

YOGA: THE OCCULT

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The previous article revealed that the physical practice of yoga is designed to alter one's consciousness and bring occult transformation. Thus, authoritative texts on both yoga and the occult reveal that yoga is a potentially profound occult practice. ¹ Yoga is designed to awaken occult energies in the body, to lead to occult transformation, and to secure specific occult goals. Certain experiences under yoga (especially kundalini yoga) are similar to those found in shaman initiation and ritualistic magic, including experiences of spirit possession and insanity. Virtually all standard yoga texts acknowledge that yoga practice develops psychic powers and other occult abilities.

All this is why the yoga scholar and Sanskrit authority Rammurti Mishra can interpret yoga theory as laying the foundation for occultism. "In conclusion, it may be said that behind every psychic investigation, behind mysticism, occultism, etc., knowingly or unknowingly, the Yoga system is present." ² In his article "Kundalini and the Occult," occult authority John White observes that the essence of occultism is the attempt to gain "higher" knowledge and power or control of the forces of nature, especially the "life energy" (*prana*) which underlies the basis of true magic and psychic phenomena. "In its highest form, occult science merges indistinguishably with true mysticism.... [M]ysticism and genuine occultism are closely allied.... [T]he heart of genuine occult practices appear to be synonymous with aspects of the [yogic] kundalini concept...." ³ Yoga authority Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon), author of a standard text on kundalini yoga, *The Serpent Power*, agrees, and he supplies many additional reasons why yoga and occult magic go hand in hand. ⁴ Until his death, perhaps the leading authority on shamanism and comparative religion was Mircea Eliade. Note his observations of the similarities between yoga and witchcraft: "All features associated with European witches are claimed also by Indo-Tibetan yogis and magicians." Along with a range of occult powers common to both, some yogis:

... boast that they break all the religious taboos and social rules: that they practice human sacrifice, cannibalism, and all manner of orgies, including incestuous intercourse, and that they eat excrement, nauseating animals, and devour human corpses. In other words, they proudly claim all the crimes and horrible ceremonies cited *ad nauseam* in the Western European witch trials. ⁵

Because yoga is an occult system, the physical, mental, and spiritual dangers that accompany occult practices are also found in yoga. ⁶ Thus, even standard yoga books warn of the serious dangers arising from supposedly "wrong" yoga practice. But we think such hazards are conceded because yoga is an *occult* practice, not because its techniques are allegedly done incorrectly.

RISKS AND HAZARDS

The following citations taken from authoritative texts show many risk and hazards of yoga practice (including death).

Shree Purohit Swami's commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* warns, "People forget that *Yama* and *Niyama* [limbs one and two] form the foundation [of yoga practice], and unless it is firmly laid, they should not practice postures and breathing exercises. In India

and Europe, I came across some three hundred people who suffered permanently from wrong practices, the doctors on examination found there was nothing organically wrong and consequently could not prescribe.”⁷ Because most people (including most medical doctors) wrongly assume that yoga is harmless, they rarely consider its possible relevance to any illnesses of their patients who practice yoga. But we are convinced that many perplexing diseases, including some deaths, are related to yoga. Richard Kieninger, a New Age educator, recalls, “A woman of my acquaintance upset her hormonal balance doing this yoga exercise, and it produced a malfunction in her adrenal glands. Doctors didn’t know how to reverse the effects... and she soon died.... Swami Rama warns that advanced forms of patterned breathing, which is a common yoga exercise, can cause a person to harm himself irreparably.”⁸ United Nations spiritual adviser and spiritist Sri Chinmoy,⁹ author of *Yoga and the Spiritual Life*,¹⁰ admits, “To practice pranayama [breath control] without real guidance is very dangerous. I know of three persons who have died from it...”¹¹ In *Yoga and Mysticism*, Swami Prabhavananda warns about the dangers of the yoga breathing exercises, which so many today think are harmless, when he writes:

Now we come to breathing exercises. Let me caution you: they can be very dangerous. Unless properly done, there is a good chance of injuring the brain. And those who practice such breathing without proper supervision can suffer a disease which no known science or doctor can cure. It is impossible, even for a medical person, to diagnose such an illness.... [For example,] I had known a young boy of perhaps 16 or 17 years of age who had begun to practice hatha yoga.... He was acting very strangely. He would prostrate fully on the ground, rise to full height, then repeat the performance—over and over again. The Swami said that he had lost his mind. ... Finally, however he became so unmanageable that he had to be confined.... As regards breathing exercises, I know that Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and all the disciples of Ramakrishna have warned us again not to practice them¹² (yet Vivekenanda, Ramakrishna’s disciple, encouraged them!¹³)

Yoga authority Hans Ulrich Rieker admonishes in *The Yoga of Light*, “Yoga is not a trifling jest if we consider that any misunderstanding in the practice of yoga can mean death and insanity,” and of *kundalini* yoga, he says that if the breath is “prematurely exhausted [withdrawn] there is immediate danger of death for the yogi.”¹⁴

The practice of hatha yoga is often conceded to be dangerous. Gopi Krishna warns of the possible dangers of such practice, including “drastic effects” on the central nervous system and the possibility of death:

In Hatha yoga the breathing exercises are more strenuous, attended by some abnormal positions of the chin, the diaphragm, the tongue, and other parts of the body to prevent expulsion or inhalation of air into the lungs in order to induce a state of suspended breathing. This can have drastic effects on the nervous system and the brain, and it is obvious that such a discipline can be very dangerous. Even in India, only those prepared to face death dare to undergo the extreme discipline of Hatha yoga.¹⁵

A standard authority on hatha yoga, *The Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (chapter 2, verse 15), warns, “Just as lions, elephants, and tigers are tamed, so the prana, should be kept under control. Otherwise it can kill the practitioner.”¹⁶

As was mentioned earlier, so-called hatha yoga is not easily distinguished from other forms of yoga. And the same problems encountered in hatha yoga are encountered in almost all forms of yoga. Yoga authority Ernest Wood emphasizes, “I hold that all *Hatha*

Yogas are extremely dangerous,” and he therefore urges use of a “different” form of yoga, *Raja Yoga*.¹⁷ But another authority on yoga, Hans Ulrich Rieker, claims, “Mastery of hatha yoga is *only a preliminary* to the mastery of raja yoga.”¹⁸ Furthermore, a standard work, the *Shiva Samhita*, argues, “There is no Hatha Yoga without Raja Yoga and no Raja Yoga without Hatha; therefore, the Yogi should start with Hatha Yoga, guided by a competent teacher.”¹⁹ What this implies is that yoga is yoga; its various forms do not fundamentally alter its basic nature. For example, the Hindu holy book, the *Bhagavad Gita*, promotes at least five different systems of yoga, and yet all are acknowledged as potentially dangerous. Thus, Hindu master Sri Krishna Prem cautions in *The Yoga of the Bhagavat Gita*, “As stated before nothing but dangerous, mediumistic psychisms or neurotic dissociations of personality can result from the practice of [yoga] meditation without the qualifications mentioned at the end of the last chapter.”²⁰ He warns, “To practice it, as many do, out of curiosity...is a mistake which is punished with futility, neurosis, or worse [‘even insanity itself’].”²¹ The specific physical and mental consequences arising from yoga practice are also listed in other authoritative yoga texts. Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon) refers to “considerable pain, physical disorder, and even disease....”²² Rieker lists cancer of the throat, all sorts of ailments, blackouts, strange trance states, or insanity from even “the slightest mistake....”²³ In *The Seven Schools of Yoga*, Ernest Wood warns of “the imminent risk of most serious bodily disorder, disease, and even madness.”²⁴ He observes that many people have brought upon themselves incurable illnesses or insanity by neglecting Hatha Yoga prerequisites, and “by any mistake there arises cough, asthma, head, eye, and ear pains, and many other diseases.”²⁵

From the above, we conclude that innumerable yoga teachers in the West are being irresponsible in promoting yoga as a safe physical regimen.

Notes:

1. Rammurti S. Mishra, *Yoga Sutras: The Textbook of Yoga Psychology*, Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1973, pp. 132-37, 295-399; Ernest Wood, *Seven Schools of Yoga: An Introduction*, Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1973, pp. 112-13; R. S. Mishra, *Fundamentals of Yoga*, Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1974, pp. 2-3, chs. 17-19, 26-27; J. H. Brennan, *Astral Doorways*, New York: Samuel Weiser, 1972, pp. 29, 98; Haridas Chaudhuri, *Philosophy of Meditation*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1974, pp. 50-51.
2. Mishra, *Yoga Sutras*, p. 138.
3. John White, “Kundalini and the Occult,” in *Kundalini Evolution and Enlightenment*, Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1979, pp. 363-64.
4. See Arthur Avalon [Sir John Woodroffe], *The Serpent Power: The Secrets of Tantric and Shaktic Yoga*, New York: Dover, 1974, pp. 186-204.
5. Editorial, *Yoga Journal*, May/June 1984, p. 71.
6. See John Ankerberg, John Weldon, *The Coming Darkness: Confronting Occult Deception*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993.
7. Bhagwan Shree Patanjali, *Aphorisms of Yoga*, trans. Shree Purohit Swami, London: Faber and Faber, 1972, pp. 56-57.
8. Richard Kieninger, *The Spiritual Seekers' Guidebook*, Quinlan, TX: The Stelle Group, 1986, p. 71.
9. Sri Chinmoy, *Astrology, the Supernatural and the Beyond*, Jamaica, NY: Agni Press, 1973, pp. 53-68, 87-89; Sri Chinmoy, *Conversations with the Master*, Jamaica, NY: Agni

- Press, 1977, pp. 9-20,26-33),
10. Sri Chinmoy, *Yoga and the Spiritual Life; The Journey of India's Soul*, Jamaica, NY: Agni Press, 1974.
 11. Sri Chinmoy, *Great Masters and the Cosmic Gods*, Jamaica, NY: Agni Press, 1977, p. 8.
 12. Swami Prabhavananda, *Yoga and Mysticism*, Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1972, pp. 18-19.
 13. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda, the Yogas and Other Works*, New York: Ramakrishna and Vivekananda Center, 1953, pp. 592-99.
 14. Hans Ulrich Rieker, *The Yoga of Light: Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, New York: Seabury Press, 1971, pp. 9,134.
 15. Gopi Krishna, "The True Aim of Yoga," *Psychic*, January-February, 1973, p. 13.
 16. Rieker, *Yoga of Light*, p. 79.
 17. Ernest Wood, *Seven Schools of Yoga: An Introduction*, Wheaton IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1973, p. 79.
 18. Rieker, *Yoga of Light*, p. 128, emphasis added.
 19. Wood, *Seven Schools*, p. 77.
 20. D. R. Butler, "Instant Cosmic Consciousness," in John White, ed., *Kundalini Evolution and Enlightenment*, Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1979, p. 47.
 21. Sri Krishna Prem, *The Yoga of the Bhagavat* [sic] *Gita*, Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1973, pp. XV, 46.
 22. Avalon, *Serpent Power*, p. 12.
 23. Rieker, *Yoga of Light*, pp. 30, 79, 96, 111-12.
 24. Wood, *Seven Schools*, p. 14.
 25. Ibid., p. 78.