



Faithfully Alison

Is Yoga a Religion?

Uh oh! She's really going to go there! Hang onto your hats as this one is ... um.... thorny, controversial and therefore super interesting!

Before one of this weeks' classes we somehow got onto the subject of Yoga and Religion.

Is Yoga a Religion? On one of my teacher trainings, in 2011 I recall this question being debated. The group of us were split. Most of us (including me) said No. A few said Yes.

Since then my practice has deepened, my awareness has grown and I've had the question posed to me in various different guises.

The work of the Devil?

- I had a phone call from a perspective client who told me that her Sister said Yoga was the "work of the Devil"
- Some lovely potential Yoga venues owned by religious organisations have turned me away as they appear to believe that Yoga is contrary / detrimental to their teachings.
- Nigel and I recently got 'challenged' at a well known UK Abbey for practicing outside in the grounds and taking photographs. The implication was that we were being disrespectful.

Historical Perspective

Yoga can be traced back to the Veda's which are considered the the be the roots of Hinduism and Buddhism. Some Yoga

Teachers weave the mythological stories about the Hindu Gods as metaphors and themes into their classes. Certain Asanas (Yoga postures) are named after Hindu Gods e.g. Hanumanasana (monkey pose / splits). But a modern Yoga practice is far from Modern Hinduism.

The 8 limbs (astanga) of Yoga referred to in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras which date back to before 400 CE(BC) outline a prescribed 8 fold sequence of practices ending with enlightenment and starting with a list of ethical conducts that include "Svadhya" self-study and study of scriptures. However, definition of what constitutes a 'scripture' is left open.

That said, for many in the West, a Yoga practice has been abridged to one of the 8 limbs; Asana (Postures). Often people think of Yoga as being purely an exercise class to promote muscle flexibility and relaxation. And for those who like to practice in this way the debate about Yoga and Religion is moot.

My Position

I first came to Yoga for its physical benefits. I wasn't interested in anything 'spiritual' and probably would have laughed if anyone had told me the leading role Yoga would come to play in my life.

As my practice has evolved and deepened it has become very much wider than Asana. Yoga is my primary Spiritual practice. My foundation. My way of life. The teachings of Yoga (as I understand them) inspire me, support me, challenge me and inform everything I do.

But I don't define it as my Religion.

For me, Yoga is a spiritual practice that can be used to support any Faith or belief system with the purpose of promoting balance, harmony and Unity on and off the mat.

But...

As with so many of these sorts of discussions there is no one right or wrong answer. Which means.... drum role please....

It's up to you!

*"Everything before the word
but is horse shit!" - Game of
Thrones*

Is Yoga is a Religion for you? Great!

Is Yoga your weekly exercise class? Great!

Perhaps you use Yoga to stretch your body after a run or a cycle? Great!

Perhaps it's your one time in the week for 'you'. A chance to switch off and relax. Great!

You believe Yoga to be the 'work of the Devil'? OK. Best not to practice it then.

I don't have an attachment to convincing you one way or another. My classes and especially my 'play'shops and retreats do include some of the spiritual aspects of the practice . I teach what I practice, I practice what I need.

More than anything else though my intention is to inspire, support and empower you to make your own mind up, and to express and live your truth... both on and off the mat.

With love

Faithfully Me xx

