“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 worshiping 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 monthestic 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 worshiping 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,

Michael Gleghorn

"Is It OK for a Christian to Train in Martial Arts?"

I want to ask a question about a Christian's involvement with martial arts and how it relates to a Christian who has a career in law enforcement.

Christians are warned not to be involved with martial arts because they lead people into conversion of eastern religions. But many who train as police or as a security guard etc. may find it handy or essential and may have to train in martial arts whether they want to or not.

What should a Christian do who may be in this situation?

Thanks so much for your question. Interestingly, Pat Zukeran,one of my colleagues here at Probe trains in martial arts! He has written an article on this topic entitled Martial Arts. We discussed this question together and came to a similar conclusion.

In our opinion, a distinction should be made between the physical training and exercise required in martial arts and the philosophical and religious ideas which may sometimes be associated with such training.

Paul does warn believers in Colossians 2:8, "See to it that no

one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. Thus, one must be wary of some of the eastern philosophical and religious concepts which might be promoted in the martial arts. It is not wrong to know and understand these concepts, but you do not want to be taken captive and led away from Christ by them."

On the other hand, the sort of physical training required in the martial arts is doubtless a very good thing. It not only leads to such benefits as a stronger body, greater flexibility, faster reflexes, and greater dexterity, it also leads to increased confidence in one's ability to handle potentially dangerous situations. And all of these benefits can be of enormous value to those involved in law enforcement and security work. Indeed, such training may help save lives—not only of those who receive it, but also of those they are attempting to apprehend.

Thus, my own view (and the view of my colleague) is this. There is nothing wrong with a Christian learning martial arts, especially for purposes of self-defense and increased effectiveness in law enforcement. As long as one is careful to separate the non-Christian philosophical and religious ideas from the actual physical training—rejecting the false ideas, but embracing the benefits of the physical training—there does not seem to be any harm in a Christian learning martial arts.

I hope this helps and I wish you all the best,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

Yoga and Christianity: Are They Compatible? – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

Michael Gleghorn takes a hard look at yoga to determine if the practice is compatible with Christian living. After examining the spiritual underpinnings of yoga and the relationship of the physical aspects to the spiritual teaching, he concludes that Christians seeking physical exercise would be wise to consider techniques other than yoga.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

What is Yoga?

What is yoga? For many in the West, yoga is simply a system of physical exercise, a means of strengthening the body, improving flexibility, and even healing or preventing a variety of bodily ailments. But if we inquire into the history and philosophy of yoga we discover that "much more than a system of physical exercise for health, Yoga is . . . [an] ancient path to spiritual growth." It is a path enshrined in much of the sacred literature of India.{1} Thus, if we truly want a better understanding of yoga, we must dig beneath the surface and examine the historical roots of the subject.

Before we begin digging, however, we must first understand what the term "yoga" actually means. "According to tradition, 'yoga' means 'union,' the union…of the finite 'jiva' (transitory self) with the infinite'…Brahman' (eternal Self)."{2} "Brahman" is a term often used for the Hindu concept of "God," or Ultimate Reality. It is an impersonal, divine substance that "pervades, envelops, and underlies everything."{3} With this in mind, let's briefly look at three key texts that will help us chart the origin and development

of yoga within India.

It appears that one can trace both the practice and goal of yoga all the way back to the *Upanishads*, probably written between 1000-500 B.C.{4} One *Upanishad* tells us: "Unite the light within you with the light of Brahman."{5} Clearly, then, the goal of yoga (i.e. union with Brahman) is at least as old as the *Upanishads.*

In addition, the word "yoga" often appears in the *Bhagavad Gita,* a classic Hindu text possibly written as early as the fifth century B.C.{6} In chapter 6, Krishna declares: "Thus joy supreme comes to the Yogi . . . who is one with Brahman, with God."{7}

Finally, in about A.D. 150, the yogi Patanjali systematized yoga into eight distinct "limbs" in his *Yoga Sutras*. These eight limbs are like a staircase, supposedly leading the yogi from ignorance to enlightenment. In order, the eight limbs are: *yama* (self-control), *niyama* (religious observances), *asana* (postures), *pranayama* (breathing exercises), *pratyahara* (sense control), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (deep contemplation), and *samadhi* (enlightenment).{8} It's interesting to note that postures and breathing exercises, often considered to be the whole of yoga in the West, are steps three and four along Patanjali's "royal" road to union with Brahman.

We see that yoga is an ancient spiritual discipline deeply rooted in the religion of Hinduism. This being so, we may honestly wonder whether it's really wise for a Christian to be involved in yoga practice. Next, we'll continue our discussion by examining some of the important doctrinal differences between yoga and Christianity.

Yoga and Christianity: What are the

Differences?

Many people today (including some Christians) are taking up yoga practice. We'll later consider whether yoga philosophy can truly be separated from yoga practice, but we must first establish that there are crucial doctrinal differences between yoga and Christianity. Let's briefly look at just a few of these.

First, yoga and Christianity have very different concepts of God. As previously stated, the goal of yoga is to experience union with "God." But what do yogis mean when they speak of "God," or Brahman? Exactly what are we being encouraged to "unite" with? Most yogis conceive of "God" as an impersonal, spiritual substance, coextensive with all of reality. This doctrine is called pantheism, the view that everything is "God." It differs markedly from the theism of biblical Christianity. In the Bible, God reveals Himself as the personal Creator of the universe. God is the Creator; the universe, His creation. The Bible maintains a careful distinction between the two.{9}

A second difference between yoga and Christianity concerns their views of man. Since yoga philosophy teaches that everything is "God," it necessarily follows that man, too, is "God." Christianity, however, makes a clear distinction between God and man. God is the Creator; man is one of His creatures. Of course man is certainly unique, for unlike the animals he was created in the image of God.{10} Nevertheless, Christianity clearly differs from yoga in its unqualified insistence that God and man are distinct.

Finally, let's briefly consider how yoga and Christianity differently conceive man's fundamental problem, as well as its solution. Yoga conceives man's problem primarily in terms of ignorance; man simply doesn't realize that he is "God." The solution is enlightenment, an experience of union with "God." This solution (which is the goal of yoga) can only be reached

through much personal striving and effort. Christianity, however, sees man's primary problem as sin, a failure to conform to both the character and standards of a morally perfect God. Man is thus alienated from God and in need of reconciliation. The solution is Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."{11} Through Jesus' death on the cross, God reconciled the world to Himself.{12} He now calls men to freely receive all the benefits of His salvation through faith in Christ alone. Unlike yoga, Christianity views salvation as a free gift. It can only be received; it can never be earned.

Clearly, Christianity and yoga are mutually exclusive viewpoints. But is every kind of yoga the same? Isn't there at least one that's exclusively concerned with physical health and exercise? Next, we'll take a closer look at hatha yoga, the one most often believed to be purely physical in nature.

What Is Hatha Yoga?

Here we've learned that yoga is an ancient spiritual discipline rooted in a belief system that is utterly incompatible with Christianity. But is this true of *all* yoga? Isn't *hatha* yoga simply concerned with physical development and good health?

Hatha yoga is primarily concerned with two things: *asana* (physical postures) and *pranayama* (breathing exercises). But it's important to realize that both asana and pranayama also play a significant role in Patanjali's *raja* (or "royal") yoga. In the traditional eight "limbs" of Patanjali's system, asana and pranayama are limbs three and four. What then is the relationship of hatha to raja yoga?

Former yoga practitioner Dave Fetcho states that yoga postures "evolved as an integral part of Raja . . . Yoga."{13} He points out that the author of the famous handbook, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika,* "presents Hatha . . . solely and exclusively

for the attainment of Raja Yoga."{14} He also cites a French yoga scholar who claims, "the sole purpose of . . . Hatha Yoga is to suppress physical obstacles on the . . . Royal path of Raja Yoga and Hatha Yoga is therefore called 'the ladder to Raja Yoga.'"{15} Fetcho concurs, noting that the physical postures are "specifically designed to manipulate consciousness…into Raja Yoga's consummate experience of *samadhi:* undifferentiated union with the primal essence of consciousness."{16} These statements should make it quite clear that hatha, or physical, yoga has historically been viewed simply as a means of aiding the yogi in attaining enlightenment, the final limb of raja yoga.

This is further confirmed by looking at Iyengar yoga, possibly the most popular form of hatha yoga in the U.S. The Web site for the Iyengar Yoga Institute of San Francisco states: "BKS Iyengar studies and teaches yoga as unfolded in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjaili [sic] and the Hatha Yoga Pradipika among other classical texts. Thus Asana, or postures, are taught as one of the eight limbs . . . of yoga defined by Patanjali."{17} In fact, the ultimate goal of Iyengar hatha yoga is precisely the same as that of Patanjali's raja yoga.{18} Both aim to experience union with "God," Brahman, or universal consciousness.

If all these things are so, it seems increasingly apparent that hatha yoga may ultimately involve its practitioners in much more than physical exercise. Although it may not be obvious at first, the ultimate goal of hatha is the same as every other form of yoga: union of the self with an impersonal, universal consciousness. We must remember that the Bible never exhorts Christians to seek such an experience. If anything, it warns us of the potential dangers in doing so. Next, we'll consider whether yoga practice might, in fact, be dangerous—and why.

Can Yoga be Harmful?

Despite its touted health benefits, there are numerous warnings in authoritative yoga literature which caution that yoga can be physically, mentally, and spiritually harmful if not practiced correctly.

For instance, Swami Prabhavananda warns of the potentially dangerous physical effects that might result from yoga breathing exercises: “Unless properly done, there is a good chance of injuring the brain. And those who practice such breathing without proper supervision can suffer a disease which no known science or doctor can cure.”{19}

In addition, many yogis warn that yoga practice can endanger one’s sanity. In describing the awakening of “kundalini” (coiled serpent power) Gopi Krishna records his own experience as follows: “It was variable for many years, painful, obsessive…I have passed through almost all the stages of…mediumistic, psychotic, and other types of mind; for some time I was hovering between sanity and insanity.”{20}

Finally, however, from a Christian perspective it seems that yoga could also be spiritually harmful. To understand why, let’s return to the experience of “kundalini.” Yoga scholar Hans Rieker declares, “Kundalini [is] the mainstay of all yoga practices.”{21} But what exactly is kundalini and why is it so central to yoga practice?

Swami Vivekananda summarizes the kundalini experience as follows: “When awakened through the practice of spiritual disciplines, it rises through the spinal column, passes through the various centres, and at last reaches the brain, whereupon the yogi experiences samadhi, or total absorption in the Godhead.”{22} And researcher John White takes the importance of this experience even further declaring: “Although the word kundalini comes from the yogic tradition, nearly all the world’s major religions, spiritual paths, and

genuine occult traditions see something akin to the kundalini experience as having significance in "divinizing" a person. The word itself may not appear…but the concept is there…as a key to attaining godlike stature."{23}

Reading such descriptions of the kundalini, or coiled serpent power, the Christian can almost hear the hiss of that "serpent of old…who deceives the whole world."{24}In Eden, he flattered our first parents by telling them: "You will be like God."{25} And though Christianity and yoga have very different conceptions of God, isn't this essentially what yoga promises?

Swami Ajaya once said, "The main teaching of Yoga is that man's true nature is divine."{26} Obviously this is not the Christian view of man. But if the goal of yoga is to realize one's essential divinity through union with "God," then shouldn't the Christian view the practice that leads to this realization as potentially spiritually harmful? Next, we'll conclude our discussion by asking whether it's really possible to separate yoga philosophy from yoga practice.

Can Philosophy and Practice be Separated?

We've seen that yoga is an ancient spiritual discipline whose central doctrines are utterly incompatible with those of Christianity. Even hatha yoga, often considered to be exclusively concerned with physical development, is best understood as merely a means of helping the yogi reach the goal of samadhi, or union with "God." Furthermore, we've seen that all yoga, including hatha, has the potential to be physically, mentally, and spiritually harmful.

In light of such evidence, it may appear that this question—"Can yoga philosophy be separated from yoga practice?"—has already been answered in the negative. And this is certainly the view of many yoga scholars. Dave Fetcho, formerly of the Ananda Marga Yoga Society, has written, "Physical yoga, according to its classical definitions, is

inheritably and functionally incapable of being separated from Eastern religious metaphysics."{27} What's more, yoga authorities Feuerstein and Miller, in discussing yoga postures (asana) and breathing exercises (pranayama), indicate that such practices are more than just another form of physical exercise; indeed, they "are *psychosomatic* exercises."{28} Does this mean that separating theory from practice is simply impossible with yoga?

If one carefully looks through an introductory text on hatha yoga,{29} one will see many different postures illustrated. A number of these may be similar, if not identical, to exercises and stretches one is already doing. Indeed, if one is engaged in a regular stretching program, this is quite probable. This raises an important question: Suppose that such beginning level yoga postures are done in a context completely free of yogic philosophy. In such a case as this, doesn't honesty compel us to acknowledge at least the *possibility* of separating theory from practice?

While I hate to disagree with scholars who know far more about the subject than I do, this distinction does seem valid to me. However, let me quickly add that I see this distinction as legitimate *only* at the very beginning of such practices, and *only* with regard to the postures. The breathing exercises, for various reasons, remain problematic.{30} But this distinction raises yet another question, for how many people begin an exercise program intending never to move beyond the most basic level? And since by the very nature of yoga practice, such a distinction could *only* be valid at the very earliest of stages, why would a Christian ever want to begin this process? It seems to me that if someone wants an exercise program with physical benefits similar to yoga, but without all the negative spiritual baggage, they should consider low-impact or water aerobics, water ballet, or simple stretching.{31} These programs can be just as beneficial for the body, without potentially endangering the soul. In my opinion, then,

Christians would be better off to never begin yoga practice.

[Note from the webmistress: Also see Why a Christian Alternative to Yoga? on the PraiseMoves.com website for an excellent treatment of this subject from a former yoga instructor who explains why the two are incompatible.]

Notes

1. Raphael, *Essence and Purpose of Yoga: The Initiatory Pathways to the Transcendent* (Massachusetts: Element Books, Inc., 1996), back cover.
2. Brad Scott, "Exercise or Religious Practice? Yoga: What the Teacher Never Taught You in That Hatha Yoga Class" in *The Watchman Expositor* (Vol. 18, No. 2, 2001): 5.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 6.
5. Ibid., cited in Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, *The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal* (New York: New American Library, 1957), 120ff.
6. *Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Juan Mascaro (New York: Penguin Books, 1962), back cover.
7. Ibid., 71.
8. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 601.
9. See Romans 1:18-25.
10. See Genesis 1:26.
11. John 1:29.
12. See 2 Corinthians 5:19.
13. Dave Fetcho, "Yoga," (Berkeley, CA: Spiritual Counterfeits Project, 1978), cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 602.
14. Ibid., 603.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 602.
17. See "Source and Context: Patanjali and Ashtanga Yoga" at http://www.iyisf.org/. This quotation was obtained from the site on March 1, 2002.

18. Ibid.
19. Swami Prabhavananda, *Yoga and Mysticism* (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1972), 18, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 604.
20. Gopi Krishna, *The Awakening of Kundalini* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), 124, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 608.
21. Hans Ulrich Rieker, *The Yoga of Light: Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (New York: Seabury Press, 1971), 101, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 606.
22. Swami Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1970), 16, cited in Scott, "Exercise or Religious Practice? Yoga: What the Teacher Never Taught You in That Hatha Yoga Class," 5.
23. John White, ed., *Kundalini Evolution and Enlightenment* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1979), 17, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 606.
24. See Revelation 12:9.
25. See Genesis 3:5.
26. Swami Rama, *Lectures on Yoga: Practical Lessons on Yoga* (Glenview, IL: Himalayan International Institute of Yoga, Science and Philosophy, 1976, rev.), vi, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs,* 596.
27. Dave Fetcho, "Yoga," 2, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 600.
28. George Feuerstein and Jeanine Miller, *Yoga and Beyond: Essays in Indian Philosophy* (New York: Schocken, 1972), 27-28, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 600.
29. For example, Richard Hittleman, *Introduction to Yoga* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969)
30. For instance, the breathing exercises can by physically dangerous. Sri Chinmoy wrote, "To practice pranayama without real guidance is very dangerous. I know of three persons whohave died from it…" See *Great Masters and the Cosmic Gods* (Jamaica, NY: Agni Press, 1977), 8, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs,* 604. In addition,

however, from a Christian perspective such exercises may also be mentally and spiritually dangerous (at least potentially) because they can induce altered states of consciousness that may make one more vulnerable to demonic deception. Indeed, psychologist Ernest L. Rossi has written of pranayama: "The manual manipulation of the nasal cycle during meditation (dhyana) is the most thoroughly documented of techniques for altering consciousness." See Benjamin B. Wolman and Montague Ullman, eds., *Handbook of States of Consciousness* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1986), 113, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs,* 595.
31. Of course such programs will need to be tailored to each individual's needs and goals. It's always a good idea to talk to your doctor before beginning any new exercise program.

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The Worldview of Edgar Cayce — An Evaluation of His Teachings from a Biblical Perspective

The Edgar Cayce Readings

By all accounts Edgar Cayce was truly a remarkable man. Beginning in 1901 and continuing until his death in 1945 he gave thousands of psychic readings. Broadly speaking, these readings were of two types: health readings and life readings. The health readings consisted of a psychic diagnosis of a patient's physical ailments and a prescription for how these

ailments should be treated. The life readings consisted of answers to all sorts of personal, religious, and philosophical questions. One rather interesting aspect of these readings is the manner in which they were given: Cayce would lie down on the couch and put himself into a trance state resembling sleep. It was this manner of giving readings that led one of his biographers, Jess Stearn, to refer to Cayce as "The Sleeping Prophet."{1}

Just how accurate were these readings? Although it is impossible to verify everything Cayce said, some contend that his accuracy rate was over ninety percent!{2} But "with all his vaunted powers," writes Stearn, "Cayce was a humble man, religious, God-fearing, who read the Bible every day of his life."{3} Indeed, Cayce read through the entire Bible every year and regularly taught Sunday school throughout his life. It is probably for reasons such as these that many people believe that the worldview of the readings is generally consistent with biblical Christianity. But is this really so? How well does the worldview of the Edgar Cayce readings compare with that of the Bible?

Herbert Puryear writes, "The content of . . . the Edgar Cayce readings is . . . always Christ-centered, supporting the ultimate importance of the unique work of Jesus of Nazareth."{4} But as I hope to demonstrate in this article, such a claim can only be true by redefining the person and work of Jesus Christ to mean something quite different from what the Bible teaches.

For instance Thomas Sugrue, Cayce's earliest biographer and long-time friend, begins his chapter on the philosophy of the readings by stating, "The system of metaphysical thought which emerges from the readings of Edgar Cayce is a Christianized version of the mystery religions of ancient Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, India, and Greece."{5} The worldview of the readings actually has much more in common with New Age metaphysics and occult philosophy than it does with biblical Christianity.

Although I have little doubt that, as a person, Cayce was kind and humble and motivated by a sincere desire to help his fellow man, it obviously does not follow that the worldview revealed in the readings is therefore true. And while I certainly acknowledge that Cayce regularly read and taught the Bible, it by no means follows that the philosophy of the readings is therefore biblical.

The Nature of God

According to Dr. Herbert Puryear, "More consequences for thought and action follow from the affirmation or denial of God than from answering any other fundamental question."{6} It's difficult to overestimate the importance of this observation. Equally important, however, for those affirming the existence of God, is the kind of God they affirm to exist.

There can be no doubt that God is of primary importance in the Edgar Cayce readings. The readings certainly affirm the existence of God, an affirmation that they obviously share with biblical Christianity. This being said, however, there is a marked difference in what each source affirms about the nature of God.

Dr. Puryear writes, "The clearly articulated philosophy of the Edgar Cayce readings is a thoroughgoing monism."{7} The doctrine of monism claims that all reality is of the same essence. In other words, "All is one." Indeed, in the introduction to his book Dr. Puryear claims that "the oneness of all force" is the "first premise of the Edgar Cayce readings."

What effect does this first premise have on the view of God presented in the readings? Dr. Puryear writes, "With the premise of the oneness of all force we affirm that *God is*, that He is *all that is*, and *all that is*, is God."{8} This view is known as pantheism. It comes from two Greek words: *pan*, meaning "all" or "every," and *theos*, meaning "God." In other

words pantheism, like the Edgar Cayce readings, teaches that everything is God – a view substantially at odds with the biblical doctrine of God. Let's look, then, at what the Bible *does* say about God.

Let's first acknowledge that the Bible, like the Edgar Cayce readings, does indeed affirm that God is one. Moses wrote, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" (Deut. 6:4) But the biblical affirmation means something very different from the doctrine of pantheism espoused in the Cayce readings. The Bible is affirming that there is only one Lord God. It is not teaching that "All is One," nor that the name we should give to this all-inclusive Oneness is "God." The biblical view that the Lord is one is sometimes referred to as monotheism. It holds that there is only one God – *not many*, as Israel's polytheistic neighbors believed. It also holds that God, as the Creator of all that exists (other than Himself), is not to be identified with any created thing.{9} This view contrasts with the doctrine of pantheism, which clearly blurs the distinction between Creator and creation.

Since the view of God presented in the Edgar Cayce readings is basically pantheistic,{10} it is also, by virtue of this fact, clearly unbiblical. Next we'll see how this effects the readings' presentations of both Christ and men.

Christ and Men

How did the view of a pantheistic God influence Cayce's doctrines of Christ and men?

Thomas Sugrue, in summarizing the philosophy of the readings, says that in the beginning God "projected from Himself the cosmos and souls."{11} Thus, according to this view, everything that exists (including man) is somehow part of God. Or as Cayce put it in one of his readings: "Each person is a corpuscle in the body of that force called God."{12}

But if the readings affirm the divinity of man, what becomes of the Christian belief in the uniqueness of Jesus? Dr. Puryear declares, "In Jesus we are told that God became incarnate. If we could only see clearly that Jesus' claim for divinity is a claim for the divinity of us all, we would understand that His relationship to God is a pattern which all of us may and one day must attain."{13} Thus, contrary to the Bible, the readings do not understand Jesus' uniqueness in terms of His being God's one and only Son.{14} In fact, the readings actually deny that there is any essential difference between Jesus and the rest of humanity. All souls – yours, mine, and Christ's – were projected from God, and all share the same divine essence. The Christ soul was simply the first to complete its earthly experiences and return to God.{15} But concerned with the plight of its brother souls, the Christ soul decided to return and help us. According to Sugrue, the Christ soul incarnated as Enoch, Melchizedek, Joseph, Joshua, Jeshua, and finally – Jesus!{16} As Jesus, He triumphed over death and the body and once again returned to God, becoming "the pattern we are to follow."{17}

How do such teachings square with the Bible? Not very well, I'm afraid. The Bible maintains a careful distinction between God and man. God is the Creator; man is His creature. God created man in His image (Gen. 1:27); He did not project him from His essence. The Bible also maintains a clear distinction between Jesus and other men. Jesus is the completely unique God-man; no other man is like Him. He was both fully divine and fully human (John 1:1, 14). We are merely human. He was sinless (Heb. 4:15); we are sinful (Rom. 3:23). He claimed to have come not merely to be our example, but "to save that which was lost" (Matt. 18:11) and "to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). We, of course, are the lost sinners He came to ransom and to save (Rom. 5:6-11). Thus it's clear, even from this brief summary, that the readings' doctrines of Christ and men differ substantially from those of the Bible.

Problems and Solutions

The Bible identifies man's primary problem as sin, a state of moral corruption that has infected our very nature. It is our sinful nature (and the sinful acts arising from it) that is the source of so many of our problems. The Bible warns us that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 3:23). Death is understood primarily as separation. Physical death is the spirit's separation from the body (Jas. 2:26); spiritual death is a person's separation from God (Eph. 2:1-7). All men are conceived in a state of spiritual death, alienated from their Creator and in need of reconciliation with Him (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12; 2 Cor. 5:20).

The Bible presents Jesus as the solution to our problem. It tells us that He died for our sins and, as Divine confirmation of this fact, that He was raised for our justification.{18} It assures us that *whoever* believes in Jesus will receive God's forgiveness and the free gift of eternal life!{19}

The Edgar Cayce readings offer a very different perspective on man's fundamental problem and how it should be solved. Before exploring this perspective, however, it's helpful to remember that the doctrine of God presented in the readings is essentially pantheistic: God is *everything* and *everything* is God.{20} We've already shown that this view is substantially different from that of the Bible. And as Douglas Groothuis observes: "Differing descriptions of ultimate reality lead to differing descriptions of the human problem and to differing prescriptions for its solution."{21} Let's now see how the different descriptions of God in both the Bible and the readings contribute to their different perspectives on man's problem and its solution.

Having declared that God "projected from Himself the cosmos and souls,"{22} Thomas Sugrue goes on to observe: "At first there was little difference between the consciousness of the new individual and its consciousness of identity with

God."{23} Over time, however, there was a "gradual weakening of the link between the two states of consciousness."{24} Eventually, "The individual became more concerned with . . . his own creations than God's. This was the fall in spirit . . ."{25}

According to Dr. Puryear, these unfortunate souls "were cutoff from an awareness of their oneness with the whole."{26} And while the full explanation is more involved, the readings seem to ultimately identify this ignorance of our oneness with God as our fundamental problem.{27} Of course, if this is so, the solution is rather obvious: we must remember and reaffirm this inherent oneness. Dr. Puryear claims that it is "God's quest" to bring us back into a remembrance of our divine heritage "and into full accord with Him."{28}

Our summary reveals that while the readings' perspective on man's problem and its solution is unique, it more strongly resembles the viewpoint of non-dualistic Hinduism than biblical Christianity. It is important that Christians be aware of these differences.

Death and Beyond

One of the greatest human mysteries concerns the experience of death and what (if anything) happens afterward. The book of Hebrews declares, "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Most biblical scholars agree that this verse leaves no room for the doctrine of reincarnation – a doctrine explicitly affirmed in the Edgar Cayce readings. But if this is so, then how did Cayce conclude "that an acceptance of reincarnation in no way went against Holy Writ"?{29}

When Cayce gave his first "life reading" for Arthur Lammers, he spoke of reincarnation as a fact.{30} On waking from his trance and being told what he had said, Cayce was shocked. He even considered that the Devil might be trying to trick

him.{31} But after thinking the matter over, Cayce eventually concluded that even Jesus had taught about reincarnation!{32}

In Matthew's Gospel, immediately after the appearance of Moses and Elijah to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, His disciples ask, "Why . . . do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus answers: "Elijah has come already, and they did not know him." But notice how the passage concludes: "Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist" (Matt. 17:10-13). Reflecting on this passage, Cayce wondered how the disciples could draw such a conclusion. Had they understood John to be the reincarnation of Elijah?{33} And why did they draw this inference so quickly? Had Jesus already taught them "the laws of reincarnation?"{34}

There are several difficulties with this position. First, the theological context of first century Judaism was decidedly *theistic* – not *pantheistic*.{35} We should thus be very careful before concluding that Jesus taught His disciples about reincarnation. His statement probably meant no more than that John had come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" – just as the angel Gabriel had said He would.{36} Second, Jesus made His remarks *after* Elijah's appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration. But "since John had already . . . died by then, and since Elijah still had the same name and self-consciousness, Elijah had obviously not been reincarnated as John . . ."{37} If he had, then we should have read about Moses and *John* appearing to Jesus – not Moses and *Elijah*! "Third, Elijah does not fit the reincarnation model, for he did not die."{38} The Bible tells us that he was taken up into heaven while still alive!{39} And finally, such an interpretation would clearly contradict the passage in Hebrews cited earlier. Thus, I think we can safely conclude that Jesus did *not* teach the doctrine of reincarnation.

We've seen that while Edgar Cayce was a kind and humble man, the worldview of his readings is "world's apart" from that of the Bible. Christians must carefully avoid being taken captive

by this philosophy.{40}

Notes

1. Jess Stearn, *Edgar Cayce: The Sleeping Prophet* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968).
2. Thomas Sugrue, *There is a River: The Story of Edgar Cayce,* rev. ed. (Virginia: A.R.E. Press, 1994), back cover.
3. Stearn, *Edgar Cayce,* 8.
4. Herbert B. Puryear, *The Edgar Cayce Primer* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 197.
5. Sugrue, *There is a River*, 305.
6. Puryear, *The Edgar Cayce Primer*, 229.
7. Ibid., 209.
8. Ibid., 209.
9. See, for example, Exodus 20:1-6 and Romans 1:18-25.
10. A rather unique feature of the particular version of pantheism presented in the Cayce readings is that "God" is viewed as, in some sense, personal. Dr. Puryear, in a discussion on meditation, writes, "The godhead we seek is a personal one . . ." (*The Edgar Cayce Primer,* 146). This certainly distinguishes the pantheism of the readings from that of most New Age literature (which tends to conceive of "God" as impersonal, rather than personal). Nevertheless, the view of God presented in the Edgar Cayce readings is still pantheistic and, therefore, unbiblical.
11. Sugrue, *There is a River,* 307.
12. Cited in Sugrue, *There is a River,* 320.
13. Puryear, *The Edgar Cayce Primer*, 221.
14. This, according to New Testament scholar D.A. Carson, is the real meaning of John 3:16. See Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 161.
15. Sugrue, *There is a River,* 314.
16. Ibid., 315-16.
17. Ibid., 316.
18. See 1 Corinthians 15:3 and Romans 1:4; 4:25.
19. See John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Colossians 1:14.
20. Puryear, *The Edgar Cayce Primer,* 209.
21. Douglas Groothuis, *Are All Religions One?* (Downers Grove, Illinois:

InterVarsity Press, 1996), 24.

22. Sugrue, *There is a River,* 307.

23. Ibid., 309.

24. Ibid., 310.

25. Ibid.

26. Puryear, *The Edgar Cayce Primer,* 213.

27. This seems evident from the fact that, before we can take the next step (i.e. living the Great Commandment) we must first recognize and reaffirm our oneness with the whole. In other words, before we can tackle our other problems, we must first overcome our primary problem: ignorance of our oneness with God. The following remarks from Dr. Puryear help make this clear:

> *If we get the sense of such a Reality and affirm God, the oneness of all force, then we may take the next step and address that which the readings evaluate as the ultimate agenda for mankind: the living of the great commandment. We are to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul, and our neighbor as ourselves. This Edgar Cayce represented as the ideal for all mankind and the answer to all the problems of mankind . . . A major hindrance and barrier to loving God and others lies in the inadequate understanding we have of ourselves, of our basic spiritual nature, of the spiritual nature of others . . . We must come to understand fully that we are spiritual beings and that all of us are children of God (Ibid., 229-30).*

Notice that it's only after we affirm this pantheistic notion of God that we may take the next step of living the Great Commandment (the solution to all our other problems). Thus, if we can first remember and reaffirm our oneness with God, we can then begin to recognize that, "As children of God, love is . . . the very nature of our being" (Ibid., 231). Armed with this knowledge, we can begin fulfilling the Great Commandment – and watch our problems disappear!

Of course, any Christian would certainly agree that fulfilling the Great Commandment is a worthy ideal for the human race. But there remains a serious problem. In the readings, both God and my neighbor have been redefined. They are supposed to be understood from within a pantheistic worldview. And, as I've already noted previously, this is quite different from a biblical worldview. Thus, what a Christian theist (on the one hand) and a pantheist (on the other) understand by fulfilling the Great Commandment is something very different indeed!

28. Puryear, *The Edgar Cayce Primer,* 213
29. Noel Langley,*Edgar Cayce on Reincarnation,* ed. Hugh Lynn Cayce (New York: Paperback Library, 1971), 176.
30. Sugrue, *There is a River*, 202.
31. Ibid., 210.
32. Ibid., 220.
33. Ibid., 222.
34. Langley,*Edgar Cayce on Reincarnation,* 173.
35. Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 106
36. Ibid. See also Luke 1:17.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. See 2 Kings 2:11. See Colossians 2:8.

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See Also:

• **Edgar Cayce: The Sleeping (False) Prophet***Probe Answers Our E-Mail:*

• You're a Christian Fundamentalist Narrow Thinker

• How Dare You Judge Edgar Cayce!

• You Can't Say Edgar Cayce was a Failure as a Prophet!

• Family Members are into Freemasonry and Edgar Cayce!

“Is Hypnosis OK or a Problem?”

I was told by a man who is a new Christian that he quit smoking this past fall through hypnosis. I know that hypnosis is not a good thing, but could you tell me a little more about it so that I can know how to answer in the future?

Although hypnosis may be useful in some situations, there are a number of potential dangers as well. In what follows, I have simply cut and pasted from a teaching outline on hypnosis. The outline comes from a chapter on “Hypnosis and Hypnotic Regression” in John Weldon and John Ankerberg’s book *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs.* It’s important to realize that Weldon and Ankerberg are looking at hypnosis primarily as it relates to the occult and New Age Movement. It MAY be possible for a Christian therapist to make some beneficial use of hypnosis in treating patients. However, I am honestly not knowledgeable enough in this area to know for sure. At any rate, one must certainly be careful, for as Weldon and Ankerberg point out, there are many potentially negative effects arising from the use and/or abuse of hypnosis. Here are a few sections from my outline:

Hypnosis and Hypnotic Regression

I. So what is hypnosis anyway?

> *A. It is a deliberately induced condition of deep mental relaxation, or trance (i.e. an ASC), in which a person becomes highly suggestible and potentially capable of being*

dramatically manipulated.

B. When the ASC has been achieved, "various therapeutic maneuvers in the form of suggestions or other psychological interventions are performed and are called the practice of 'hypnotherapy.'" (310) C. Its New Age and occult applications include: psychic development, spirit contact, automatic writing, astral travel, etc. For instance, Harpers Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience declares, "Self-hypnosis is used…by mediums and channelers to communicate with spirits." (311)

II. What about hypnotic regression? What is that all about?

A. This usually involves using hypnosis to take a person back in their past to uncover buried memories and resolve hidden conflicts.

B. In New Age and occult applications, such regression may go back into a person's alleged "past lives."

III. How does hypnosis claim to work?

A. No one really knows for sure! There is still no generally accepted scientific theory about it.

B. "Daniel Goleman, who has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Harvard University, observes, 'After 200 years of use, we still cannot say with certainty what hypnosis is nor exactly how it works. But somehow it does." (310)

IV. Does the Bible have anything at all to say about the practice of hypnosis?

A. "Hypnosis may be related to the biblically forbidden practice of 'charming' or 'enchanting'; to the extent this relationship holds true, the practice should be rejected." (310)

B. Christians are to be "filled" and controlled by the Holy Spirit. To the extent that the hypnotic trance opens one up to the influence of other spirits, it has the potential to be quite harmful.

V. What is the susceptibility to hypnosis in the general population?

A. About 10-20% of people cannot be hypnotized.

B. About 10-20% can be easily hypnotized.

C. The remainder fall somewhere in between.

VII. Granting that hypnosis MAY be helpful and useful under some circumstances, we might still ask whether it is a necessary part of the psychotherapeutic process?

A. One psychiatry textbook states, "Everything done in psychotherapy with hypnosis can also be done without hypnosis." (314).

B. But if this is really so, we may ask whether the potential risks are worth the potential benefits?

X. What are some of the documented potential dangers of hypnosis?

A. Perverse motivations to satisfy ulterior needs on the part of the therapist or patient.

B. It may increase a patients overdependence on the therapist.

C. Traumatic insight when repressed memories are uncovered.

D. Precipitation of a psychosis.

E. Sudden panic reactions occasioned by the experience of

hypnosis.

F. Complications from miscommunication.

G. Unscrupulous use of hypnosis.

H. Difficulty in waking subject and unfortunate effects of incomplete waking.

XI. However, it must be admitted that in the Jan. 1987 *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, it was concluded that "other than in a few rare and isolated instances, hypnosis has proven to be one of the safest tools in the armamentarium of the healing professions." (317). The dangers of hypnosis are usually attributed more to the therapist than to hypnosis itself.

XII. W & A suggest five variables to be considered when evaluating the risks of hypnosis:

A. The religious, ethical, and philosophical orientation of the therapist.

B. The emotional history and condition of the client.

C. The degree of technical expertise and past experience of the therapist.

D. The motive and purpose for engaging in hypnosis.

E. The hypnotic state itself.

XIII. Dr. Shafica Karagulla, M.D., a neuropsychiatrist and member of the prestigious Royal College of Physicians. . . warns against possession from hypnosis in her Breakthrough to Creativity. . . She warns that hypnosis can open '. . .the door to your mind which can be influenced by other intelligences, some greater than your own. In such a passive state, an entity can get in and obtain control over you.'

(328).

XV. Christian scholars are divided over whether the use of hypnosis is permissible for Christians. "One of the leading Christian authorities on the occult, the late Dr. Walter Martin, accepted the medical practice of hypnosis, while warning against its occult use. Noted psychiatrist Paul Tournier, on the other hand, is opposed to any use of hypnosis" (332).

XIX. Can you think of any biblical prohibitions against hypnosis?

> *A. It may be generally prohibited in a passage like Deut. 18:10-12 (e.g. divination, witchcraft, sorcery, casting spells, mediums, spiritists, etc.). But of course this is not entirely clear.*

I hope this information helps you in your understanding of hypnosis. While it's not a clear-cut issue, Christians should probably be very careful (and prayerful) before either recommending or receiving hypnosis.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

"Help Me Understand Eating Clean and Unclean Meats"

I am a freshman college student. A New Testament class professor said that Paul, James and Peter disagreed with the

eating of clean and unclean meats. Now I know of the vision with Peter, which he says some scholars say is only for the fact that they should preach to Gentiles as well as Greeks. Now, is there anywhere else that says they may have not been disagreeing or that one case won out over the other or if one had more information from God? Should we be wary of this subject as Christians? Because that would mean we were eating "wrong" all this time (for those of us who do eat pork and other things like that). Does this have any relevance to our spirituality as Christians? Am I just thinking too hard?

Thanks for writing. The dietary laws set forth in passages such as Leviticus 11:1-47 and Deuteronomy 14:1-21 were temporary laws given by God only to Israel. These laws are not applicable to Christians today under the terms of the New Covenant. This is not only made clear in Peter's vision, recorded in Acts 10:9-16, but it is stated explicitly by Christ Himself in Mark 7:14-23. Notice in particular what Jesus says in vv. 18-19. In part, this text reads, "Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" Then notice the parenthetical statement which concludes this verse: "Thus He declared all foods clean." In other words, the dietary restrictions given by God to Israel have been nullified. Christians today are not bound by such laws. Today, the Old Covenant under which Israel operated is obsolete (Hebrews 8:13).

Hope this helps!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Why Doesn’t the New Testament Violate the Command Not to Add to Scripture?”

Revelations 22:18 states that, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book; if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book.”

I have heard this verse used to explain why the Book of Mormon is not to be considered a later divinely inspired revelation. However, in Deuteronomy 4:2 and Proverbs 30:6, these same warnings about adding to God’s word are stated, so why wouldn’t the New Testament fall into the same category of unacceptable additions to the Bible? Why is it an acceptable addition and revelation when the Book of Mormon—or, for that matter, the Koran—is not?

I personally believe that Revelation 22:18 should be interpreted more narrowly as referring only to the content of the book of Revelation. In other words, I don’t believe John is necessarily forbidding (or excluding) the possibility of later revelations from God; he is rather simply warning against adding or subtracting anything from the book which he has just written. I think the wording of verses 18-19 supports this view. Notice how often John specifies “this” book (i.e. the book of Revelation), and the book of “this” prophecy, as the content of what should not be added to or subtracted from. Thus, I don’t think John’s warning necessarily forbids additional revelation from God in OTHER books; he is simply warning against tampering with what is written in his own. What he has written is the word of God and it should be kept pure and undefiled. Of course I realize that not everyone will share this view, but this is what I think John intended the verse to communicate.

I would basically take Deut. 4:2 the same way. Moses is writing the word of God, and God does not want His message polluted with the additions and subtractions of sinful human beings. He wants His word kept just as He gave it and not altered to suit human fancies or inclinations. What this forbids is purely HUMAN additions or subtractions; it does not mean that God cannot give additional revelation in the future. Indeed, if that were so, not only would the NT be called into question, but the remainder of the OT would as well (for Deuteronomy is the last book of Moses)!

Finally, I think Proverbs 30:5-6 also fits this interpretation. Verse 5 begins, "Every word of God is tested." In v. 6 we are forbidden to add to HIS words. God may reveal additional truth to man at some later time, but man is not to take it upon himself to add to, or subtract from, what God has already revealed.

So what about the Book of Mormon, or the Koran? Why not accept these books as additional revelation from God? My answer to this is simple: whatever the source of these books, it is NOT the God of the Bible. How do we know this? Because both books teach beliefs and practices which are CONTRARY to the Bible. The "God" of Mormonism and the "God" of Islam are NOT the same God as the God of the Bible. In addition, not only do Mormonism and Islam teach a different doctrine of God than that revealed in the Bible, they also teach a different doctrine of man, sin, the afterlife, salvation, etc. If we apply the law of non-contradiction to these different "revelations" we see that while they can all be false, they cannot all be true. Furthermore, if one of these IS true, the others must be false (because they contradict each other on essential beliefs and practices). See the point? If the Bible is truly the word of God, neither the Book of Mormon nor the Koran can qualify as His word.

It is for this reason that I think the Book of Mormon and the Koran should be rejected as later "revelations" from God; not

because of Revelation 22:18.

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“What Is the Job Description of a Deacon?”

Greetings! I would like to receive some godly insight as to the job description of a deacon.

I have heard from the pulpit of my church that a deacon has the duties of counseling others within the church, as well as teaching. Is this biblical? Please give scriptures. The preacher stated the deacon is ordained but the Bible says that a deacon is appointed. The preacher stated that a deacon can counsel people, making reference to Jethro appointing men to help with counsel to free up Moses… These men, were’t they elders and not deacons?

Thanks for your question! The term “deacon” comes from the Greek term *diakonos*, and simply means “minister” or “servant”. It is used often in the New Testament in the general sense of one who serves. However, in a few passages it is used to refer to those occupying a particular position of service in the early church (see Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

The qualifications for serving as a deacon in the church are spelled out in 1 Tim. 3:8-13. Neither counseling nor teaching are specifically mentioned as duties of deacons, nor is the ability to do so stated as a requirement for becoming a deacon. While an elder must be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2),

this requirement is not specified of deacons. Nevertheless, since deacons were to hold “to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience”, it seems that a certain amount of biblical and theological knowledge may have been required to serve as a deacon. This may indicate that, if necessary, a deacon should be both intellectually and spiritually prepared to minister in such a capacity. However, this is not explicitly stated.

Some believe that the office of deacon originated in Jerusalem by order of the Apostles (Acts 6). Although the Greek term *diakonos* is not used of the Seven in this passage, they do seem to have performed at least some of the duties typically associated with the office of a deacon (e.g. the distribution of food in vv. 1-3). If the office of deacon originated in Acts 6, there may be some basis for official ordination to this office in v. 6. The dictionary on my desk defines ordain, at least in part, in this manner: “officially appoint or consecrate as a minister in a Christian church”. Thus, depending on how one defines the terms “ordain” and “appoint”, they could be used somewhat interchangeably.

Also worth noting, if Acts 6 does refer to the appointment of the first deacons, there were two who had ministries which were much more extensive than may have been required of deacons. Stephen was quite a teacher, preacher and debater (Acts 6:9-10 and Acts 7), while Philip was quite an evangelist (Acts 8:4-5, etc.). While such gifts may not have been required to serve as a deacon, it seems clear that one who possessed gifts of teaching, evangelism, counseling, etc. could serve as a deacon. Since the requirements to serve as a deacon were primarily moral in nature, anyone meeting these requirements could serve as a deacon, whatever their spiritual gifts might have been.

As for the account of Jethro counseling Moses in Exodus 18, my own view would be as follows: First, while Jethro did counsel Moses (v. 19) to appoint judges to assist him in handling disputes between the people (vv. 21-26), he is actually

described as a “priest” (v. 1) and not a deacon. Second, in my opinion, the Church (including its offices of elder and deacon) did not formally begin until the Day of Pentecost as described in Acts 2. While the men appointed by Moses to help judge the Israelites may have had moral qualifications similar to those required of both elders and deacons in the New Testament, nevertheless, strictly speaking I do not think that they should be understood as such in the context of Exodus 18. It makes sense that there should be similar moral qualifications required of those who would lead God’s people, but I do not think we should view the “judges” in Exodus 18 as “elders” or “deacons” in the New Testament sense. The former were leaders of Israel; the latter are leaders of the Church. There are certainly similarities between the two, but there are differences as well.

In summary, let me briefly answer your questions this way: First, while a deacon may be competent both to counsel and to teach, neither are specifically required of deacons in the New Testament. Second, there could be evidence for the ordination (or appointment) of deacons to their official task in Acts 6:6. Finally, while the example of Jethro, Moses, and the appointment of judges in Exodus 18 certainly offers some important principles for understanding the necessity of appointing spiritually and morally qualified leaders to assist in the effective ministry of the Church, nevertheless, I personally do not think we should equate the ministry of these “judges” of Israel with that of elders and deacons in the local church. Strictly speaking, if the church began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, I think we should primarily glean our understanding of the qualifications and requirements for serving as elders and deacons in the local church from those New Testament passages which specifically address this issue (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9; Acts 6; etc.).

Hope this helps. God bless you!

Michael Gleghorn

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