

A Course in Miracles and Yoga

by Amy Torres

A Course in Miracles offers us a highly individualized curriculum where we use the body as a learning device under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Yoga is one of the classrooms the Holy Spirit offers me, to use my body for spiritual purposes. ACIM provides a mind-training; therefore, all of its practices are in thought-form, or ideas. This can be challenging, since the body demands our attention all day long. Yoga offers a body-based *sadhana*, or spiritual practice, using the body and breath to reconnect with God's Mind. This way, instead of letting the body run the show, we have concrete techniques so that the body serves the Mind.

"The body, valueless and hardly worth the least defense, need merely be perceived as quite apart from you, and it becomes a healthy, serviceable instrument through which the mind can operate until its usefulness is over." W-135.

Most of us think of yoga as a physical practice, but the physical movements or *asanas*, known as *hatha* yoga, is but one of five yoga systems¹. Hindu philosophy speaks of *hatha* yoga, *raja* yoga, *bhakti* yoga, *jnana* yoga, and *karma* yoga. Each of these systems can be used autonomously to realize God, or they can be used in combination.

Yoga comes from the Sanskrit word "yuj" which means "to yoke" or "join" as in union with our brothers and communion with God. Swami Satchidananda defines yoga as "the science of mind" and explains that "the mind is a veil woven with thoughts." Yoga is a system that helps us harness the mind, because as long as the ego mind gives us the runaround, we'll remain unaware of the One Mind in which we all truly live.

Hatha Yoga

Hatha yoga is the physical movement of yoga, the *asanas*, or postures. The Rishis of five thousand years ago inadvertently "invented" *hatha* yoga when they surfaced from deep meditation and felt stiff. The stretching they did to limber up was based on what they saw around them in nature: they mimicked animals, mountains, and trees to loosen up and invigorate the body. Nowadays, *hatha* yoga is used as preparation for meditation. It can also be seen as a moving meditation in itself. When the movements are linked to the breath, and smooth transitions melt one pose into the next, the mind is smoothed also. By relaxing and strengthening the body, we calm the mind and are more able to harness our thoughts and concentrate, which leads to meditation.

ACIM is not strict about a formal ongoing meditation practice. "Nor is a lifetime of contemplation and long periods of meditation aimed at detachment from the body necessary. All such attempts will ultimately succeed because of their purpose. Yet the means are tedious and very time consuming, for all of them look to the future for release from a state of present unworthiness and inadequacy." T-18.VII.4:9-11. Yoga is an unhurried, ancient practice based, to some extent, on an accumulation of good *karma*. It takes time to balance *chakras*, activate *kundalini* energy, and transcend the sheaths of the *koshas*.² The Course is a refreshing counterbalance to yoga in this way: ACIM promises us over and over again that it will save us time. It provides a structured practice of meditation in the Workbook Lessons, but after that, we are on our own, listening to our Inner Teacher and using the Holy Instant to connect with Universal Mind as often as possible, and in our own way.

Bhakti Yoga

Bhakti yoga is a path of selfless devotion to God. Krishna's *gopis* exemplified *bhakti* yoga. *Gopi* mean "cow-herding girl." The story goes that when Krishna played his flute, *gopi* women dropped what they were doing, whether it was cooking, tending to the cows, or washing clothes. Everything would be left in the middle and the *gopis* would abandon their families to dance ecstatically around Krishna as he seduced them with his flute. At night, Krishna would visit every *gopi*, in a unique form just for her, and make love to her. *Bhakti* yoga has a quality of unreserved love and passion for God, a full faith that recognizes that God comes first above all others.

¹ These are five well-known yogic systems. *Kundalini* yoga, *tantric* yoga, and *kriya* yoga are also frequently studied and applied, and the list goes on.

² Yoga is a vast subject and there are countless books and online resources to explore *karma*, the *chakras*, *kundalini* energy and the *koshas*, as well as many other esoteric topics, if you are so inclined. David Hoffmeister has an interesting chart in his book, *Awakening Through A Course in Miracles*, that maps the ego mind and the layers are remarkably similar to the *koshas*.

Mirabai, the thirteenth century mystic poet, valued her spiritual marriage to Krishna over her family's arranged marriage for her. She spurned convention, surrendered entirely to her passion for Lord Krishna, and experienced Love alternately through knowing It, and yearning for It.

A Course in Miracles asks us for the same level of devotion. Lesson 157.5, "Into His Presence would I enter now" expresses it this way, "From this day forth, your ministry takes on a genuine devotion, and a glow that travels from your fingertips to those you touch, and blesses those you look upon."

Jnana Yoga

Jnana yoga uses the study of scripture as a means to comprehend our true Self. What starts out as an intellectual pursuit deepens into a felt experience. *Jnana* uses inquiry to uncover meaning beneath meaning beyond meaning until the Self is revealed. The great sage and realized master Ramana Maharshi taught through the question, "Who am I?" This question, aimed at everything, takes us back to the Witness, the Observer, the Decision-Maker (in Ken Wapnick's parlance). "It undoes the veils that the ego has interposed between its little slice of mind and its Source.

Jnana yoga helps us return to the decision-making part of our mind by stripping away the false self, layer by layer. "This single purpose creates perfect integration and establishes the peace of God." T-3.II.5:6. Ultimately, the Course tells us to "Forget this world, forget this course, and come with wholly empty hands unto your God." W-189; but, until we reach that point, immersing ourselves in scripture can be the royal road Home. Rather than be lost in the ego's unconscious, we saturate ourselves in the Holy Spirit's teachings.

Karma Yoga

Karma yoga is the yoga of taking action in the world through selfless service. It is a pure practice of brotherhood. It is the natural expression of the miracle, seeing Christ in everyone indiscriminately. It is the application of generalization. "You will recognize that you have learned there is no order of difficulty in miracles when you apply them to all situations. There is no situation to which miracles do not apply, and by applying them to all situations, you will gain the real world." T-12.VII.1:3-4. And, the way to do this is to see Christ in each other.

Raja Yoga

Patanjali, the sage who compiled the *Yoga Sutras*, lays out the path of *raja* yoga. *Raja* means royal and is considered a complete system. Its goal is to improve our concentration so we can move all our attention toward our Being in order to become that Being. *Raja* yoga is also called *ashtanga* yoga because of the eight limbs on which the system rests: They are 1) Yamas, outward morality, consisting of non-harming, truthfulness, non-stealing, self-discipline and non-coveting 2) Niyamas, inner ethics, consisting of cleanliness, contentment, purification of body, mind and nervous system, study of metaphysical principles and self-examination, contemplation of God 3) Postures, or *asanas* 4) Control of breath and life currents, or *pranayama* 5) Withdrawal of the senses in order to turn within, or *pratyahara* 6) Concentration, or *dharana* 7) Meditation, or *dhyana*: prolonged periods of concentration which becomes contemplation and 8) Holy Trance, or *samadhi*, what the Course would call revelation, a direct experience of God.

As the Course says in the Clarification of Terms, "A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary." ACIM also has a curriculum, and uses a text, workbook, and manual for teachers as its "limbs," which, when used vigilantly, integrate its teachings and deepen our learning. The ACIM curriculum is not aimed at teaching Love or *samadhi* because that is beyond what can be taught and is naturally revealed as we remove the blocks to the awareness of Love's presence.

The Yoga of ACIM

Though I was introduced to yoga first, along the way it became clear to me that ACIM is my path. The lack of ceremony and ritual, the lack of deities and complicated practices, suits me. I have a gypsy nature, which finds the "no baggage" style of the Holy Spirit alluring. Still, it comes naturally for me to practice ACIM *hatha* yoga, where I find my mind often goes pleasantly blank and I spontaneously experience the peace of God. And ACIM *bhakti* yoga emerged effortlessly too, as it became natural to devote the fruits of my practice to God. ACIM *jnana* yoga is the pleasure of reading and re-reading the Course, experiencing a deeper and deeper understanding as I do, as well as cultivating the relationship with my *guru*, my inner teacher, the Holy Spirit. ACIM *raja* yoga is applying the practices, the Workbook lessons, and allowing the Course to work through me as an integrated whole. ACIM *karma* yoga is seeing Christ in my brother.

It's fun to reverse my upside-down perception simply by doing a headstand, and to evoke the holy instant by chanting "*aum*." It's fun "to let my words be chosen for me by ceasing to decide for myself what I'm going to say" (paraphrased from M-21). Recently, I heard myself giving a guided meditation to my yoga class during *savasana* inviting them to contact a glowing light within them that is always there, allowing it to permeate their bodies and then extend, radiating Its light through them, so that their very presence was a source of healing to all they came in contact with the rest of the day. "The light is *in* you," I said, not realizing it was a line from Chapter 18, channeling straight through me. "You need do nothing except not to interfere," I continued, transmitting Chapter 16 from the True Empathy section. The Light flowed through me on Its way to them.

In concluding, I say to you, "*Namaste*. The divine Light in me bows to the divine Light in you" or, in ACIM-speak, "You are one Self with me, united with our Creator in this Self. I honor you because of What I am, and What He is, Who loves us both as One." Lesson 95.15:3.

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Amy Torres teaches ACIM and yoga in NYC. To see her videos, or contact her, visit:

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