

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.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 69.

13. Ibid., 69-70.

14. Ibid., 116.

15. Lynn Catoe, *UFOs and Related Subjects: An Annotated Bibliography* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), p. iv (prepared under Air Force Office of Scientific Research Project Order 67-0002 and 68-0003), cited in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on UFO's and Other Supernatural Phenomena* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1992), 17.

16. John A. Keel, *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse* (New York: Putnam's, 1970), p. 215; cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on UFO's*, 18.

17. Whitley Strieber, *Transformation: The Breakthrough* (New York: Morrow, 1988), p. 181; cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on UFO's*, 23.

18. For example, his recent online journal entry, "How We Can Protect Ourselves," (Aug. 28, 2003) at www.unknowncountry.com/journal/.

19. John A. Saliba, "Religious Dimensions of UFO Phenomena," in *The Gods Have Landed*, ed. James R. Lewis (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 25; cited in Ross, et al., *Lights in the Sky*, 145.

20. Ross, et al., *Lights in the Sky*, 150.

21. Ibid., 164.

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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.
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.
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.
18. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html.
19. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at

www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html.

20. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html.

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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?”](#)

“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* (InterVarsity 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

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>

[!\[\]\(6605b201d6f14d9b3bcb8ab5f274d107_img.jpg\) 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.

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

“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

“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:

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

Wicca: A Biblical Critique

Dr. Michael Gleghorn examines some of the fundamental doctrines of Wicca, offers a biblical critique of those doctrines, and highlights the differences between Wicca and Christianity.



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

The Goddess and the God

By some estimates, Wicca “appears to be the fastest growing religion in America.”^{1} But what exactly is “Wicca” anyway? One scholar writes, “The modern religion of Wicca, otherwise known as Old Religion, Magick, Witchcraft, the Craft, and the Mysteries, is part of the neo-pagan movement.”^{2} In this article I hope to accomplish two things. First, I want to outline some of the fundamental doctrines of Wicca; second, I want to offer a biblical critique of those doctrines.

Let’s begin with Wiccan theology. Although some Wiccans are devoted exclusively to the Goddess, most worship both the Goddess and the God. Raven Grimassi, a Wiccan scholar, has written, “The Source of All Things, also known as the Great Spirit, is generally personified in Wiccan belief as a Goddess and a God.”^{3}

It’s important to point out that the Goddess and God are merely *personifications* of this ultimate source of all things. The Source itself is both “unknowable” and “incomprehensible.”^{4} It is perhaps for this reason that some “Neo-Wiccans” have simply abandoned such personifications altogether, choosing rather to view the gods as simply “detached metaphysical concepts.”^{5} But for those who embrace

such personifications, the Goddess has often been associated with the moon (and has thus sometimes been called the *Queen of Heaven*).[{6}](#) She is also known in three aspects, corresponding to the three stages of a woman's life: Maiden, Mother, and Crone.[{7}](#) She was alleged to have reigned "with a male consort called *The Horned One* who was a nature god and was also associated with the sun."[{8}](#) Interestingly, this god was not only viewed as the consort of the Goddess, he was also her son as well. Each year he was born of the Goddess, became her lover, and died-only to be reborn once more the following year from his own seed! This was known as the Year God cycle and was associated with the fertility of the land and the annual cycles of seedtime and harvest.[{9}](#)

Interestingly, modern Wicca shares many similarities with the ancient fertility religions of Canaan, religions specifically condemned by God in the Bible.[{10}](#) For instance, the Wiccan Goddess is revered by some as the *Queen of Heaven*, by others as *Astarte*.[{11}](#) But in the Bible, the worship of Ishtar, the queen of heaven, and Astarte, or Ashtoreth, is repeatedly condemned, as is the worship of her consort, known sometimes as Baal, sometimes as Tammuz.[{12}](#) Thus in Judges 2:11-13 we read: "Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord . . . they provoked the Lord to anger . . . they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreth." But if the only true God rejected the ancient Canaanite religions and their practices, would His reaction to modern Wicca likely be any different?

The Watchers

"The Watchers is a concept common to most Wiccan Traditions, although they are viewed differently by the various systems within Wicca."[{13}](#) Raven Grimassi describes these "Watchers" as "an ancient race who have evolved beyond the need for physical form."[{14}](#) However, he is quick to add that, historically, the "Watchers" have been conceived in a

diversity of ways. For instance, in the early Stellar myths the Watchers were “gods who guarded the Heavens and the Earth.”[{15}](#) Later, he says, “the Greeks reduced them to the Gods of the four winds, and the Christians to principalities of the air.”[{16}](#)

The connection, observed by Grimassi, between the Wiccan concept of the Watchers and the Christian concept of angels may find some validation in the Bible. In Daniel 4:13-17, the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar relates a dream to Daniel. He tells him that during the dream a “watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven” and pronounced a judgment that is said to be “by the decree of the watchers . . . a command of the holy ones . . . that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind.” Most conservative commentators understand the “watchers” in this passage to be angels. One commentator writes, “The king is probably referring to the angels which were known to him through the Babylonian religion.”[{17}](#) But that these beings are indeed the biblical angels seems evident from the fact that they are acting as *messengers* of the Most High God.[{18}](#)

In light of this connection between the “watchers” and angels, it is interesting to note that “Rabbinic and Cabalistic lore” made a distinction between good and evil Watchers.[{19}](#) This distinction parallels the biblical distinction between good and evil angels, or angels and demons. Indeed, Grimassi notes, “In the *Secret Book of Enoch*, the Watchers . . . are listed as rebellious angels who followed Sataniel in a heavenly war.”[{20}](#) We find a similar incident recounted in Revelation 12:7-9, where we read of a heavenly war in which Michael and his angels cast Satan and his angels from heaven to earth.

With this in mind it is interesting to note that Richard Cavendish, in his book *The Powers of Evil*, “lists the Watchers as the Fallen Angels that magicians call forth in ceremonial magick.”[{21}](#) This remark is especially noteworthy when one considers Grimassi’s comments concerning “the relationship

that exists between a Wiccan and the Watchers.”[{22}](#) Grimassi points out that “every act of magick that a Wiccan performs is observed and noted by the Watchers.”[{23}](#) Furthermore, he says, “There is a definite link between the ‘powers’ of a Wiccan and their rapport with the Watchers.”[{24}](#) But since the God of the Bible clearly prohibits magic, is it likely that these “Watchers” should be thought of as good spirits (inasmuch as they oppose the ordinance of God)?[{25}](#)

The Art of Magick

Wiccans view magick as a genuine possibility because of humanity’s intrinsic connection both to Deity and a supernatural order. Raven Grimassi states: “The art of magick is one of creation. . . . The power to create from *thoughts* is linked to the divine spark within us. We create in accordance with the divine formula that created all things.”[{26}](#)

But how is this possible? Grimassi explains, “The astral plane is the link between the divine world and the physical. . . . Whatever manifests on the astral plane will eventually manifest on the physical plane.”[{27}](#) And human thought can manifest on the astral plane.[{28}](#) Thus, for one accomplished in the art of Wiccan magick, the power to secure a desired effect in the physical world is alleged to begin with the careful creation of a thought-form on the astral plane.[{29}](#) Grimassi continues: “Thought-forms begin to appear in the astral material, which then become vehicles for the spirits or deities that have been invoked (through which they will respond to the desire of the magickal intent).”[{30}](#) If done properly, “the magickal seeds planted in the astral plane” will eventually bear fruit on the physical plane.[{31}](#) This is the basic theory behind Wiccan magick. And one practitioner has boasted, “No matter what type of coven magic is used, it is usually effective.”[{32}](#)

Might there actually be some truth to this? Indeed, there might. The book of Exodus tells us that the Egyptian magicians

were able to duplicate, by means of “their secret arts,” the initial plagues God brought upon Egypt!{33} Furthermore, the text never hints that this was done by any means other than some genuine secret power. In light of this we might ask why God is so opposed to the practice of magic. After all, couldn't such power be used for good, as well as evil? But God specifically warned the Israelites: “There shall not be found among you anyone” who practices divination, witchcraft, sorcery, or spiritism.{34} Why is this?

Could it be that the “secret power” of magick is due, not to its various rituals, symbols and gestures, but rather to the supernatural intervention of spirit beings? In Acts 16 we read of a demon-possessed slave-girl described as “having a spirit of divination . . . who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling.”{35} This passage clearly ties the power of divination to demons. With this in mind, it's interesting to remember Grimassi's admission: “There is a definite link between the ‘powers’ of a Wiccan and their rapport with the Watchers.”{36} Wiccans view the Watchers as a race of highly evolved spiritual beings.{37} But these beings are linked with angels and demons in other religious literature (including the Bible).{38} Is it possible that God prohibits magic because He wants to protect people from involvement with demons?

The Summerland and Reincarnation

Like Christians, Wiccans do not believe that physical death is the end of personal existence. Nevertheless, in its details the Wiccan doctrine of the “afterlife” differs substantially from the biblical view. How so?

To begin, Wiccans do not accept the biblical doctrines of heaven and hell. Rather, they believe that after physical death, “Wiccans pass into a spirit world known as the Summerland . . . a metaphysical astral realm of meadows, lakes, and forests where it is always summer. It is a Pagan paradise filled with all the lovely creatures of ancient lore,

and the gods themselves dwell there.”{39} The Summerland is viewed as a place of rest and renewal for the soul before its rebirth into the physical world.{40}

The belief in the soul’s rebirth into the physical world, also known as reincarnation, is another way in which Wiccan doctrines differ from those of biblical Christianity. Though the doctrine of reincarnation is completely unbiblical, many Wiccans actually believe it is taught in the Bible. Raven Grimassi cites John 9:1-3 as evidence that even Jesus and His disciples believed in reincarnation!{41} In this passage Jesus’ disciples ask Him about a man born blind: “‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him.’” Grimassi comments: “Jesus does not denounce the question of this man’s existence prior to this birth, but explains that [his blindness] had nothing to do with his sins prior to his present life.”{42} But is this interpretation correct? Is Jesus really affirming that this man existed *prior* to his present life?

It’s important to understand both the disciples’ question, and Jesus’ response, from within the historical context of first century Judaism. “The Jewish theologians of that time gave two reasons for birth defects: *prenatal sin* (before birth, *but not* before conception) and *parental sin*.”{43} In other words, first century Jewish rabbis did not believe that birth defects resulted from bad karma in a previous incarnation! Rather, they thought such defects arose either from the sins of the parents being visited upon their children, or from the sin of the child while still in the mother’s womb.{44} Although Jesus denies that either of these causes was responsible for this man’s blindness, we must still bear in mind that His *disciples* were asking this question from within a first century Jewish context. We must also remember that elsewhere the New Testament explicitly affirms, “[I]t is appointed for men to

die once and after this comes judgment.”{45} Thus, far from affirming the Wiccan doctrine of reincarnation, the New Testament clearly denies it.

Is Wicca Another Way to God?

Scott Cunningham claimed, “All religions have one ideal at their core: to unite their followers with Deity. Wicca is no different.”{46} He also wrote, “Perhaps it’s not too strong to say that the highest form of human vanity is to assume that your religion is the only way to Deity.”{47} But is it really true that there are many ways to God, or is there only one?

Although it’s quite common in today’s pluralistic society to assume that all the enduring religious traditions of mankind are equally valid ways to God or Ultimate Reality, there are tremendous philosophical difficulties with this belief. Since we are here concerned with both Wicca and Christianity, let’s briefly compare some of the fundamental tenets of these two religions and see what we come up with.

Wiccans appear to believe in the essential divinity of human nature. Raven Grimassi writes, “[E]verything bears the ‘divine spark’ of its creator.”{48} He also claims, “Souls are like brain cells in the mind of the Divine Creator, individual entities and yet part of the whole.”{49} Thus, there doesn’t seem to be any clear distinction in Wicca between humanity and Deity. This explains why the Witch Starhawk could confidently declare, “there is nothing to be saved *from* . . . no God outside the world to be feared and obeyed.”{50}

Christianity, however, maintains a firm distinction between God and man. Man is created in God’s image, but he is neither God nor a part of God. Furthermore, although man bears God’s image, his nature has been corrupted by sin, which separates him from God. Man’s need, therefore, is to be saved from his sins and reconciled to God. This explains the significance of Christ for Christianity. As Peter put it, “Christ . . . died

for sins once for all . . . that He might bring us to God.”[{51}](#) Christians believe that God dealt fully and finally with man’s sin through the death and resurrection of His Son.[{52}](#) Thus, contrary to Wicca, Christianity teaches that there *is* something to be saved from and that there *is* a God outside the world to be both feared and obeyed.

Because of their differences, the law of non-contradiction makes it impossible for both of these religions to be true. It’s therefore interesting to note Charlotte Allen’s observation: “In all probability, not a single element of the Wiccan story is true. The evidence is overwhelming that Wicca is . . . a 1950s concoction . . . of an English civil servant and amateur anthropologist” named Gerald Gardner.[{53}](#) But surely such questionable historical origins cast doubt on the truth of Wiccan religious beliefs as well. Christianity, however, is firmly rooted in the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth, whose claim to be the *only* way to God was clearly vindicated when God “furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”[{54}](#)

Notes

1. Charlotte Allen, “The Scholars and the Goddess” *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 2001): 18.
2. Fritz Ridenour, *So What’s the Difference?* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2001), 209.
3. Raven Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries: Ancient Origins and Teachings* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2000), 33.
4. Scott Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1999), 76.
5. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 33.
6. *Ibid.*, 25.

7. Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today*, 73.
8. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 26.
9. Ibid., 88-89.
10. Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?*, 210. This is not to imply, of course, that Wicca itself is ancient. The antiquity of Wicca has been seriously challenged by modern scholarship.
11. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 25; Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today*, 72.
12. For instance, see Judges 2:11-17; 2 Kings 23:4-14; Jeremiah 44:15-23; Ezekiel 8:14-15. For documentation concerning the consort of Ashtoreth being Baal and/or Tammuz see J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, eds. *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1987), s.v. "Ashtoreth," 100-01; "Tammuz," 986. For documentation that Ishtar, the queen of heaven, was associated with Tammuz see Trent C. Butler, gen. ed. *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), s.v. "Ishtar," 721; "Tammuz," 1321.
13. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 99.
14. Ibid., 100.
15. Ibid., 101.
16. Ibid.
17. Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 103.
18. Compare Daniel 4:17 with 4:24.
19. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 102.
20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 103.

22. Ibid., 106.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid. This is not to imply that Wiccans explicitly worship Satan or demons (understood in the Christian sense). They are very careful to say they do not, and we should take them at their word. At the same time, is it legitimate to ask if one can be deceived by the devil without actually worshipping the devil? For while Wiccans may not worship the devil, the Bible seems to indicate that they have nonetheless been deceived by him. Wicca, for example, rejects the biblical doctrines of God, man, Christ, sin, salvation, etc. As a religion, therefore, Wicca helps prevent men and women from coming to a saving knowledge of God through faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible, however, declares that this is also one of the activities of Satan! It reveals that the devil "has blinded the minds of the unbelieving" to keep them from saving faith in Christ (see 2 Cor. 4:3-4). It is for this reason that Christians, while acknowledging that Wiccans do not worship the devil, nonetheless view the religion of Wicca as a means of Satanic deception since it keeps its followers from saving faith in Christ.

25. See Deuteronomy 18:9-13.

26. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 140.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 150.

29. Ibid., 140-41.

30. Ibid., 140.

31. Ibid., 159.

32. Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today*, 125.
33. See Exodus 7:11-12, 22; 8:6-7.
34. See Deuteronomy 18:9-13.
35. See Acts 16:16-18.
36. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 106.
37. Ibid., 100.
38. Ibid., 101-03.
39. Ibid., 30.
40. Ibid., 32.
41. Ibid., 113.
42. Ibid.
43. Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 175.
44. Ibid.
45. Hebrews 9:27.
46. Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today*, 77.
47. Ibid., 66.
48. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 26.
49. Ibid., 27.
50. Starhawk (Miriam Simos), *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 9, cited in Ridenour, *So What's the Difference*, 213.

51. 1 Peter 3:18.

52. See Romans 4:25.

53. Allen, "The Scholars and the Goddess," 19.

54. See John 14:6 and Acts 17:31.

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"You Have Many Inaccuracies in Your Article on Islam"

Dear Rick Rood,

I stumbled upon your ["What is Islam"](#) article and read it thoroughly. I would like to know how you got that information because it is inaccurate. I would just like to point them out to you so that you may correct them.

"He called on the many factions of the Arab peoples to unite under the worship of Allah, the chief god of the Arab pantheon of deities."

Correction: Allah is not the chief god of the Arabs pantheon of dieties. Allah means "God" in Arabic. You are confusing the reader by associating Allah with other Arab deities as for example Zeus is the chief god in the Romans.

"At this point we should discuss the current status of Islam. In doing so, it's important to realize that Islam is not a monolithic system."

Correction: Islam is a pure monotheistic religion. The message of Islam is that 'There is no God, but God.' How is it not? Please elaborate.

"The Koran mentions numerous names of Allah, and these names are found frequently on the lips of devout Muslims who believe them to have a nearly magical power."

Correction: Muslims do not believe that Allah's names hold magical powers. There are 99 names which is mentioned in the Quran (not Koran), for example: The Most Merciful, The Protector, The Creator, The All-Knowing, The Loving. These names identify the characteristics of God.

"Though Muhammed himself said that he was a sinner, nonetheless there are many Muslims throughout the world who appear to come close to worshipping him."

Correction: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) always recognized that he was a human being. He was a human, and he made mistakes just like the other prophets who are human beings. It is very judgmental for you to add that Muslims appear to come close worshipping him when that is not the case at all. Muslims only worship God, and only God.

"Those who conclude that Islam is a fatalistic religion have good reason for doing so."

Why is that?

"But it also contains many elements of prescribed activity that are of pagan origin."

What kinds? For example?

"A sixth pillar, that of jihad, is often added. (The term

means "exertion" or "struggle" in behalf of God.) Jihad is the means by which those who are outside the household of Islam are brought into its fold. Jihad may be by persuasion, or it may be by force or "holy war." The fact that any Muslim who dies in a holy war is assured his place in paradise provides strong incentive for participation!"

You got the part right about how the Jihad means "struggle," but you got the rest of it completely false. It is a struggle to attain nearness to God, by struggling to overcome your bad desires, and to stick to Islam under difficult circumstances, such as when facing persecution and other problems.

There are MANY other mistakes that you have written about Islam. Not to mention that it sounds very bigoted. Please fix your mistakes. Thanks!

Thanks for your letter. Rick Rood is no longer with Probe Ministries. However, I'm afraid that you may have misunderstood certain aspects of Rick's article. Please allow me to try to briefly clarify.

"He called on the many factions of the Arab peoples to unite under the worship of Allah, the chief god of the Arab pantheon of deities." Correction: Allah is not the chief god of the Arabs pantheon of dieties. Allah means "God" in Arabic. You are confusing the reader by associating Allah with other Arab deities as for example Zeus is the chief god in the Romans.

Any good history of the Arab peoples that documents the religious climate immediately preceding the time of Muhammad will confirm that there was indeed a pantheon of deities. Muhammad instituted monotheism in place of a prior Arabic polytheism.

"At this point we should discuss the current status of Islam.

In doing so, it's important to realize that Islam is not a monolithic system. " Correction: Islam is a pure monotheistic religion. The message of Islam is that 'There is no God, but God.'" How is it not? Please elaborate.

Mr. Rood uses the term "monolithic" – not "monotheistic." I believe that you simply misread him at this point. Islam is certainly monotheistic. He documents what he means by it not being monolithic in his article.

"The Koran mentions numerous names of Allah, and these names are found frequently on the lips of devout Muslims who believe them to have a nearly magical power." Correction: Muslims do not believe that Allah's names hold magical powers. There are 99 names which is mentioned in the Quran (not Koran), for example: The Most Merciful, The Protector, The Creator, The All-Knowing, The Loving. These names identify the characteristics of God.

Your third point is well-taken, provided we are speaking of theologically educated Muslims. However, many Muslims hold to what some scholars call "folk Islam". This sort of Islam, often influenced by animism, does often regard these names as having magical power. Similar aberrant beliefs can be found in Judaism, Christianity, and most other world religions. Finally, sometimes Sufi mysticism can tend in this direction as well.

"Though Muhammed himself said that he was a sinner, nonetheless there are many Muslims throughout the world who appear to come close to worshipping him." Correction: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) always recognized that he was a human being. He was a human, and he made mistakes just like the other prophets who are human beings. It is very judgmental for you to add that Muslims appear to come close worshipping him when that is not the case at all. Muslims only worship God, and only God.

Again, your point is well-taken, provided we are speaking of theologically educated Muslims. However, as I mentioned above, some Muslims would come awfully close to worshiping Muhammad, just as some Roman Catholics come awfully close to worshiping the virgin Mary, even though church doctrine does not include Mary worship. I'm not saying this is what orthodox Islam teaches, it's simply what sometimes happens in practice.

"Those who conclude that Islam is a fatalistic religion have good reason for doing so." Why is that?

Do you not believe that all things are dictated by the sovereign will of Allah? Does anything happen that is not willed by God? If you reject this doctrine, I think you would be taking a minority view within Islam.

"But it also contains many elements of prescribed activity that are of pagan origin." What kinds? For example?

Casting stones at a stone pillar representing Satan. This was done by Arab pagans prior to the time of Muhammad.

"A sixth pillar, that of jihad, is often added. (The term means "exertion" or "struggle" in behalf of God.) Jihad is the means by which those who are outside the household of Islam are brought into its fold. Jihad may be by persuasion, or it may be by force or "holy war." The fact that any Muslim who dies in a holy war is assured his place in paradise provides strong incentive for participation!" You got the part right about how the Jihad means "struggle," but you got the rest of it completely false. It is a struggle to attain nearness to God, by struggling to overcome your bad desires, and to stick to Islam under difficult circumstances, such as when facing persecution and other problems.

As for Jihad, it has historically been understood by most Muslims (and still is today) as Holy War. It can be

interpreted, as you say, to mean striving in the cause of Allah to live a pure and righteous life. But many passages in the Quran resist this interpretation (e.g. Suras 4:74-75; 9:5, 14, 29; 47:4; 61:4; etc.).

The New Encyclopedia of Islam (Altamira Press, rev. ed. 2001) documents many of these points.

Shalom,

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