

# INNOCENT YOGA?

By Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon

When Westerners employ yoga techniques as a means to improve their health, they should understand that they can also be producing subtle changes within themselves which will have dramatic spiritual consequences that will not be for the better. Regardless of the school or spiritual tradition, yoga practice tends to alter a person's consciousness in an occult direction.

Even when yoga is practiced innocently, it can eventually produce dramatic occult transformation. "Personality changes can be brought about in Hatha Yoga by changing the body so that it influences the mind." <sup>1</sup> Consider the experience of Christina Grof, who, prior to her experience with yoga, was an average housewife with normal plans for her life. She took up yoga entirely without suspicion as a practice that would help her physically during her pregnancy. After all, there are widespread claims that "during pregnancy, yoga exercises are extremely beneficial and will keep you supple and relaxed." <sup>2</sup>

What Christina Grof got was far more. She found herself transformed from a "conservative suburban housewife" into a New Age leader by means of hatha yoga. All she had to do was "join a hatha yoga class for exercise" and the logical progression ensued:

**During the birth of my first child, for which I had prepared with the Lamaze method of breathing (very much like yogic *pranayama*), this enormous spiritual force was released in me. Of course, I didn't understand it and was given morphine to stop it as soon as the baby was born.... Then the same thing happened when my second child was born. This all led to more and more experiences. I threw myself into yoga, although still not acknowledging it as a spiritual tool. My meeting with Swami Muktananda really blew the lid off everything. He served as a catalyst to awaken what I had been resisting, which was kundalini (the universal life force). <sup>3</sup>**

Thus, an innocently practiced yoga-for-exercise routine led to numerous psychic experiences that had the cumulative impact of dramatically changing her life. She became a disciple of the Hindu guru Muktananda and then, as we will see, a leader in the New Age Movement with a specific mission: to assist people who were having "spiritual emergencies" from their occult practices and help them to "properly interpret" and successfully integrate these "divine" experiences into their lives. <sup>4</sup>

Initially, however, as the standard *kundalini* yoga symptoms emerged in her life, the prognosis was not good. (Hindu kundalini mythology is discussed in a separate article: *Kundalini Yoga*, see New Age archives, May, 2001.) Grof herself was in the midst of a spiritual emergency and increasingly convinced of her own insanity. "I was convinced I was headed for a life of psychopathology. I was afraid I was going crazy." <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, counseling through occult philosophy put matters in their "proper" perspective. Her marriage ended, "which it was destined to do anyway." And the late popular mythologist Joseph Campbell helped her recognize, "The schizophrenic is drowning in the same waters in which the mystic is swimming with delight." He also referred her to LSD and consciousness researcher Stan Grof for more counseling.

The rest is history. The couple were eventually married and today coordinate some 50 SEN (Spiritual Emergency Network) regional information centers around the globe. <sup>6</sup> They also publish a significant amount of literature in the field of occult metaphysics. Their rein-

terpretation of the pathological phenomena induced by occult practice—as a positive transforming spirituality (a spiritual “emergence”)—not only helps undergird and legitimize the occult, but it also effectively inhibits discernment of the true issues involved.

For example, in the case of kundalini yoga, symptoms of mental illness and demonization are gratuitously redefined as emerging manifestations of “higher” or divine consciousness. Thus, we are not to question or fear the kundalini process but to surrender to it and trust it implicitly, for it is indeed part of that ageless wisdom of evolutionary transformation which is far wiser than ourselves. A chapter in a recent book edited by Stan and Christina Grof, *Spiritual Emergency*, reveals a basic approach of SEN counseling. The title is “When Insanity Is a Blessing.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, a slow but sure yoga-induced occult transformation catapulted Christina Grof headlong into the world of occultism. In the long run, her innocent flirtation with yoga altered her entire life and resulted in her becoming a leader in the New Age Movement, with influence over hundreds of thousands of people.

Consider one more example of the potential consequences of innocent yoga practice. While Christina Grof used yoga for help in her pregnancy, Carole, a friend of coauthor John Weldon, used yoga for medical and health reasons. We published her story in *The Coming Darkness: Confronting Occult Deception*.<sup>8</sup> We first met Carole as a result of exchanging information on the famous Indian guru and yogi Swami Rama. The following information is taken from material sent to us.

Carole was very sick and doctors were unable to find the cause of her illness. When she went to a physician-nutritionist recommended by a friend, she found some literature in his office about the Himalayan Institute, of which the doctor was a staff member. The institute was founded by Indian Swami Rama, one of the most scientifically studied of the gurus, beginning with famous biofeedback researcher and spiritist Dr. Elmer Green. Carole decided to attend the institute, where she began lessons in hatha yoga. Eventually, she was initiated and received her mantra, or word of occult power, from Swami Rama. As he laid his hands upon her head, the typical transfer of “occult energy” began (termed *shaktipat diksha*). Carole was in heaven:

**Currents of electrical energy began to permeate my head and went down into my body.... It was as if a spell had come over me, the bliss that I felt was as if I had been touched by God. The power that had come from his hand, and simply being in his presence, drew me to him irresistibly.**

The night after receiving her mantra, Carole was visited by a spirit being who claimed to be the spirit of Swami Rama himself. Although no one had ever mentioned the spirit world in her church (they did not believe in such things), Carole felt that this was the means of directly communing with God. She experienced wonderful powerful forces and energies, while thoughts entered her mind with a magnetic-like force:

**Electrical currents were pulsating around my body and then moved into my hand, the currents were shaking my hand and strong, almost entrancing thoughts were impressed into my mind, “Meditate, meditate. I want to speak with you.” It was a miracle. I was communicating with the spirit world. I had found God. Sitting in the darkness of my living room I began to repeat my mantra. A presence seemed to fill the room. I began to see visions of being one with the universe and the magnetic thoughts were now leaving and I was hearing a voice, which identified itself as Swami Rama, saying he was communicating with me through astral travel.**

**Within one week, after meditating many hours each day and still in constant**

**communication with this spirit, forces began to come upon me and gave me powers to do yoga postures; I was floating through them, the forces giving me added breath even... postures that before would be very painful to do.**

However, after two weeks of daily yoga meditation, Carole became engulfed in a nightmare of utter dread and terror. Voices that once claimed they were angelic turned threatening, even demonic. She was brutally assaulted, both physically and spiritually by spirits. During meditation, in the midst of being violently shaken, she could sense that the same energy received at initiation, energy which was now felt to be *personal*, was attempting to remove her life-essence from her physical body—in her words, “to literally pull the life from my shell of a body.” She sensed an overwhelming and implacable hatred directed toward her from this “energy,” as if “monstrosities of another world were trying to take my very soul from me, inflicting pain beyond endurance, ripping and tearing into the very depths of my being.”

The intermittent suffocation and torment seemed interminable; her fears increased as she realized there was no one to help her. Finally, the attack subsided. But it was merely the first of many.

It seems that nothing could stop the assaults. Her agonized pleas to the spirits were ignored; her husband was powerless. Her father wanted her to see a psychiatrist; others also doubted her sanity. In desperation, her mother contacted psychic friends from a local church of the Unity School of Christianity. They laid hands on Carole and commanded that “the divinity within” deliver her, but to no avail.

Dr. C. Norman Shealy, M.D., Ph.D., entered the picture. He is a noted neurosurgeon, a former professor at Harvard University, past president of the American Holistic Medical Association, and the author of *Occult Medicine Can Save Your Life*. Dr. Shealy also works in conjunction with psychics and spiritists such as Caroline Myss. When Dr. Shealy was unable to help, he referred Carole to Dr. Robert Leichtman, M.D., a spiritist who is coauthor of several dozen books received by revelation from the spirits.

Leichtman admitted that Carole’s situation was not uncommon among followers of Eastern gurus. He even told her some have died as a result of similar psychic attacks. But he, too, was unable to help. His instructions, such as visualizing herself in the white “Christ light” of protection, were useless. By this time, Carole was near the end.

**I had to endure the torture, unable to free myself. To those around me I was insane. No one believed me and no one could free me. The hopelessness I felt was unbearable. No one believed me except the psychics... and they could do nothing.**

**I was defenseless against these never-ending attacks... hundreds of presences filling my room, which itself would be filled with thick, ice cold air, my body drenched with perspiration as my whole being fought against them.**

**After spending several weeks at my parents’ we decided perhaps I could try returning home. But that night the spirits started to exert their full power.**

**First, against my skull. I felt as if they were trying to crack it open, like the air was being cut off to my brain. Incredible pressure was exerted upon my back and chest, pulling with a wrench-like grip. It felt like they were trying to pull my shoulder from its socket, pressing on my eyes trying to blind me, pushing on my throat trying to choke me. Filled with fear and exhaustion, on the brink of death I screamed to my husband, “I’m dying; I can’t take it anymore. Get me to the hospital.”**

**I was taken to the hospital where I laid like a scared dog cowering on a cart. I could hardly speak but at least the spirits were gone—temporarily.... The doctor on duty recommended a psychiatrist who saw me the next morning. He told me I was**

**covering up some deep problems with this “talk of evil spirits.” “There is no such thing as the devil,” he said coldly.**

Carole admitted herself to the hospital, but once more no one could help. The attacks finally subsided and she was released. Upon returning home, the attacks began again. More unimaginable torment. Although she was terrified of dying, death was now her desire. Wishing to take her life but too fearful of dying, she readmitted herself to the hospital. Once again, she was placed in locked ward. She felt that here she would die, alone and in torment

But today, Carole is alive and well. Even her psychiatrist is amazed at the miraculous transformation. She is now in perfect health, both mentally and physically.

How did Carole get free? No one had been able to help her. Today, Carole attributes both her health and her life to a living Jesus Christ who delivered her from a desperate plight. Reflecting back on her predicament, she is awed that such terrible destruction could be purchased at the price of a simple, supposedly harmless form of yoga meditation.

Events like these reveal that there is more to yoga than meets the eye. Whether yoga can trigger some unknown psychospiritual, physiological response, or whether changes are produced spiritistically, or both, few can deny yoga is a powerful spiritual discipline that has been used for millennia to secure occult, pagan goals. As we proceed, we will better understand the reasons for this.

#### **Notes:**

1. Ann Hill, ed., *A Visual Encyclopedia of Unconventional Medicine*, New York: Crown Publishers, 1979, p. 223.
2. Brian Inglis, Ruth West, *The Alternative Health Guide*, New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983, p. 143.
3. Stan and Christina Grof, “Spiritual Emergencies,” *Yoga Journal*, July-August 1984, p. 40.
4. Stanislav Grof, Christina Grof (eds), *Spiritual Emergency*, Los Angeles, CA: J. P. Tarcher, 1989.
5. Grof, *Yoga Journal*, p. 41.
6. cf. Grof, *Spiritual Emergency*, p. 227.
7. Ibid., pp. 77-97.
8. John Ankerberg, John Weldon, *The Coming Darkness: Confronting Occult Deception*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993.