



POSITION STATEMENT

Yoga

Focus on the Family has significant reservations about the practice of yoga due to its basis in Eastern religious traditions and beliefs. We realize that many people engage in yoga as a purely physical form of exercise, and it is not our purpose to deny the benefits of this aspect of the practice. But we do feel that it is important to point out that yoga is part of a much bigger picture. Traditionally, yoga is something more than a technique for stretching the muscles and achieving bodily relaxation.

In Hindu philosophy the word *yoga* denotes a type of *spiritual* discipline. As such, it is viewed as a pathway to the goal of emptying oneself and uniting the soul with Atman, the World Soul from which all souls are derived. There are four types of yoga in the Hindu system: Hatha yoga, which involves mastery and control over the body, was traditionally practiced as a preliminary to the other three forms of yoga: Jnana yoga, or the way of knowledge; Bhakti yoga, the path of love and devotion; and Karma yoga, the way of work and service to others.

Again, we are aware that there are a number of Christian yoga courses – many offered through churches – which have attempted to filter out harmful elements while retaining the desired physical and mental benefits. We do not feel that it is our place to pass judgment on programs of this type. They seem to be similar in nature to other popular forms of stretching exercises, like Pilates. Equally committed Christians disagree whether taking these classes will compromise one's Christian walk and testimony.

We simply want to point out that the physical component of yoga – Hatha yoga, as we've designated it above – does not stand alone in Eastern thought and practice. On the contrary, it has the potential to become a stepping stone to spiritual disciplines of a decidedly non-biblical character and thus to serious spiritual deception. From a Christian perspective, the Hindu notion of emptying one's self and opening the mind to the "World Soul" is rife with danger. It entails the possibility of coming into contact with demonic deception, manipulation, and even possession. This is why we feel so strongly that Christians need to understand all the various aspects of yoga before making a decision to become involved with it.

We encourage individual believers with an interest in the subject to consult with their pastor and other trusted Christian advisors and to ultimately follow the dictates of their conscience in this regard.