

# “How Do I Witness About the New Age Movement?”

How do I witness about the New Age movement with firm intelligence but empathy?

There are a number of helpful books available which set forth a Christian response to the New Age Movement. I will recommend a few resources you might want to consider, but the bibliographies in most of these will direct you to many further resources as well.

1. *Embraced by the Darkness: Exposing New Age Theology from the Inside Out* by Brad Scott (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996). Brad spent ten years involved in the New Age religion until converting to Christianity. He teaches at Golden Gate University.

2. *Confronting the New Age and Unmasking the New Age* by Douglas Groothuis (InterVarsity Press). Doug teaches at Denver Seminary.

3. *The New Age Movement and the Biblical Worldview* by John Newport (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). This looks like a comprehensive resource by a distinguished professor of Philosophy of Religion at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

4. *Apologetics in the New Age: A Christian Critique of Pantheism* by David Clark and Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990).

5. *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* by John Ankerberg and John Weldon (Oregon: Harvest House, 1996).

6. I would also recommend checking out Marcia Montenegro's website at [www.christiananswersforthenewage.org](http://www.christiananswersforthenewage.org). Marcia was a

former astrologer who was deeply involved in the New Age Movement prior to her conversion to Christianity. She has many helpful articles on her site. CANA stands for Christian Answers for the New Age. Please be sure to check out her site.

Finally, there is a brief [article on the New Age Movement by Kerby Anderson](#) on the Probe website. In addition, there are many other related articles in our [“Cults and World Religions”](#) section on our Web site at [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org).

A careful study of some of these resources, combined with prayer and compassion for those you seek to reach, will be of great benefit to you as you seek to share Christ with those you love.

Best wishes in witnessing for Him,

Michael Gleghorn  
Probe Ministries

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## Evaluating Miracle Claims

*Probe's Michael Gleghorn demonstrates that not all miracle claims are equal. Although genuine miracles have occurred, a careful evaluation reveals that many claims are spurious.*

*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*



## Are They Alien Events?

I recently spoke with a Christian woman who told me of the concern she felt for many of her family members who had embraced the doctrines of Christian Science. As we discussed how she might effectively communicate the gospel to those she loved, she mentioned one of the main difficulties she faced in

getting a fair hearing. Apparently, some of her family members had been surprisingly healed of various physical ailments. And naturally enough, they interpreted these healings as confirming the truth of Christian Science.

What are we, as Christians, to make of such claims? Are they miracles? What are we to think about the many sincere people, holding vastly different beliefs, who claim to have personally experienced miracles? And what about many of the world's great religious traditions that claim support for their doctrines, at least in part, by an appeal to the miraculous? Should we assume that all such claims are false and that only Christian miracle claims are true? Or might some miracles have actually occurred outside a Judeo-Christian context? Are there any criteria we can apply in evaluating miracle claims to help us determine whether or not a miracle has actually occurred? And could there be other ways of explaining such claims besides recourse to the miraculous?

Before we attempt to answer such questions, we must first agree on what a "miracle" is. Although various definitions have been used in the past, we will rely on a definition given by Richard Purtill. "A miracle is an event brought about by the power of God that is a temporary exception to the ordinary course of nature for the purpose of showing that God has acted in history."[\[1\]](#) A miracle, then, requires a personal, supernatural being who is capable of intervening in nature to bring about an effect that would otherwise not have occurred.

If this is what miracles are, then some religions have no real way of accounting for them. Take Christian Science for instance. "The Christian Science view of God is impersonal and *pantheistic*."[\[2\]](#) In this system, "miracles" can be nothing more than "divinely natural" events.[\[3\]](#) But if a true miracle requires the intervention of a personal being who is beyond nature, then Christian Science has no place for such events because it does not admit the existence of such a being. As David Clark has stated: "Pantheism has no category labeled

‘free act by a divine person.’ So miracles are as alien to all forms of pantheism as they are to atheism.”[\[4\]](#) Thus, far from demonstrating the truth of Christian Science, a genuine miracle would actually demonstrate its falsity! While such events may still have occurred, they can hardly be used as evidence in support of such traditions

## Are They Legendary Events?

Apollonius of Tyana was, like Jesus, a traveling first century teacher. Like Jesus, he is credited with having performed a variety of miraculous feats. He is said to have healed the sick, cast out demons and predicted the future. He is even said to have raised the dead!

In a fascinating passage from his biography we read the following:

A girl had died...and the whole of Rome was mourning...Apollonius...witnessing their grief, said: ‘Put down the bier, for I will stay the tears that you are shedding for this maiden’...The crowd...thought that he was about to deliver...an oration...but merely touching her and whispering in secret some spell over her, at once woke up the maiden from her seeming death...”[\[5\]](#)

Readers familiar with the Gospel of Luke will recognize that this story is quite similar to the account of Jesus raising the widow’s son (Luke 7:11-17). But isn’t it inconsistent for Christians to affirm that Jesus really did perform such a miracle while denying the same for Apollonius? Not necessarily.

Suppose that the story about Apollonius is merely legendary, while the story about Jesus is truly historical. If that were so, then it would clearly make sense for Christians to deny that Apollonius raised someone from the dead while simultaneously affirming that Jesus really did perform such a

feat. There are actually good reasons for believing that this is in fact the case.

Norman Geisler draws a number of significant contrasts between the evidence for Jesus and that for Apollonius.<sup>[6]</sup> First, the only source we have for the life of Apollonius comes from Philostratus. In contrast, we have numerous, independent sources of information about the life of Jesus. These include the four canonical gospels, many New Testament letters, and even extra-biblical references in writers like Tacitus, Josephus and others. Second, Philostratus wrote his biography about 120 years after Apollonius' death. The New Testament was written by those who were contemporaries and/or eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus. The point, of course, is that the further one gets from the original events, the more likely it is that accounts may become contaminated by later legendary developments. Third, Philostratus was commissioned to write his work by the wife of a Roman emperor, most likely as a means of countering the growing influence of Christianity. He thus had a motivation to embellish his account and make Apollonius appear to be the equal of Jesus. The New Testament writers, however, had no such motivation for embellishing the life of Jesus. Finally, Philostratus admits that the girl Apollonius allegedly raised may not have even been dead!<sup>[7]</sup> Luke, however, is quite clear that the widow's son was dead when Jesus raised him.

This brief comparison reveals that not all miracle claims are as historically well-attested as those of Jesus.

## **Are They Psychosomatic Events?**

Amazing healings are among the most frequently cited miracle claims. Although many of these claims may be false, many are also true. But are they really miracles?

Some estimates indicate that up to 80 percent of disease is stress related. While such diseases are real, and really do

afflict the body, they originate largely from negative mental attitudes, anxiety and other unhealthy emotions. For this reason, such diseases can often be healed through a reduction in stress, combined with positive mental attitudes and healthy emotions. But such healings should not be viewed as miracles because they do not involve God's direct, supernatural intervention.

If this is true, then we must carefully distinguish between psychosomatic events and those that are truly miraculous. Psychosomatic illnesses have psychological or emotional (rather than physiological) causes. Thus, people afflicted with such disorders may get better simply by coming to believe that they *can* get better. In other words, psychosomatic disorders can often be alleviated simply by faith—whether in God, a priest, a doctor, a pill, or a particular method of treatment. But there is nothing miraculous about this kind of healing. “It happens to Buddhists, Hindus, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and atheists. Healers claiming supernatural powers can do it, but so can...psychiatrists by purely natural powers...”[\[9\]](#) Obviously, healings of this sort cannot be used as evidence for a particular belief system because all belief systems can account for them.

But are there any differences between supernatural and psychological healings that might help us decide whether or not a particular healing was truly miraculous? Norman Geisler lists a number of important distinctions.[\[10\]](#) First, supernatural healings do not require personal contact. Jesus occasionally healed people from a distance (John 4:46-54). In contrast, psychological healings often do require such contact, even if this simply involves laying one's hands on the television while an alleged faith-healer prays. Second, when a person is healed supernaturally there are no relapses. But relapses are common after psychological healings. Finally, a person can be healed of *any* condition by supernatural means, including organic diseases and major birth defects. Jesus

healed a man with a withered hand (Mark 3:1-5) and restored the sight of one born blind (John 9). In contrast, not all conditions can be healed psychologically. Such methods are usually effective only in treating psychosomatic illnesses.

Thus, not every claim for miraculous healing is a genuine miracle. Only those healings that offer clear evidence of Divine intervention can fairly be considered miracles.

## **Are They Deceptive Events?**

It appeared to be a miracle. The young man claimed he could see without an eye! Norman Geisler recounts an amazing demonstration he once witnessed in a seminary chapel back in the early 70s.[\[11\]](#) It involved a young man who had injured his left eye as a child. It was later surgically removed and replaced with a glass eye. For three years his father prayed, asking God to restore his son's vision. One day, his son excitedly announced that he could see with his glass eye! His father believed that God had worked a miracle. And apparently he wasn't the only one.

At the chapel service the young man's father shared how the physicians who had examined his son had confirmed that his vision had been restored despite the removal of the young man's eye! The demonstration seemed to prove that this was indeed the case. The young man's glass eye was removed and his good eye was covered with a blindfold that had been inspected by one of the students in the audience. After various items had been randomly collected from those in attendance, the young man proceeded to read what was written on them! Needless to say, all who witnessed the performance were stunned by what appeared to be a genuine miracle. But was there another explanation? Although he initially thought that he had witnessed a miracle, Dr. Geisler later came to believe that he might have been deceived. But why?

It turns out that any skilled performer of magic tricks can do

the very same thing. By applying some invisible lubricant to the cheek before a performance begins, the magician can have coins and clay placed over his eyes, along with a blindfold, and still read what has been handed to him. How is this possible? Dr. Geisler explains: "By lifting his forehead under the bandages, a small gap is made down the bridge of his nose through which he can see. It is not a miracle; it is magic."[\[12\]](#)

Since magic can often appear miraculous, we must carefully evaluate miracle claims for clear evidence of divine intervention. What are some differences between miracles and magic that may keep us from being deceived?[\[13\]](#)

First, miracles are of God and serve to glorify God. Magic is of man and usually serves to glorify the magician. Second, no deception is involved in miracles. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he was really dead, and had been for four days (John 11:39). But deception is an essential component of human magic. Finally, a miracle fits into nature in a way that magic does not. When Jesus healed the man born blind (John 9), He restored the proper function of his natural eyes. By contrast, in the story above the young man claimed to see without an eye at all! While one is clearly of God, the other is simply odd.

## **Are They Demonic Events?**

The Bible affirms the existence of both Satan and demons, evil spirit beings with personal attributes who are united in their opposition to God and His plans for the world. Although vastly inferior to God, they still possess immense intelligence and power. Is it possible that at least some of the apparently miraculous phenomena reported in the world's religions and the occult might be due to demonic spirits?

The book of Exodus seems to indicate that the Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate the first two plagues that God brought upon their land (Exod. 7:22; 8:7). How should this be explained? While some believe the magicians relied on human



trickery,{14} others think that demonic spirits may have aided them.{15}

Although we cannot know for sure which view is correct, the demonic hypothesis is certainly possible. Indeed, the Bible elsewhere explicitly affirms the power of Satan and demons to perform amazing feats. For instance, Luke tells of a slave-girl “having a spirit of divination...who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling” (Acts 16:16). Undoubtedly this was a demonic spirit for Luke records that Paul cast it out “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:18). This enraged the girl’s masters because apparently, once the demon had been exorcised, the girl no longer retained her special powers (Acts 16:19).

In addition, Paul told the Thessalonians that the coming of the end-time ruler would be in “accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9). In Revelation 13 we read that Satan gives his power and authority to this wicked ruler, apparently even healing his otherwise fatal wound to the head (Rev. 13:3). Not only this, but the ruler’s assistant is also said to perform “great signs” (v. 13). For instance, he is said to make fire come down from heaven and to give breath and the power of speech to an image of the ruler (vv. 13-15). The text implies that these wonders are accomplished through the power of Satan (v. 2).

This brief survey indicates that Satan and demonic spirits can indeed perform false signs and wonders that may initially appear to rival even genuinely Divine miracles. The book of Revelation tells us that the world of unregenerate humanity, deceived by such amazing signs, proceeds to worship both Satan and the ruler (Rev. 13:4). But how can we, as Christians, keep from being likewise deceived? In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul exhorts believers to put on “the full armor of God.” Among other things, this involves taking up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the “sword of the Spirit,

which is the word of God" (see Eph. 6:10-17). If we have faith in Christ Jesus, and if we are protected by "the full armor of God," we won't be easily deceived by "the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11).

## Notes

1. Richard L. Purtill, "Defining Miracles," in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, eds. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 72.
2. Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions and the Occult* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1990), 111.
3. Norman L. Geisler, in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, s.v. "Miracles, Magic and," (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 476.
4. David K. Clark, "Miracles in the World Religions," in Geivett and Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles*, 203.
5. Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, trans. F.C. Conybeare (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1912 [Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1]), 457-459, cited in Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 83.
6. Norman L. Geisler, in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, s.v., "Apollonius of Tyana," 44-45.
7. See Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 85.
8. Kenneth Pelletier, *Christian Medical Society Journal* 11, no. 1 (1980), cited in Geisler, "Healings, Psychosomatic," *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 301.
9. Norman L. Geisler, "Apollonius of Tyana," in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 44-45.

10. Ibid., 118-122.

11. The story is told in Norman Geisler, *Signs and Wonders* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), 59-60.

12. Ibid., 60.

13. I take these criteria from Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, 73-76.

14. See Dan Korem, *Powers: Testing the Psychic and Supernatural* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 172-176.

15. See John D. Hannah, "Exodus," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1985), 118.

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## UFOs and Alien Beings – A Christian Worldview Response

*Michael Gleghorn addresses issues related to reports of UFO and alien sightings. He considers the various possible causes before closing with a biblical, Christian perspective pointing out these reports are often presented like false gospels. At the end of the day, even an alien cannot take away from the importance of faith in Christ.*



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

# A Tale of Two Hypotheses

It seems that almost everyone is interested in reports of UFOs and alien encounters. But how should these reports be understood? Where do these “unidentified flying objects” come from and what are they? Are intelligent beings visiting us from another planet or some other dimension? Or are UFO reports merely a collection of hoaxes, hallucinations, and misidentified phenomena? Can all UFO reports be adequately explained, or are there some that seem to defy all natural explanations? These are just a few of the questions we want to consider in this article.

First, however, it's essential to note that most UFOs (unidentified flying objects) become IFOs (identified flying objects). John Spencer, a British UFO researcher, estimates that as many as 95 percent of received UFO reports “are turned into IFOs and explained satisfactorily.”[\[1\]](#) For example, the report might be found to have been a clever prank or to have some natural explanation. Planets, comets, military aircraft, and rockets (among many others) have all been mistaken for UFOs. But even if 99 percent of UFO reports could be satisfactorily explained, there would still be thousands of cases that stubbornly resist all natural explanations. These are called *residual* UFO reports.

If residual UFOs are not hoaxes, hallucinations, or some natural or man-made phenomena, then what are they? Most UFO researchers hold either to the extraterrestrial hypothesis or the interdimensional hypothesis. The extraterrestrial hypothesis holds that technologically advanced, interplanetary space travelers are indeed visiting our planet from somewhere else in the cosmos. Stanton Friedman, a representative of this view, states clearly, “The evidence is overwhelming that some UFOs are alien spacecraft.”[\[2\]](#)

The interdimensional hypothesis agrees “that some UFOs are real phenomena that may exhibit physical . . . effects.”[\[3\]](#)

However, unlike the extraterrestrial hypothesis, this view does not believe that UFOs and alien beings come from somewhere else in our physical universe. So where *do* they come from? Some suggest that they come from some other universe of space and time. But others believe that they come from some other dimension entirely, perhaps a spiritual realm.[{4}](#)

How might we tell which, if either, of these two hypotheses is correct? Astronomer and Christian apologist Dr. Hugh Ross suggests that we employ the scientific approach known as the “process of elimination.” He writes, “Mechanics use it to find out why the car won’t start. Doctors use it to find out why the stomach hurts. Detectives use it to find out who stole the cash. This process can also be used to discover what could, or could not, possibly give rise to UFO phenomena.”[{5}](#)

So what happens if we apply this process to the extraterrestrial hypothesis? Although quite popular here in America, there are some serious scientific objections to this viewpoint.

## The Extraterrestrial Hypothesis

In the first place, it is highly improbable that there is another planet in our cosmos capable of supporting physical life. Dr. Ross has calculated the probability of such a planet existing by natural processes alone as less than 1 in  $10^{174}$ . You actually have “a much higher probability of being killed in the next second by a failure in the second law of thermodynamics (about one chance in  $10^{80}$ ).”[{6}](#) Thus, apart from the supernatural creation of another suitable place for life, our planet is almost certainly unique in its capacity to support complex biological organisms. (See the Probe article [“Are We Alone in the Universe?”](#)) This alone makes the extraterrestrial hypothesis extremely improbable. But it gets even worse!

Suppose (against all statistical probability) that there *is* a planet with intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. What is the likelihood that such creatures are visiting our planet? And what sort of difficulties would they face in doing so?

Probably the greatest challenge to interstellar space travel is simply the immense size of the universe. One group of scientists, assuming that any alien spacecraft would likely maintain communication with either the home planet or with other members of their traveling party, “scanned all 202 of the roughly solar-type stars within 155 light-years of Earth. Not one intelligible signal was detected anywhere within the vicinity of these stars.”[\[7\]](#) This implies that, at a minimum, E.T. would have to travel 155 light-years just to reach earth. Unfortunately, numerous galactic hazards would prevent traveling here in a straight line. Avoiding these deadly hazards would increase the minimum travel distance to approximately 230 light-years.[\[8\]](#)

Dr. Ross estimates that “any reasonably-sized spacecraft transporting intelligent physical beings can travel at velocities no greater than about 1 percent” of light-speed.[\[9\]](#) Although this is nearly 7 million miles per hour, it would still take about twenty-three thousand years to travel the 230 light-years to earth! Of course, a lot can go wrong in twenty-three thousand years. The aliens might run out of food or fuel. Their spacecraft might be damaged beyond repair by space debris. They might be destroyed by a contagious epidemic. The mind reels at the overwhelming improbability of successfully completing such a multi-generational mission.

In light of these facts, it doesn't appear that the extraterrestrial hypothesis can reasonably survive the process of elimination. Does the interdimensional hypothesis fare any better? A growing number of serious UFO researchers believe it can. Let's take a look.

# The Interdimensional Hypothesis

The interdimensional hypothesis holds that residual UFOs “enter the physical dimensions of the universe from ‘outside’ the four familiar dimensions of length, height, width, and time.”[{10}](#) Where do they come from? Some believe that they come from another physical universe of space and time. But this does not seem possible. General relativity forbids “the space-time dimensions of any other hypothetically existing universe” from overlapping with our own.[{11}](#) For this reason, many researchers believe that residual UFOs must come from some other dimension entirely, perhaps even a spiritual realm.

What evidence can be offered for such a bold hypothesis? Many point to the strange behavior of residual UFOs themselves. Hugh Ross contends that residual UFOs “must be nonphysical because they disobey firmly established physical laws.”[{12}](#) Among the many examples that he offers in support of this statement, consider the following:[{13}](#)

1. Residual UFOs generate no sonic booms when they break the sound barrier, nor do they show any evidence of meeting with air resistance.
2. They make impossibly sharp turns and sudden stops.
3. They send no detectable electromagnetic signals.

For example, “relative to the number of potential observers, ten times as many sightings occur at 3:00 A.M. (a time when few people are out) as at either 6:00 A.M. or 8:00 P.M. (times when many people are outside in the dark).”[{14}](#) If residual UFOs were simply random events, then we would expect more sightings when there are more potential observers. The fact that these events are nonrandom may suggest some sort of intelligence behind them. This is further supported by the fact that some people are more likely to see a residual UFO than others. Numerous researchers have observed a correlation between an individual’s involvement with the occult and their likelihood of having a residual UFO encounter. This may also

suggest some kind of intelligence behind these phenomena.

Finally, residual UFOs not only appear to be nonphysical and intelligent, they sometimes seem malevolent as well. Many of those claiming to have had a residual UFO encounter have suffered emotional, psychological, and/or physical injury. A few people have even died after such encounters. In light of these strange characteristics, many researchers have reached similar conclusions about the possible source of these phenomena.

## **The Occult Connection**

Many serious UFO investigators have noticed a striking similarity between some of the aliens described in UFO reports and the demonic spirits described in the Bible. Although it may not be possible to know whether some aliens are actually demons (and I certainly do not claim to know this myself), the well-documented connection between UFO phenomena and the occult cannot be denied.

In 1969 Lynn Catoe served as the senior bibliographer of a publication on UFOs researched by the Library of Congress for the U.S. Air Force Office of Scientific Research. After a two-year investigation, in which she surveyed thousands of documents, she drew explicit attention to the link between UFOs and the occult. She wrote, "A large part of the available UFO literature . . . deals with subjects like mental telepathy, automatic writing and invisible entities . . . poltergeist manifestations and 'possession.' Many . . . UFO reports . . . recount alleged incidents that are strikingly similar to demonic possession and psychic phenomena."[\[15\]](#) Veteran UFO researcher John Keel agrees. After surveying the literature on demonology he wrote, "The manifestations and occurrences described in this imposing literature are similar if not entirely identical to the UFO phenomenon itself."[\[16\]](#) The bizarre claim of alien abduction may lend some credibility to these remarks.



Many (though not all) of those who report an abduction experience describe the aliens as deceptive and hostile. Whitley Strieber, whose occult involvement preceded the writing of both *Communion* and *Transformation*, at times explicitly referred to his alien visitors as “demons.” For example, in *Transformation* he described his emotional reaction to the aliens with these words: “I felt an absolutely indescribable sense of menace. It was hell on earth to be there, and yet I couldn’t move, couldn’t cry out, couldn’t get away . . . Whatever was there seemed so monstrously ugly, so filthy and dark and sinister. Of course they were demons. They had to be. And they were here and I couldn’t get away.”[\[17\]](#)

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that abduction is often physically and emotionally painful, Mr. Strieber tends to believe that its purpose is ultimately benevolent. When integrated correctly, the abduction experience can provide a catalyst for spiritual growth and development. Still, he candidly admits that he is really not sure precisely *who* or *what* these beings actually are, and he continues to warn that many of them are indeed hostile and malevolent.[\[18\]](#) In light of this, one can’t help wondering about the experiences related in Mr. Strieber’s books. If his encounters with aliens were not merely hallucinatory, or due to some mental disorder, isn’t it at least possible that his sinister visitors really were demons? As noted above, many UFO investigators would indeed consider this (or something very much like it) a genuine possibility.

## Another Gospel?

In his letter to the Galatians the Apostle Paul delivered a stirring indictment against every gospel but that of Christ. “But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that

which you received, let him be accursed" (1:8-9). Evidently, the purity of the gospel was deeply important to Paul.

In today's pluralistic society a variety of gospels are being preached. And among the great throng of voices clamoring for our attention are many UFO cults. Since the 1950s a number of these cults have arisen, often around a charismatic leader who claims to be in regular contact with otherworldly beings. Interestingly, unlike the abduction phenomenon, most contactees do not claim to have ever seen the aliens with whom they communicate. Rather, they claim that the aliens communicate with them psychically or telepathically. The contactee is simply a channel, or medium, through whom the aliens communicate their messages to humankind. This method of contact is rather intriguing for those who favor the interdimensional hypothesis. As John Saliba observes, "Many contactees . . . write about UFOs and space beings as if these were psychic phenomena, belonging to a different time/space dimension that lies beyond the scope . . . of modern science." [\[19\]](#)

So what sort of messages do the aliens allegedly communicate to contactees? Often they want to help guide us to the next stage of our spiritual evolution or give us advice that will help us avoid some global catastrophe. Strangely, however, many of them also want to deny or distort traditional doctrines of biblical Christianity. Oftentimes these denials and distortions concern the doctrine of Christ. For example, the Aetherius Society "views Jesus Christ as an advanced alien being . . . who communicates through a channel and travels to Earth in a flying saucer to protect Earth from evil forces." [\[20\]](#) As a general rule, "UFO religions . . . reject orthodox Christology (Jesus' identity as both God and man) and thus reject Jesus Christ as the . . . Creator and . . . Savior of humankind." [\[21\]](#)

A deficient Christology, combined with an acceptance of biblically forbidden occult practices like mediumistic

channeling (see Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:10-12; etc.), make many UFO cults spiritually dangerous. By preaching a false gospel, they have (perhaps unwittingly) placed themselves under a divine curse. By embracing occult practices, they have opened the door to potential demonic attack and deception. Nevertheless, there is hope for those involved with these cults. There is even hope for those tormented by hostile beings claiming to be aliens. The Bible tells us that through His work on the cross, Jesus disarmed the demonic rulers and authorities (Col. 2:15). What's more, for those who flee to Him for refuge, He makes available the "full armor of God," that they might "stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). Regardless of *who* or *what* these alien beings might be, no one need live in fear of them. If Jesus has triumphed over the realm of evil demonic spirits, then certainly no alien can stand against Him. Let those who live in fear turn to Jesus, for He offers rest to all who are weary and heavy-laden (Matt. 11:28).

## Notes

1. John Spencer, ed., *The UFO Encyclopedia* (New York: Avon Books, 1991), s.v. "identified flying objects (IFOs)," cited in Hugh Ross, Kenneth Samples, and Mark Clark, *Lights in the Sky & Little Green Men* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2002), 25.
2. Jerome Clark, *The UFO Encyclopedia*, 2d ed., vol. 1 (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1998), s.v. "Friedman, Stanton Terry," cited in Ross, et al., *Lights in the Sky*, 31.
3. Ross, et al., 32.
4. Ibid., 109.
5. Ibid., 34.
6. Ibid., 39.
7. Ibid., 57.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 59.
10. Ibid., 109.

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# Reiki: A Christian

# Perspective

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn offers an overview and critical Christian worldview evaluation of Reiki energy medicine, an alternative health therapy that has grown in popularity in recent years.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## What is Reiki?

In the past twenty-five years there has been a huge increase in both the general acceptance and public availability of various types of alternative health therapies. Although some of these therapies may be beneficial, others do little good, and some are downright harmful. Under the broad umbrella of alternative medicine there are a variety of therapies that might loosely be referred to as “energy medicine”:

Energy medicine is a broad field covering a variety of therapies from many parts of the world. While each is based on the existence of a nonphysical energy pervading the universe, the nature of the energy, the form of therapies, and how healing is believed to take place varies from culture to culture.[{1}](#)

This energy is variously referred to as *prana* in India, *chi* in China, and *ki* in Japan. One form of energy medicine that has been growing in popularity is called *Reiki*. According to some, *rei* means “universal,” and *ki* means “life force energy.” But the International Center for Reiki Training goes further, declaring that “Rei” is more accurately understood to mean “supernatural knowledge or spiritual consciousness . . . the wisdom that comes from God or the Higher Self.” Thus, according to the Center, “it is the God-consciousness called Rei that guides the life force called Ki in the practice we call Reiki.”[{2}](#)

Reiki was discovered, or perhaps rediscovered, by Dr. Mikao Usui during a mystical experience at a mountain retreat in early twentieth century Japan. Some claim it is the same method of healing used by both the Buddha and Jesus, although the records of this have been lost.[\[3\]](#)

So how does Reiki work? To put it generally, and somewhat simply, Reiki claims to work by removing obstructions to the free flow of life force energy throughout the body. Such obstructions, which arise through negative thoughts, actions, and feelings, are believed to be the fundamental cause of illness and disease. But “Reiki clears, straightens and heals the energy pathways, thus allowing the life force to flow in a healthy and natural way.”[\[4\]](#) In this way, Reiki is believed to enhance physical, mental and emotional health.

In order to tap into this power and learn to channel Reiki one must first receive four attunements from a Reiki Master during a First Degree Reiki training session. These attunements are alleged to open “subtle mental and physical energy systems” that prepare the recipient “to channel Universal Life Force Energy.”[\[5\]](#) Supposedly, this creates a permanent connection with Reiki, thus allowing the recipient to channel this energy for life.

At this point, some may be wondering if there is any scientific evidence that corroborates the existence of this energy. Let’s look at the evidence.

## **Is there Scientific Support for Reiki?**

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some proponents of life force energy claimed it was a form of electromagnetic radiation (of which light and heat are familiar examples).[\[6\]](#) Of course, electromagnetic radiation is a real, physical phenomenon of the world in which we live. But should it be identified with life force energy? The answer is no, and today most of those who believe in such energy would say the same.

After all, such energy is generally believed to be non-physical. But electromagnetic radiation is a form of physical energy.

Still, many Reiki practitioners believe that good evidence supports the existence of life force energy. For example, the aura is said to be “a field of subtle life-force energy that surrounds the body of every living being.”[\[7\]](#) Those properly attuned to this energy often claim that they can feel a person’s aura. A few even claim to see auras.

But it’s one thing to make such a claim, quite another to demonstrate it under properly supervised conditions. In one study, ten people who claimed to see auras were tested against a control group of ten people who made no such claim. “Four identical screens were placed in a room with volunteers who took turns standing behind one or another of them.”[\[8\]](#) Those who claimed to see auras believed that they could detect which screen the volunteer was standing behind. But out of 720 attempts, they only gave 185 correct answers – an accuracy rate consistent with guessing. The control group, however, gave 196 correct answers – eleven more than those who claimed to see auras! Apparently, not everyone who claims to see auras can actually demonstrate this claim.

But haven’t auras been photographed? One author claims, “Kirlian photography . . . enables us to . . . photograph auras.”[\[9\]](#) However, when such photographs are investigated by independent scientists, the images are seen to have a completely physical explanation. Also, Kirlian auras have been recorded for some things not usually believed to have a field of life force energy, like pennies and paper clips. Such evidence casts doubt on the claim that auras have been photographed.

Thus, if there is such a thing as life force energy, it has so far eluded the detection of scientists. Such energy may still exist, and science may one day verify as much. But for now,

scientific support is lacking. Still, some argue that “the proof of whether a therapeutic procedure is effective rests not on the gathering of data alone but on the client’s actual experience.”[{10}](#) In other words, if Reiki works, such life force energy must exist!

## What About Reiki’s Success?

For many people, the most powerful evidence of Reiki’s effectiveness as an alternative health therapy are the testimonials of those who claim to have been personally helped by it. Consider what happened to Alex. He was in chronic pain due to a motorcycle accident that resulted in three crushed vertebrae. He attended a Reiki class, and after his first initiation was free of persistent pain![{11}](#)

How does one explain such a story? Does it prove that Reiki really works? While it cannot be denied that there is abundant anecdotal evidence of Reiki’s healing power, we must be very careful before we credit Reiki with relieving Alex’s pain. “With the exception of unsubstantiated opinion, anecdotal evidence is the least useful...evidence available to judge medical therapies.”[{12}](#)

This isn’t just the opinion of conventional Western medicine. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine acknowledges that there is a “hierarchy in the different types of evidence for therapies, with anecdotal at the bottom.”[{13}](#) Thus, anecdotal evidence counts for something, but it hardly *proves* that Reiki is an effective method of healing.

So how might we explain Alex’s pain relief? Although there are various possibilities, for the sake of time we will only mention two. First, we must honestly acknowledge that maybe Reiki *was* responsible for the elimination of Alex’s pain. After all, it was immediately after receiving Reiki that Alex felt relief. However, it’s crucial to recognize that there is another very sensible and well-documented explanation. Quite



simply, Alex's pain relief may have been due to the "placebo effect."

"The placebo effect is the combination of factors that give therapies beneficial effects, but which are not caused by any direct physiological action."[\[14\]](#) A classic example is the sugar pill. In itself it can neither cure illness nor relieve pain. However, when given to a patient by a trusted, confident physician, who says it's just what the patient needs to recover from his or her ailments, it can be incredibly effective in relieving a wide variety of psychosomatic disorders. Since such disorders have a psychological or emotional (rather than physiological) cause, they can be relieved without directly treating the patient's body.

Many studies indicate that the placebo effect can account for a full third (or more) "of the improvements found with any therapy."[\[15\]](#) But can it explain Alex's sudden relief from pain? Indeed it can. Pain can be treated very effectively with placebos.

Of course, some may argue that the really important thing is not so much *why* Alex was healed, but simply *that* he was healed! To some degree, I can sympathize with this argument. But it does have problems.

## **Should Christians Be Concerned About Reiki?**

Most people, myself included, consider physical health to be good and valuable. All things being equal, it's better to be healthy than sick. But if this is so, then does it really matter *how*, or *why*, the sick are healed? Isn't the only important thing simply *that* they're healed? And how can anyone object to Reiki if it helps accomplish this?

These are important questions and they deserve a sympathetic response. But first, let's consider an important question: Is

physical health *always* preferable to sickness? After all, most people consider such qualities as compassion, patience, courage, and love to be great and noble virtues. But what if there were people who could only acquire such virtues through the pain and suffering brought on by physical illness? So long as they're healthy, they will lack these virtues. But if they're sick, they will acquire them. Let me suggest that if you truly value these virtues, you might decide that it's better to be morally and spiritually healthy (though physically sick), than physically healthy alone.

Let's now return to our initial question. Does it really matter *if*, *how*, and *why* Reiki works? I think it does. Suppose there is no genuine power in Reiki. Suppose it "works" merely as a placebo. In that case, would you want to send a loved one to a Reiki practitioner to be treated for strep throat? Without proper treatment this would likely result in rheumatic fever, permanent heart disease, and maybe even death. Real antibiotics are needed; a placebo cannot cure this kind of infection.[\[16\]](#) Under circumstances such as these, I suspect that no one would want their loved ones treated by Reiki alone.

But now suppose that there *is* genuine power in Reiki. Is it not important to know *where* this power comes from and *what* it is? What if Reiki offers physical health only at the expense of spiritual health? Should Christians be concerned about this?

The International Center for Reiki Training describes Reiki as "spiritually guided life force energy."[\[17\]](#) After receiving the necessary attunements, a Reiki practitioner can channel this energy for life. The Center describes the attunement process as "a powerful spiritual experience" that "is guided by the Rei or God-consciousness." What's more, this experience "is also attended by Reiki guides and other spiritual beings who help implement the process."[\[18\]](#)

What are Christians to make of this? Should we be concerned about the nature of this attunement process? Exactly who, or what, are these Reiki spirit guides? Should we be cautious about becoming involved with these spirits? Or should we simply trust that they're doing God's work? After all, doesn't *all* healing come from God?

## **Does All Healing Come From God?**

Does all healing come from God? The International Center for Reiki Training declares that "Reiki comes from God."[\[19\]](#) But if we read the material on their Web site, we see that the Center advocates an Eastern or New Age view of "God." This view is radically different from that of the Bible. For example, the Center equates "God" with man's Higher Self, thus blurring the distinction between God and humanity that is taught in the Bible. Practically speaking, this difference between the God of the Bible and the "God" of Eastern or New Age philosophy means that adherents of these two systems are asserting something very different when they claim to have been healed by God.

The God of the Bible is a personal being, capable of miraculously healing people according to His will (Exodus 15:26). Nevertheless, the Bible does not teach that *all* signs and wonders come from God. On the contrary, Jesus warned His disciples that in the last days there would be false Christs and false prophets who would show great signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24). In his second letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul linked such events to the power of Satan (2 Thess. 2:9).

But does Satan have the power to perform marvelous healings? Indeed, it appears that he might. In Revelation 13 we learn that after receiving power from Satan, the beast is healed of a near-fatal head wound (vv. 2-3). The context seems to imply that this amazing healing is the work of Satan. From a

biblical perspective, this raises an important question about the healing power of Reiki. Exactly where does this healing energy come from?

We've already seen that there is not convincing evidence to regard this energy as a physical phenomenon. Biblically, this seems to leave only two main options. Either the energy comes from God, or it does not. Although the International Center for Reiki Training declares that "Reiki comes from God," we've already seen that this cannot be the God of the Bible. Is it possible, then, that the source of this energy is demonic?

As I mentioned previously, the ability to channel life force energy involves first going through an attunement process. The Center claims that these attunements are attended "by Reiki guides and other spiritual beings who help implement the process."[\[20\]](#) Is it possible that by involving themselves with spirit guides, Reiki practitioners may unwittingly be opening themselves, as well as their patients, to demonic influences? Although it may not be possible to categorically affirm that the source of Reiki energy medicine is demonic, the Bible, in condemning all forms of spiritism, does seem to at least allow for this possibility (see Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:9-14; Acts 16:16-18). Therefore, it seems to me that Christians should take the wiser, safer, and probably even healthier course of action, and carefully avoid all involvement with Reiki energy medicine.

## Notes

1. Donald O'Mathuna & Walt Larimore, *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 193.
2. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html).
3. Gary P. Stewart, et al. *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What is Good and What is Not?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998), 61.
4. "Reiki FAQ: How Does Reiki Work?" at

[www.reiki.org/FAQ/HowDoesReikiWork.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/HowDoesReikiWork.html).

5. David F. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners: Mastering Natural Healing Techniques* (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 2000), 41-42.
6. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 195. I have relied heavily on the chapter on "Energy Medicine," pp. 193-99, in this section.
7. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners*, 106.
8. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 197.
9. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners*, 106.
10. Libby Barnett, Maggie Chambers and Susan Davidson, *Reiki Energy Medicine* (Rochester, Vt.: Healing Arts Press, 1996), 15.
11. Ibid., 29.
12. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 115. I have relied heavily on chapter 10, "How Science Tests Therapies and Remedies," in this section.
13. Ibid., 116.
14. Ibid., 118.
15. Ibid., 124.
16. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 487.
17. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html).
18. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html).
19. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html).
20. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html).

# What's the NT Understanding of Tithing?

I just finished reading your answer to the question concerning [the value of the Old Testament for New Testament Christians](#). How then, do we explain tithing? Does this mean that we are no longer bound to the command to give 1/10? Where in the NT does it give directions concerning tithes and offerings?

Thanks in advance for your guidance and your wisdom!

You ask a very good question and you are essentially correct in your observations. The Old Testament tithe, according to some estimates, actually approximated closer to 23% in total tithes and offerings! The New Testament, however, does not specify a particular percentage that believers are required to give. This being said, however, believers are most certainly encouraged to give (see Rom. 15:26-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:7) and to give generously and liberally (see Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 9:11-13), each according to his own ability (Acts 11:29; 2 Cor. 8:12), with a willing, cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:7). Even those who are poor are permitted to give, and praised for doing so (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-5). Paul sets forth Jesus as the believer's example for giving (2 Cor. 8:8-9). We should give out of a heart full of gratitude toward God for what He's done for us through Christ! It is clear, then, that sacrificial giving is very much encouraged (2 Cor. 9:5) – though not commanded (2 Cor. 8:8).

Of course, believers should still be careful who they give to. We must be good stewards of the resources which God has given us, look into different opportunities for giving, and give to those who are above reproach in their financial stewardship (2 Cor. 8:20-21).

Although there are many passages in the New Testament which

address the issue of giving, the most detailed passage on this subject can be found in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

**See Also:**

- [Probe Answers Our E-Mail: "What Does the Bible Say About Tithing?"](#)
- [Probe Answers Our E-Mail: "Where Should We Give Our Tithe?"](#)

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# **"Did Jesus Cleanse the Temple More than Once, Or Is There a Mistake in the Bible?"**

In John 2:13-25 is the story of when Jesus cleansed the temple. It immediately follows Jesus turning the water into wine, and immediately precedes the conversation with Nicodemus. In Matthew 21:12-16 is the same story immediately precedes the cursing of the barren fig tree. In Mark 11:15-18 the cleansing of the temple takes place immediately after the cursing of the fig tree.

Now, as I see it, there are only three possibilities.

1) The text in either Matthew and Mark or in John is in error about the time of the cleansing of the temple. And either the text in Matthew or Mark is wrong about the time of the cursing of the fig tree.

2) The gospels were not written in chronological order.

3) The same incident happened more than once (highly unlikely).

**What is your take on this? Did I overlook something?**

Thanks for your question! You have raised an important (and relatively common) difficulty in interpreting the gospels. Let me first say that the gospels were not necessarily written in chronological order. In fact, it is generally accepted that many of the incidents recorded in the gospels were NOT written in chronological order. As a general rule, the only exception to this is Luke's gospel, in which he specifically states his intention "to write it out...in consecutive order" (Luke 1:3).

A good book which you may want to consult about some of these issues of gospel interpretation and harmonization is Craig Blomberg's *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1987). Since this is not an area of personal expertise for me, I will simply give you Blomberg's observations on possible ways in which the difficulties you have noticed might be resolved.

Concerning the cursing of the fig tree, Blomberg believes that Matthew has simply telescoped the events of two days "into one uninterrupted paragraph which seems to refer only to the second day's events." He points out that Matthew's introduction, "Now in the morning," does "not specify which day is in view, and there is no reason to exclude an interval of time between verses 19 and 20." He continues by noting, "Mark does not deny that the fig tree withered immediately, only that the disciples did not see it until the next day." He concludes by pointing out that the gospels leave out a wealth of detail (indeed, John states this explicitly in 20:30), and such omissions simply become more evident when compared with a more detailed account in another gospel.

Blomberg offers a couple of solutions to the problem of the



cleansing of the temple. The first solution holds that John has simply woven this incident into his gospel thematically, rather than chronologically. In other words, there is only one cleansing and John, for thematic considerations, has simply chosen to relay this incident in a manner unrelated to its actual chronological occurrence in the life of Christ. He offers a couple of reasons in support of this view. The second solution (which commends itself to my mind) actually acknowledges two separate cleansings, one at the beginning and one near the end of Jesus' public ministry. He offers six arguments in support of this second position:

1. The details of the cleansing given in John's account are completely different from those given in the Synoptics (i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke).
2. If Jesus felt strongly enough about the temple corruption to cleanse it once at the beginning of His ministry, it is not really too difficult to believe that He might do it again at the end of His ministry.
3. Since cleansing the temple was an overtly Messianic act, about which some of the Jews would have approved, it is not surprising that He could get away with doing this once at the outset of His ministry. However, when the Jews began to realize that Jesus was not really the sort of Messiah they were looking for, a second cleansing would have almost certainly sealed His fate (see Mark 11:18).
4. In the Synoptics, Jesus is accused of having said that He would destroy the temple and rebuild another in three days not made with human hands (Mark 14:58). But a similar comment by Jesus is only explicitly mentioned in John 2:19. Furthermore, since the witnesses in Mark's gospel get the statement slightly wrong, and cannot agree among themselves (Mark 14:59), it may be a confused memory of something Jesus said two or three years earlier, rather than just a few days earlier.

5. Jesus' statement in the Synoptics is more severe than that in John. Only in the Synoptics does He refer to the Gentiles' need to pray at the temple, and only in the Synoptics does He refer to the Jews as "robbers".

6. In John 2:20 the Jews refer to the temple rebuilding project having begun 46 years earlier. This would mark the date of the cleansing at around AD 27 or 28. But Jesus was almost certainly not crucified until at least AD 30. And it is most unlikely that John would have simply made up such a figure. Therefore, it is quite likely that John is describing a distinct (and earlier) cleansing from the one mentioned in the Synoptics.

When I approach the gospel narratives with the attitude that they are innocent until proven guilty, keeping in mind that they have been thoroughly demonstrated to be generally reliable historical sources, the six arguments listed above strongly incline me to the view that there were in fact two temple cleansings in the life of Christ—one at the beginning of His public ministry, the other at its conclusion. At any rate, that is my take on this particular issue.

Hope this helps!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

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## Communicating with the Dead –

# A Christian Perspective on Its Reality

*Can John Edward and James Van Praagh really communicate with the dead? Michael Gleghorn takes a skeptical and biblical look at the phenomenon of after-death communication.*

<https://www.ministeriosprobe.org/docs/comunicacion-muertos.htm>



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## Mediums and the Media

Both John Edward and James Van Praagh are highly sought-after mediums who claim to possess the ability to communicate with the dead. Each has his own Web site and hit television show. They have both authored best-selling books, been interviewed by television personalities and news journalists, and each has about a three-year waiting list for personal readings.

“According to a recent Gallup Poll, 38 percent of Americans believe ghosts or spirits can come back in certain situations. In 1990, it was 25 percent. Today, 28 percent think some people can hear from or ‘mentally’ talk to the dead, compared with 18 percent 11 years ago.”[\[1\]](#) Some believe that the increased interest in after-death communication is a “spillover from the growing interest in alternative medicine and Eastern spirituality.”[\[2\]](#) But whatever the cause, the popularity of self-proclaimed mediums like Edward and Van Praagh has soared in recent years.

John Edward was 15 when he first learned of his life's work.[{3}](#) He received a reading from a psychic who told him that he would help bring comfort to the living by reuniting them with those who had crossed over to the other side. Since



then, John has gone from doing private readings in his home to making appearances on popular radio and television shows. He has been a guest on *Entertainment Tonight*, *The Crier Report*, and *The Maury Povich Show*, just to name a few. He's also been interviewed by *The New York Times*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and others. He's authored three books, produced a series of audio tapes that explain how to communicate with the other side, and, since June 2000, he's had his own television show, *Crossing Over with John Edward*.



The story of James Van Praagh is similar. On his Web site we learn that James was 24 when a medium told him that he would be in the same line of work within just two years.[{4}](#) Although James was initially skeptical, he soon realized that he indeed had the ability to communicate with the dead. Since that time, James has gone from doing psychic readings for friends, to making television appearances on such

shows as NBC's *The Other Side*, *Oprah*, and *20/20*. In addition to writing four books, he's produced two meditation tapes and a video about psychic development. The popular CBS mini-series, *Living with the Dead*, was based on his life and work. And since September 2002, he's been the star of his own television show, *Beyond with James Van Praagh*.

What are Christians to make of all this? Is there good evidence that Edward and Van Praagh can really communicate with the dead? And what, if anything, does the Bible say about such matters? These are just a few of the questions that we will wrestle with in this article.

## The Tricks of the Trade

Both John Edward and James Van Praagh claim the mediumistic ability to communicate with the dead. And thousands of adoring fans believe these claims are true. One reporter tells the story of Sally Morrison, who visited Edward after the death of her husband.[\[5\]](#) During the reading, Edward reportedly asked her, “I’m getting a screwdriver; what does that mean to you?” Ms. Morrison remembered that the day before she had spent an hour looking for a screwdriver in her late husband’s tool box. Afterward she told the reporter, “It was such an everyday thing to bring up. But to me, it was incredibly comforting, a sign that Paul had been there.” Apparently, Ms. Morrison was persuaded that Edward had really made contact with her late husband. Similar stories could also be told of James Van Praagh’s apparent successes.

But if this is so, why haven’t Edward and Van Praagh managed to convince the skeptics? Michael Shermer, who I must point out is also skeptical of Christianity, observes that there are three techniques commonly used by mediums to convince people of their alleged paranormal powers: cold reading, warm reading, and hot reading.[\[6\]](#) These techniques might be thought of as the tricks of the trade, so to speak.

In cold reading, mediums make use of methods that help them “read” a person who was unknown to them in advance. Such methods may include observing body language, asking questions, and inviting the subject to interpret vague statements.[\[7\]](#) For instance, by carefully observing body language and facial expressions, the medium can often get a good idea of whether

or not he's on the right track. Also, by asking questions and inviting the subject to interpret vague statements, the medium can gain valuable information. This information can then be used later in the reading to make what appear to be stunningly precise revelations from the spirit world. Indeed, Shermer contends that by effectively applying these techniques, the medium actually gets the subject to do the reading for him![\[8\]](#) Skeptics hold that both Edward and Van Praagh make use of such methods.

Warm reading involves making statements that tend to apply to most anyone. For example, many people carry a piece of jewelry that belonged to their dead loved one. By asking if the subject is carrying such jewelry, the medium has a good chance of making a "hit." This can give the impression that the information was divined from a paranormal source. In reality, of course, it may have been nothing more than a highly probable guess.

The last technique, hot reading, actually involves getting information about a subject *before* the reading begins! But surely Edward and Van Praagh have not availed themselves of such methods. Not according to the skeptics! It appears that both mediums have apparently been caught red-handed using "hot reading" techniques.

## Caught in the Act

Skeptics contend that self-proclaimed mediums John Edward and James Van Praagh have both been caught red-handed using "hot reading" techniques. "Hot reading" involves gathering information about a subject *prior* to doing the reading. Although most skeptics agree that such techniques are probably not used as much now as they were by spiritists in the past, there seem to be strong indications that both Edward and Van Praagh have, on occasion, attempted to obtain information about their subjects in advance.

In an article written for the *Skeptical Inquirer*, Joe Nickell describes one such episode involving John Edward.[{9}](#) The incident occurred on a *Dateline* special. During a group reading, Edward indicated that the spirits were telling him to acknowledge someone named Anthony. The cameraman signaled Edward that that was his name. Edward appeared surprised and asked, "Had you not seen Dad before he passed?" John Hockenberry, the *Dateline* reporter, was initially quite impressed with this revelation. The cameraman's name was Anthony and his father was dead. Hockenberry later learned what really happened.

Earlier in the day, Anthony "had been the cameraman on another Edward shoot."[{10}](#) The two men had talked and Edward had learned of the death of Anthony's father. When confronted by Hockenberry in a later interview, Edward reluctantly admitted as much. Of course, Edward still maintained that he got this information from the spirits as well. But can anyone blame the skeptic for being suspicious?

Michael Shermer relates a similar incident, this one involving James Van Praagh, which occurred on *20/20*.[{11}](#) While relaxing during a break, Van Praagh asked a young woman, "Did your mother pass on?" The woman shook her head, but said that her grandmother had died. Unfortunately for Van Praagh, the cameras had accidentally been left rolling during the break. The entire episode was caught on tape! Unaware of this, Van Praagh later turned to the woman during his reading and said, "I want to tell you, there is a lady sitting behind you. She feels like a grandmother to me." Afterward, when confronted by *20/20*'s Bill Ritter with the video evidence captured during the break, Van Praagh insisted, "I don't cheat. I don't have to prove . . . I don't cheat. I don't cheat. I mean, come on. . . ." Shermer concludes, "Interesting. No one said anything about cheating. The gentleman doth protest too much."[{12}](#)

The fact that both Edward and Van Praagh have been caught using information in their readings that they gained

beforehand ought to alert us to the possibility that these men may not really be what they claim. Still, to be fair, we must at least admit the possibility that these men not only had advanced information about their subjects, but that they also received such information later through a spiritistic revelation. But is this really possible? Let's see what the Bible says about after-death communication.

## **Saul and the Spirit Medium**

In 1 Samuel 28, we read that Israel and the Philistines were preparing to make war with one another. When Saul, the king of Israel, saw the Philistine army, he was filled with fear. Desperate for a word from God, he inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him. Hoping for guidance by another means, Saul told his servants to find him a medium. At this point in Israel's history this may not have been an easy task, for "Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land" (1 Sam. 28:3). But why had he done this?

It was actually an act of obedience to the Word of God. In Deuteronomy 18 the Lord had said, "There shall not be found among you a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord" (vv. 10-12). The Lord had also told His people that they were not to seek out mediums (Lev. 19:31), that the person who did so was to be cut off from his people (Lev. 20:6), and that mediums were also to be put to death (Lev. 20:27). In spite of all these prohibitions against turning to mediums, Saul was apparently so desperate for guidance that he ordered his servants to find him one. They did, and he disguised himself and went to her by night.

Although initially hesitant to practice her art, the medium, not recognizing her client as Saul, eventually agreed to call up the prophet Samuel who had died some time before. "When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice," suddenly



realizing that her client was Saul! (1 Sam. 28:12)

Samuel's message to Saul was both tragic and prophetic: "The Lord will . . . deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me" (1 Sam. 28:19). Reflecting on these events, the author of Chronicles wrote, "So Saul died for his unfaithfulness . . . against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance" (1 Chron. 10:13). Whatever truths we may glean from the story of Saul and the medium, it clearly does not sanction man's attempt to communicate with the dead.[{13}](#)

But does it confirm that after-death communication is really possible? Although some have speculated that the spirit of Samuel was actually a demonic spirit, the text repeatedly identifies the spirit as Samuel (vv. 12, 14, 15-16) and nowhere even hints that it might be a demon. Thus, we are forced to conclude that after-death communication is not intrinsically impossible. But here we must be careful. Possibility does not suggest probability. The text seems to imply that God allowed Samuel's special return in order to pronounce judgment against Saul (vv. 16-19). And as we'll see, there are good reasons to believe that this was, in fact, an exceptional event.

## **The Rich Man and Lazarus**

Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) clearly suggests the immense improbability of the dead communicating with the living. Both the rich man and Lazarus died. Lazarus went to "Abraham's bosom," a place of paradise for the righteous dead (Luke 16:22). The rich man went to Hades, a place of conscious torment for the unrighteous. Though separated by a great chasm, the rich man could still see and speak with those dwelling in paradise. He called out to Abraham, asking that Lazarus be sent to warn his brothers,

lest they share his torment in the afterlife. But Abraham refused, saying that if they would not listen to the Word of God, they also would not listen if someone rose from the dead.

But why didn't the rich man just go and warn his brothers himself? After all, if it were a simple matter for the dead to communicate with the living, then why did the rich man ask that Lazarus be sent to warn his brothers? Apparently, the rich man was not *able* to warn his brothers. He could not escape his place of punishment to do so.

But wouldn't it also, then, be impossible for Lazarus to warn them? Not necessarily. Although it seems to be a rare occurrence, it appears that the righteous dead are, on occasion, permitted by God to communicate with those still alive on earth. The Old Testament records the appearance of Samuel to Saul (1 Samuel 28), and the New Testament records the appearance of Elijah and Moses to Jesus and some of his disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17). Nevertheless, the biblical evidence indicates that after-death communication is extremely rare.

Does this mean that mediums like John Edward and James Van Praagh are charlatans? Skeptics certainly think so, and the skeptics may be right. But the Bible allows for another possibility; namely, that the spirits with whom Edward and Van Praagh claim to communicate are not human at all, but demonic. Consider the following.

The Bible indicates that messages from the human dead are extremely rare. It's therefore unlikely that Edward and Van Praagh should receive such messages all the time. In addition, listen to what the spirits are alleged to say. Do any of them, like the rich man, strive to warn their relatives about a place of conscious torment? Do they urge repentance for sin or the need for personal faith in Christ? On the contrary, such important Christian doctrines are typically either ignored or denied. But if the Bible is truly God's Word, and the spirits

deny its teachings, then who are these spirits likely to be?

Of course, maybe Edward and Van Praagh aren't really communicating with spirits at all. But if at times they are, I fear it's probably with demonic spirits – not spirits of the human dead.

## Notes

1. Bill Hendrick, "Higher Communication," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 31 October 2001, sect. C; Greg Barrett, "Can the Living Talk to the Dead?" *USA Today*, 20 June 2001, sect. D; cited in Marcia Montenegro, "The Resurging Interest in After-Death Communication," *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 01, 2002, 12.

2. Ruth La Ferla, "A Voice from the Other Side," *New York Times on the Web*, 29 October 2000  
(<http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/29/living/29/DEAD.html>).

3. See the information about John at <http://www.scifi.com/johnedward/aboutjohn/> and his official Web site at [http://www.johnedward.net/about\\_John\\_Edward.htm](http://www.johnedward.net/about_John_Edward.htm).

4. See the information about James on his Web site at <http://www.vanpraagh.com/bio.cfm>.

5. La Ferla.

6. See Michael Shermer, "Deconstructing the Dead: Cross Over One Last Time to Expose Medium John Edward," <http://www.skeptic.com/newsworthy13.html>. I have relied heavily on Shermer's article in the following discussion.

7. See Joe Nickell, "John Edward: Hustling the Bereaved," *Skeptical Inquirer*, November/December 2001, Vol. 25, No. 6, p. 20. I have relied on some of Nickell's observations in what follows.

8. Shermer.

9. Nickell.

10. Ibid.

11. See Michael Shermer, "How Psychics and Mediums Work: A Case Study of James Van Praagh," <http://www.skeptic.com/>. See also Michael Shermer, "Does James Van Praagh Talk To The Dead?"

Nope! Fraud! – Parts 1” at

<http://www.holysmoke.org/praagh1.htm> and “Does James Van Praagh Talk To The Dead? Nope! Fraud! – Part 2” at <http://www.holysmoke.org/praagh2.htm>.

12. Shermer, “How Psychics and Mediums Work: A Case Study of James Van Praagh.”

13. Montenegro, p. 16.

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## **“People in Hell Are Destroyed, Not Live Forever”**

I am writing about your answer to the question [“Are People in Hell Isolated and Alone?”](#)

The bible clearly states that the wages of sin is DEATH not eternal life, be it in heaven or hell as you think. Consider these verses:

*Malachi 4:3 plainly says the wicked shall be ashes under our feet. Is.1:28–“...and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed.” Is.66:17–“shall be consumed together, saith the Lord.” Rev 20:9–“...and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.” Rev 20:14, “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.”*

Doesn't say second life but second death. You should look up some of the Greek and Hebrew words that have been translated into hell, that would make it more clear to you.

Thank you for your letter. You are correct in noting that the fate of unbelievers is one of heated debate these days, even

among professing evangelicals. My own difficulty with the thesis of conditional immortality stems from passages like Matthew 25:46, Revelation 14:9-11 and Revelation 20:10. It is difficult for me to see how these passages can be consistent with the denial of eternal punishment.

For example, in Matthew 25:46 Jesus states: "And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. The same Greek term, *aionion* (eternal), is used to describe both punishment and life.

Revelation 14:11 reads in part: "And the smoke from their torture will go up forever and ever, and those who worship the beast and his image will have no rest day or night." What troubles me about this verse is the concluding phrase, "those who worship the beast and his image will have no rest day or night." Again, these unfortunate people appear to be enduring eternal, conscious torment.

Finally, in Revelation 20:10 we read: "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are too, and they will be tormented there day and night forever and ever." The beast and false prophet are both human beings. And yet, along with the devil, they will endure eternal punishment. Furthermore, Revelation 19:20 states, "Now the beast was seized, and along with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf; signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with sulfur." Please note that this takes place prior to the thousand year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:1-7). And yet, when the thousand years are over, the beast and false prophet are still being tormented in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). This lake of fire is the same place where all unbelievers are thrown in Revelation 20:15.

It's true that this is called the "second death," but does the

Bible equate “death” with “annihilation”? How do you read Ephesians 2:1-2? The Ephesians were formerly “dead.” But does this mean that they didn’t have personal, conscious existence? Wouldn’t you agree that the Ephesians were spiritually dead (i.e. separated from the spiritual life of God)? And might this not also be what the Bible means by the “second death” (i.e. unremedied spiritual death results in eternal separation from God)? When the Bible speaks of death it does not mean “annihilation.” Rather, it means “separation.” Physical death is the “separation” of the spirit from the body (James 2:26). Spiritual death is the “separation” of a conscious, living person from God (Ephesians 2:1-2). And the second death is the “eternal separation” of an unredeemed person from God (Revelation 20:11-15).

This, at any rate, is why it’s so difficult for me to embrace the doctrines of conditional immortality and annihilationism.

Hope this helps.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn  
Probe Ministries

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## **“Is it OK for a Christian to Practice Yoga?”**

I read your email response to the question [“Is it OK for a Christian to train in martial arts?”](#) and have a question of my own on a related subject.

For several years I have had fairly severe back problems, and was advised by a physiotherapist friend (who is a Christian),

to consider taking up Yoga as it might help. My father expressed concerns about this, as he felt that it was a direct path to eastern religions. For the same reason I was never allowed to train in martial arts when I was a teenager. Several other friends of mine also feel that Yoga is decidedly 'non-kosher.'

My own view is the same as that expressed in your article—that martial arts and the like do contain dangerous elements for the Christian, as they are linked to eastern philosophies. However, I feel that it is possible to participate in such activities, as long as one uses them for physical training rather than for a spiritual purpose, and remains aware of the possible dangers.

With this in mind, I have been attending Yoga classes for the past few months, and my back has never been better! It is a blessed relief to me to be able to move painlessly for once!! (At 24, I'm a little young to consider putting up with back problems for long!). I have been attending Iyengar yoga classes, which, so far, have not involved any spiritual content. The 'meditation', consists of lying down at the end of the class and feeling relaxed. I often use it as quiet time to meditate on Jesus!!

Some of my friends at church appear to think that just getting into a position may lead directly to demon possession. I feel that perhaps Yoga has been given a bad press, as it appears to me that the exercises themselves are rather separate from transcendental meditation and the like, which obviously go totally against what the bible teaches. Have I just been fortunate in finding a class that is not compromising my faith, or am I compromising myself without even realizing it? Obviously I don't wish to open myself to any spirits other than the Holy Spirit!

I would value any insight you might have on this topic.

Hi \_\_\_\_\_,

Thanks so much for writing! You ask a very important question about a very controversial subject. Indeed, you offer an interesting case study to which I want to reply rather carefully.

Let me first say that I am truly sorry to hear of your back problems. Since you have apparently found some genuine relief of these problems through the practice of yoga, what I have to say may be a little difficult to "digest." So if you're ready.  
. . .

Until very recently, I would have entirely agreed with your own evaluation of yoga. I would have made precisely the same distinction which you made between the physical postures and breathing exercises of yoga (on the one hand) and the non-Christian philosophical and religious ideas (on the other). I still think this can often be a helpful and valid distinction in other areas (e.g. much of the martial arts), but I'm afraid I've become rather skeptical about its applicability to yoga. Please let me explain why.

The physical postures and breathing exercises in yoga are inseparably bound up with the philosophical and religious ideas. I realize this may initially sound absurd, but please hear me out. The discipline of yoga is, as a general rule, firmly grounded within a pantheistic worldview. Pantheism teaches that everything which exists is part of a unitary, all-encompassing divine reality. In short, pantheism teaches that all is "God." But in pantheism, "God" is not a personal being distinct from the world; rather "God" IS the world and the world IS "God."

But why is this important? According to the pantheistic philosophy of yoga, each one of us is also part of this all-encompassing divine reality known as "God" or Brahman. As Brad Scott, a former practitioner of yoga, has written in a recent



article,

*"..all creation to the Yoga-Vedantin is comprised of the substance of Brahman. Hence, yogis are pantheists... Brahman created the universe out of Itself, as a spider spins out a web" ("Exercise or Religious Practice? Yoga: What the Teacher Never Taught You in That Hatha Yoga Class." The Watchman Expositor: Vol. 18, No. 2, 2001, p. 7).*

And since "God," or Brahman, is ultimately something non-physical, what we imagine to be our physical bodies are (according to yoga philosophy) merely just a crude layer of mind. The physical postures and breathing exercises of yoga are actually intended to help move the mind in the direction of altered states of consciousness. The ultimate goal of yoga is "union" with "God" or occult enlightenment. Please allow me to support these statements with some authoritative quotations.

On the Watchman Expositor website there is a brief overview of yoga at <http://www.watchman.org/na/yoga.htm>. The author of this piece quotes from Swami Vishnudevananda, well known authority of Yoga, in his book, *The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*, as follows:

*..the aim of all yoga practice is to achieve truth wherein the individual soul identifies itself with the supreme soul of God."*

He also quotes from Swami Sivananda Radha, in a book on Hatha Yoga, as follows:

*When most people in the West think of yoga, they think of yoga as a form of exercise. Too often... there are yoga teachers who teach asanas without an understanding of their real nature and purpose. Asanas are a devotional practice which like all spiritual practices, bring us to an understanding of the truth.... Beyond this there also lies a*

*mystical or spiritual meaning. Each asana creates a certain meditative state of mind, (p.xv; emphasis mine).*

And again, from the same source:

*Hatha Yoga plays an important part in the development of the human being... the body working in harmony with the mind, to bring the seeker into closer contact with the Higher Self, (Ibid, p.xvii).*

Indeed, it is for this reason that the Yogi authority Gopi Krishna writes:

*“All the systems of yoga...are designed to bring about those psychosomatic changes in the body which are essential for the metamorphosis of consciousness” (Quoted in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs, Harvest House Publishers, 1996, p. 596).*

And finally, John Ankerberg and John Weldon quote from Judith Lasater’s article, “Yoga: An Ancient Technique for Restoring Health”:

*“One basic assumption of Yoga Sutras [a standard yoga text] is that the body and mind are part of one continuum of [divine] existence, the mind merely being more subtle than the body...It is believed that as the body and mind are brought into balance and health, the individual will be able to perceive his true [divine] nature” (597).*

As you are probably already aware, the term “yoga” simply means “union.” And, as previously stated, the ultimate goal of yoga is “union” with “God,” one’s Higher Self, or Brahman. All the different “limbs” or stages of yoga, including the physical postures (asana) and breathing exercises (pranayama), are specially designed to prepare the practitioner for union

with “God” and occult enlightenment.

In this regard, Ankerberg and Weldon also cite Feuerstein and Miller, two authorities on yoga, who contend that the postures of yoga (asana), as well as the breathing exercises (pranayama), are more than just physical exercises—they are psychosomatic (mind/body) exercises:

*“...the control of the vital energy (prana) by way of breathing, like also asana, is not merely a physical exercise, but is accompanied by certain psychomental phenomena. In other words, all techniques falling under the heading of asana and pranayama...are psychosomatic exercises. This point, unfortunately, is little understood by Western practitioners...” (600).*

Interestingly, Brad Scott, the former yoga practitioner mentioned previously, who (by the way) studied yoga for seven years under Swami Shraddhananda of the Ramakrishna Order, provided me with a web address for The Iyengar Yoga Institute of San Francisco which you may want to take a look at. The address is: <http://www.iyisf.org/>. The state-accredited two year certificate program one can earn at this institute requires not only studies in anatomy and physiology, but in yoga philosophy as well. You may be interested in reading the following course descriptions taken from the website:

### ***Philosophy***

#### *Yoga Sutras*

*2 units (required)*

*A study of classical yoga philosophy based upon a reading of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. The aims, methods, and powers of yoga, as well as the nature of liberation, will be investigated.*

#### *Bhagavad Gita*

2 units (required)

*The Gita, as a practical handbook for yoga, will be studied and related to daily life. The different branches of yoga described in the Gita will be discussed and placed in context with other major Indian scriptures.*

*Physiology of Yoga*

1 unit (Elective Course)

*Yoga is a vitalistic science that views all of existence as supported by a force called prana. Yoga physiology describes how this vital force pervades and animates the physical body. This course will lay the groundwork to help one begin to view themselves and the world around them from this vitalistic perspective.*

It's important to keep in mind that this force called "prana," which supports all of existence, is ultimately the same force as "God." Thus, one does not escape pantheism even in a class on yoga physiology! As Ankerberg and Weldon write, "...prana, God, and occult energy are all one and the same. The one who practices yogic breathing (pranayama) is by definition attempting to manipulate occult ('divine') energy" (602).

Again, in another section on the website, concerning the Iyengar approach to Hatha Yoga, we read the following:

*"Yoga as taught by B.K.S. Iyengar emphasizes the integration of body, mind and spirit. The Iyengar approach to yoga is firmly based on the traditional eight limbs of yoga as expounded by Patanjali in his classic treatise, The Yoga Sutras. Iyengar yoga emphasizes the development of strength, stamina, flexibility and balance, as well as concentration (Dharana) and meditation (Dhyana)."*

But what are these eight "limbs" on which the Iyengar approach

is firmly based? John Ankerberg and John Weldon point out that the eight limbs of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras are "defined within the context of a basic Hindu worldview (reincarnation, karma, and moksha, or liberation) and intended to support and reinforce Hindu beliefs." (601). They go on to describe these eight limbs as follows:

- Yama (self-control, restraint, devotion to the gods [e.g., Krishna] or the final impersonal God [e.g., Brahman])
- Niyama (religious duties...)
- Asana (proper postures for yoga practices; these represent the first stage in the isolation of consciousness...)
- Pranayama (the control and directing of the breath and the alleged divine energy within the human body [prana] to promote health and spiritual [occult] consciousness and evolution)
- Pratyahara (sensory control or deprivation, i.e., withdrawal of the senses from attachment to external objects)
- Dharana (deeper concentration, or mind control)
- Dhyana (deep contemplation from occult meditation)
- Samadhi (occult enlightenment or "God [Brahman] realization" i.e., "union" of the "individual" with God).

In light of this, when we read on the IYISF website that "students at IYISF [Iyengar Yoga Institute of San Francisco] are encouraged to refine both their knowledge of asanas (poses) and pranayama (breathing)...The same precision of practice brings the serious student to the cutting edge of exploration in the field of mind-body interaction," we now have a better idea of what's being referred to.

Let me conclude this discussion with a brief word about "kundalini awakening." This much-sought-after experience could potentially open the one who has it to occult influences. As

you may already know, Kundalini is sometimes thought of as a Hindu goddess believed to lie coiled as a serpent at the base of the spine. Others, however, think of Kundalini simply as “coiled serpent power,” without necessarily identifying this power with a Hindu goddess (Brad Scott, personal e-mail). Either way, however, one of the primary purposes of yoga practice is to arouse Kundalini so that she/it travels up the spine toward her lover, Shiva, who is said to reside in the brain. Supposedly, as she/it travels up the spine she opens up the seven psychic centers (called chakras). Weldon and Ankerberg write:

*“When the crown or top chakra is reached, the union of Shiva/Shakti occurs, supposedly leading the practitioner to divine enlightenment and union with Brahman” (606).*

This, of course, is identical with Patanjali’s eighth limb, samadhi (although Brad Scott informed me in a personal e-mail that “The Shiva-Shakti mythology...was superimposed on yoga after Patanjali’s time”). Since the yoga authority Hans Rieker claims that “Kundalini [is] the mainstay of ALL yoga practices,” (Ankerberg/Weldon, 606, emphasis added) it is very important to point out that such an experience MAY place the practitioner under occult influences of a spiritual nature. For the Christian, firsthand accounts of this experience sometimes sound as if some sort of demonic influence may be involved. Mind you, I’m not saying that this is ALWAYS the case, but Weldon and Ankerberg write that many Hindu and Buddhist gurus, “when describing their spirit, or ‘energy,’ possession,” often link it directly to “kundalini activity” (606). They go on to cite a leading guru, Swami Muktananda, as confessing that he was violently shaken by a spirit during kundalini arousal:

*“A great deity in the form of my guru has spread all through me as chiti [energy] and was shaking me...when I sat for meditation, my whole body shook violently, just as if I were*

*possessed by a god or a bad spirit" (610).*

Weldon and Ankerberg conclude with this observation: "Because all yoga has the ability to arouse 'kundalini,' all yoga should be avoided" (610).

And for all of the reasons offered above, I cannot in good conscience recommend that a Christian practice yoga—even if they limit themselves only to the physical postures and breathing exercises. Having said this, I certainly hope you understand that I'm not trying to be insensitive to your particular situation. Indeed, I will grant that it's at least POSSIBLE that you could continue practicing yoga for many years without experiencing any of the destructive spiritual effects which such a practice could potentially have. However, in the case of yoga, where it becomes quite difficult (if not impossible) to separate the non-Christian religious and philosophical ideas from the physical postures and breathing exercises, my own advice would be to very humbly recommend that you look for a different exercise program, one that would help relieve your back pain without potentially compromising your spiritual health as a Christian.

I hope this gives you some solid reasons for making an informed decision concerning ongoing yoga practice. I genuinely wish you all the best. If you would like more information, you may want to consider taking a look at Brad Scott's book, *Embraced by the Darkness: Exposing New Age Theology from the Inside Out* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996). Although I have not yet personally read this book, I found his article on Yoga in the Watchman Expositor (Vol. 18, No. 2, 2001) to be extremely helpful in understanding the vast doctrinal differences between the philosophy of yoga and biblical Christianity. Another potentially valuable resource is John Weldon and John Ankerberg's, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996).

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“Is God the Creator of Evil?”**

**I would like to get some help with Isaiah 45:7, which says, “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.” (KJV) Is God the creator of evil? Can you recommend a good book on this?**

God is not the creator of evil. Indeed, strictly speaking, evil is not a thing. It doesn't exist in its own right, but only as a corruption or perversion of some good thing that God did create.

A better translation of this verse, given the context, is what you find at [www.netbible.org](http://www.netbible.org):

I am the one who forms light and creates darkness;  
the one who brings about peace and creates calamity.  
I am the Lord, who accomplishes all these things.

God is sovereign and nothing happens apart from His will (Ephesians 1:11; etc.). This includes calamities and disasters of every kind. Although God is not always the efficient cause of such calamities, He nonetheless allows them to occur in accordance with His sovereign purposes for the world. Almost any good exegetical or expositional commentary on this verse will deal with the difficulty you've noticed.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn  
Probe Ministries