

Is it possible that the teachings of Jesus are so comprehensive they encompass the core spiritual principles of both East and West?

THE YOGA OF CHRIST

By Philip G. McLemore



"Practice my yoga, and your burden will be light."
—MATTHEW 11:29–30

I WAS BAPTIZED INTO THE CHURCH AT AGE NINETEEN. Six months later, I received a patriarchal blessing from an elderly stake patriarch. I had never seen this man before, and the second and final time I saw him, he did not recognize me. Given this context, the blessing he gave me was amazingly prophetic in how it mapped out the development of my unfolding perspectives, personality, and life path. I'll just mention two of these ways.

First, the blessing declared in very clear terms that I would provide spiritual leadership to people and groups outside of the organizations of the Church. Thirteen years after I'd received the blessing, that type of leadership seemed impossible. My life was completely consumed in my work as an LDS Institute of Religion director and seminary supervisor, along with long hours of service as a counselor in a bishopric. Then, in an amazing turn of events, the next year, I had become a military chaplain and was preaching in Protestant worship services, directing a Protestant Sunday School, and performing general Christian counseling, weddings, and funerals for people of many different denominational backgrounds. Since my 2004 retirement from the Air Force, I have worked as a hospice chaplain and meditation instructor, ministering to people of multiple faiths as well as to people who have no clearly defined beliefs. More than 70 percent of my spiritual service has been to those outside the Church, and I didn't seek any of these career changes—they were offered "out of the blue." The patriarch knew more about my upcoming life than I did.



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A second highlight from the blessing was its admonition that to fulfill my mission in life, I would need to have information, knowledge, and divine insight into the "principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ *and all truth*." In context, tucked within its surrounding passages, the sense of this advice was that my understanding would be centered on the principles Jesus taught rather than on understanding his exact nature.¹

This emphasis on principles rather than personhood has served me well, since until recently, I've never been able to make much sense out of nor feel close to the God/man Jesus as explained by any Christian church, including my own tradition. In one strain of Mormon thought, Jesus is my elder brother who was more spiritually advanced than I but who still, like me, had to come to earth to be tempted, to demonstrate obedience, and grow from grace to grace to attain perfection. This line of thinking confirmed my inner feeling that Jesus was someone I could follow because he had trod the path, knew the difficulties, and could show me the way with compassion and understanding. However, we Latter-day Saints also present Jesus as the only one who in the pre-existence attained a pinnacle of intelligence which ranked him as a God.² Even without the perfecting experience of mortality, Jesus was still the Creator of this earth and other worlds without number. He is Jehovah, the God of Israel, the God of the Old Testament. To accomplish his atonement for our sins, he had to be absolutely sinless. In this strain of thought, Jesus is presented as being perfect in every way and demonstrating an impressive array of supernatural powers. These latter emphases led me to the same conclusion expressed by Marcus Borg in his most recent book on Jesus:

a figure who has superhuman powers is ultimately not one of us. Jesus' humanity disappears. . . . [I]f Jesus had superhuman power and knowledge, he cannot be a model for human behavior.³

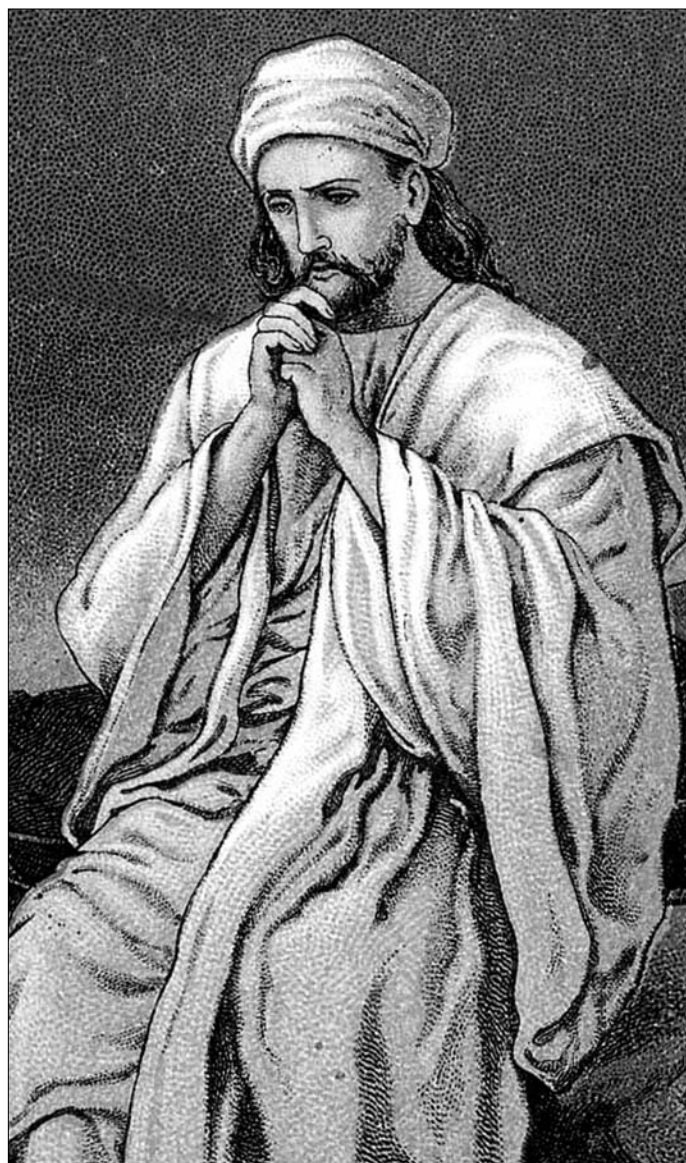
Although I was never perfectly comfortable with my understanding of the person of Jesus, I pressed on nevertheless, inspired by the principles he taught as well as those that were manifest in his interactions with God and man.

In the spirit of my patriarchal blessing's injunction to explore "all truth," and as I detailed in a previous article,⁴ I have spent the past seven years immersed in the practice of meditation and the study of Eastern spiritual practice and philosophy, principally in the Yogic tradition. For most people in the West, yoga is about stretching and body contortion. But in its original ancient context, yoga means two things: (1) a state of intimate union with God; and (2) the disciplines, practices, principles, and lifestyle that lead to this union. The goal of yoga is to open oneself to higher states of consciousness whereby one may have a direct experience of God and begin to see with and through His eyes. In John 13:34, Jesus gives us a "new" commandment that we are to love one another *as he has loved us*. Can we love as Christ loved without seeing through God's eyes?

Some Yogic traditions call this type of seeing Divine Consciousness. Paramahansa Yogananda called it Christ Consciousness. Yogananda, the author of the best-selling memoir, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, came to America from India in 1920 with the two-fold mission of "demonstrating the complete harmony and basic oneness of original Christianity and original yoga," thus uniting East and West, and helping others learn to experience God directly.⁵ When I first encountered Yogananda's work, I was intrigued by the idea that Yogic teachings and Christ's teachings could be in harmony with each other. However, as I studied various yoga philosophies, they seemed very different from my understanding of Christ's gospel. Although I failed to see core similarities, I was drawn to both even as I often felt torn between the two.

I ultimately realized that the tension I felt arose from the different ways Western and Yogic traditions see basic human nature and describe the way of redemption. The Western model, which includes Christianity and Mormonism as they are most commonly articulated, is based on what I call a deficiency model. In this paradigm, human beings are seen as flawed and deficient, needing redemption through the actions of an outside entity, a perfect being (Christ). Mormon teachings soften this sense of deficiency some through emphases on our eternal nature as God's children and our ultimate perfectibility through repentance, obedience, and righteous living, but Mormons still acknowledge the need for outside redemption to correct inner flaws. In either case, our human nature needs to be covered over by Christ's redeeming work, changed by grace—or by grace and good works, in the Mormon case.

The Yogic view, on the other hand, is based on a model of wholeness. We are whole (holy) and divine in our essential being, but due to our identification with a mortal mind and body, and because we are buried under a plethora of temporary material and mental attachments, we have become ignorant of our eternal nature and divine qualities as spirit.⁶ In this model, a redeemer figure acts as a revealer of the true nature of God and man as well as a liberator from the bondage of ignorance and worldly attachments. In short, a deficiency model focuses on the sins of a flawed nature as the primary problem and leans heavily on outside, supernatural redemption.⁷ A



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—Paramahansa Yogananda

wholeness model declares ignorance of our true nature to be the primary problem and focuses on enlightenment and liberation from the inside through the path of spiritual union.⁸ As Yogananda puts it:

No amount of sin can change [man's] eternal soul-nature of divinity. Sin is a crust of ignorance accrued during man's lost wanderings that hides the perfect soul; when by meditation the soul is led back to God, the crust is washed away and the perfection is revealed.⁹

In my work as a hospice chaplain, I usually read to patients from the New Testament since it is accepted scripture for most

reminds his father that he has “never transgressed . . . at any time,” the wayward child is received back as a son, with lavish gifts and a big party—something the elder son says the father has never offered him. This seems unfair to the good son; and, if I count as representative my own experiences participating in LDS classes for the past thirty-seven years, it seems unfair to many Mormons. Because LDS teaching often focuses on “commandment-keeping” as the highest good, how can the father treat this commandment-breaking son so wonderfully? Class members usually try to resolve the tension that arises from this seeming unfairness in the story by focusing on the love, compassion, and forgiveness of the father as examples of the kind



We are all prodigal children. Our inheritance is our divine inner nature, which can become obscured but never lost. As prodigal children, we have left our divine home and ended up poor and starving, living in a pig pen. When we remember our father's home and family status and make our way back, God receives us fully and joyfully, offering all that he has.

of the people I visit. At some point, a change in how I experienced the New Testament began to take place. I began to notice a new depth and breadth in the teachings of Jesus, which mirrored yogic thought and teachings. I began to see how many sayings and parables of Jesus that we often gloss over in LDS classes because they don't seem to fit the typical Mormon view make perfect sense in an Eastern philosophical context!¹⁰ Many of Jesus' parables and sayings discomfort us because they don't seem to reflect a kind or just God. I've observed considerable gnashing of teeth in church classes when we discuss parables such as the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16) in which the landowner (God) gives the same wages to all the laborers even though those who started in the morning worked many more hours than those who were invited in at the end of the day. Is God fickle and unfair? Shouldn't those who work longer receive more blessings and greater rewards? The Western mind says yes. The Yogic mind says God is always inviting people to serve him and is ready to bestow his full blessings as soon as they are receptive regardless of how long they have to serve to be prepared.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) reveals even more clearly the tension that arises when a common Mormon interpretation is overlaid on the story in contrast to the easy flow of a Yogic interpretation. A son leaves his father's (God's) home, squanders his inheritance in riotous living, and ends up poor and starving as a pig feeder. In fact, he desires the pigs' food, evidence that he hit rock bottom, that he can sink no farther. According to the text, the son “comes to himself,” and realizes the blessings of the father's domain. He returns ready to confess his sins and to submit himself fully to the father's will and assume the lowest status in his father's household.

To the surprise and distress of the “faithful” elder son, who

of love we should all strive for. They may suggest that Jesus' parables aren't meant to be perfectly applied to human circumstances. Or they may follow a similar line of reasoning found in Bruce R. McConkie's *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, glossing over the elder son's lack of compassion and self-centeredness to argue that he will inherit all the father has, while the prodigal son, though fortunate to get a nice party, will be demoted to a servant position and not be equal to the elder son in “power, honor, and dominion” because he had squandered his inheritance and it was lost forever.¹¹

These interpretations increase rather than resolve the tension for me. I have to ask myself who is closer to our Heavenly Father's heart—the one who through his mistakes has “come to himself,” grown in understanding of his father's blessings, and is willing to humbly receive with appreciation whatever the father will give him? Or the son who is outwardly compliant but inwardly unforgiving, hardhearted, and selfish? Does our Heavenly Father withhold family status and blessings from one who is honestly repentant?

In the Yogic interpretation, we are all prodigal children. In this perspective, our inheritance is our divine inner nature, which can become obscured but never lost. As prodigal children, we have left our divine home and ended up poor and starving (ignorant of our essential spiritual nature), living in a pig pen (the material world with its evils and distractions). When we remember our father's home and family status and make our way back (through spiritual disciplines), God receives us fully and joyfully, offering all that he has. For me, the Yogic interpretation is closer to what Jesus is teaching in this story and requires no strained explanations. This interpretation also makes better sense when we remember the context in which Jesus gives the parable—responding to “Pharisees and

scribes” who complain about Jesus’ receiving sinners and eating with them. Here, and in many other places throughout the gospels, Jesus contrasts “sinners” (prodigals) who seek him humbly and whom he receives, guides, and loves, to the outwardly compliant “Pharisees and scribes” (elder sons) whose hearts are far from him.

HAVE WE SO Westernized/Mormonized Christ’s teachings that we have lost critical perspectives and insights? Is it possible that the teachings of Jesus are so comprehensive they encompass the core spiritual principles of both East and West? A huge light came on for me one day as I was reading Matthew 11:28–30:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

From my study of Eastern traditions, I knew that the words “yoke” and “yoga” are both cognates from the Sanskrit word *yuj*, which means to join or unite. In that moment, I realized that a legitimate paraphrase of this passage could be, “Practice my yoga . . . and ye shall find rest (relief) unto your souls.” Jesus is inviting those with heavy burdens to trade their burdens for his, which is “light.” So my paraphrase then became, “Practice my yoga, and your burden will be light.”

I realized that if one feels burdened, it becomes more difficult to live Jesus’ “new commandment” of loving like him. Soon after that insight, as I found myself in conversation with people of deep spiritual faith and commitment, I would ask them about their burdens. In spite of the fact that we normally interpret Jesus’ words to mean that his yoke lightens our burdens because he shoulders some or most of the weight, or because he makes us stronger so that the burden feels lighter, my “spiritual” friends reported a variety of family, health, work, and other burdens that were consistently stressful, if not overwhelming at times. They said they had just accepted the fact that spiritual living is bravely facing a series of burdens while keeping the faith and enduring to the end. I admire their courage and faithfulness, but I kept remembering that Jesus said “rest.” He said our burden would be “light”—if we practiced his yoga.

Most are familiar with images of yogis becoming so light they can levitate. I’ve yet to see or experience it, so for this discussion, I assume levitation is symbolic of someone so absorbed in Christ Consciousness that he or she is not burdened by the stresses and pressures of the world. Did Jesus levitate? Sure. After a period of communion with God in prayer, and I also think, meditation, he walked out to his disciples on stormy waters, demonstrating that one in communion with God is light and can live above the storms of human existence. We can follow him like Peter did at first and walk above those stormy seas—unless we lose divine communion and identify with temporal, material circumstances, which generate fear and heavy burdens that sink us (Matthew 14:22–32). At the end of his ministry, Jesus levitated all the way up into heaven (Acts

1:10–11). If someone can levitate that high, shouldn’t we listen carefully and practice the yoga that promises such lightness?

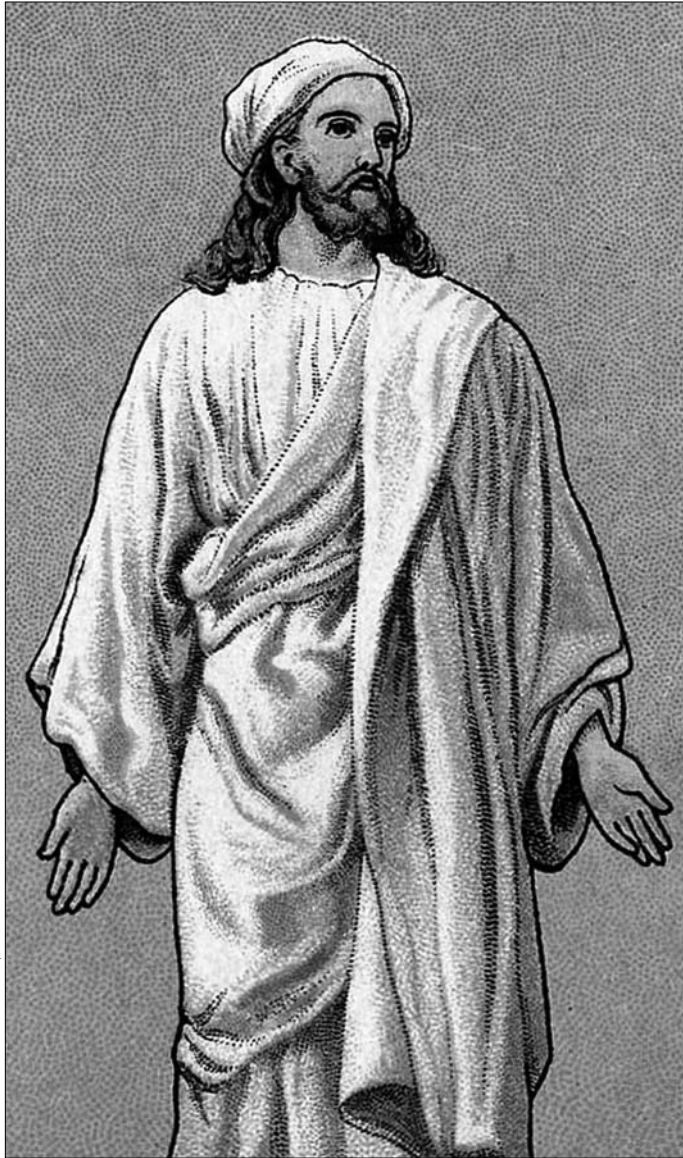
SO WHAT IS the Yoga of Christ? There are four classic Yogic paths/traditions.¹² In Yogic philosophy, when we leave the presence of God to experience incarnation and mortality, our consciousness becomes modified and limited such that we are more prone to identify ourselves with the temporal, external world instead of with our divine origin.¹³ Each of the yogas is designed to bring us back into intimate unity with God. This is done through practices that shift our awareness from identification with our body, its five senses, and its usual mental processes—which tend to direct attention outward to the people, things, and circumstances of our life and away from inner spiritual perceptions and qualities—to the wholeness of divine nature within. Each of these yogas has devotees (yogis) who follow it as a primary but not exclusive path. These yogas are:

- **BHAKTI YOGA**—*Bhakti* signifies a blissful, selfless, and overwhelming love of God. It is the spiritual practice of fostering loving devotion to God and takes the forms of singing and chanting God’s various names; glorifying and worshiping the Lord; offering devotional sacrifices, service, and prayer; fostering an intimate relationship with God; surrendering one’s thoughts and actions to God. Most Christian mystics followed this path. The Hare Krishna movement that came to prominence in the 1960s is an example. The famous Persian poets Rumi and Hafiz, who followed the Sufi version of Bhakti Yoga, often used the images of romantic love to describe the ideal relationship between God and man.

- **KARMA YOGA**—This is the path of selfless service. Karma Yogis dissolve their identification with body and mind by identifying with the whole of life, forgetting their finite selves in the service of others. Service is performed without the intent of benefiting oneself. Through this path, the practitioner purifies his or her consciousness and attains freedom from selfish conditioning. Gandhi was a Karma Yogi, and Mother Teresa is a well-known example of one who practiced the principles of this type of yoga but with a Christ-centered focus.

- **JNANA YOGA**—This yoga uses knowledge (*jnana*), clear thinking, careful logic, and even science to uncover spiritual truths that can lead someone to unity with God. It is sometimes referred to as the yoga of wisdom. Many modern writers who use the principles of quantum physics to elucidate spiritual principles fit into this path. Deepak Chopra considers himself a Jnana Yogi and believes that modern science is verifying spiritual truths taught by ancient seers.

- **RAJA YOGA**—Centered in meditation, this yoga includes the principles and practices that take one beyond normal states of sensory and mental awareness to higher states of



PROVIDENCE LITHOGRAPH COMPANY, 1933



“Even as Jesus . . . every man, by the right method of deep meditation, can learn consciously to lift the soul from body consciousness into the presence of God. . . . The prodigal soul is taken back from its wanderings in matter to its ever-blessed spiritual home in God.”
—Paramahansa Yogananda

consciousness where God can be experienced directly.¹⁴ This direct communion with the Divine liberates one from confining perceptions and unhealthy conditioned behavior. The result can be a profound spiritual transformation. According to Yogananda, “Yoga mediation is the process of cultivating and stabilizing the awareness of one’s real nature. . . by which the narrow ego, the flawed hereditary human consciousness, is displaced by the consciousness of the soul.”¹⁵

I believe Jesus was a master and example of each of these yogas. Like a Bhakti Yogi, he glorified and “hallowed” the name of his Heavenly Father. He evidenced an intimate relationship with God as seen by his use of the word *abba* (Daddy). I believe the popularity of the LDS *children’s* hymn, “I Am a Child of God,” and the fact that it is often sung in *adult* meetings is evidence that a parent/child relationship is the preferred image for most Mormons’ relationship with God. The logic is clear. Heavenly Father is perfect and all-knowing; we are imperfect, ignorant, and in need of guidance. However, when Jesus refers to God as father, there is a sense of familiarity and intimacy that is beyond the usual parent/child image and is more consistent with a loving relationship between parents and their adult children, in which there is more of a feel of equal sharing. Although the typical parent/child relationship is a logical and appropriate image while we are spiritually immature, Jesus also used the image of a wedding in which he is the bridegroom awaiting us as his bride. This metaphor reveals the type of intimacy God desires with us as we mature (Matthew 22:1–14; 25:1–12).¹⁶ It is the kind of image that a Bhakti Yogi would use.

Seeing Jesus as a Karma Yogi is clearly the easiest. His compassionate service and healing ministry to people regardless of age, race, sex, and religious beliefs is legendary. And clearly his acts of loving service were intended not to benefit himself but to bless others and glorify his Father.

When we see how Jesus’ reasoning and wisdom easily destroyed the crafty deceptions of his enemies who sought to trick and mischaracterize him, we know we are meeting a Jnana Yogi. The depth and breath of the wisdom in his teachings is self-evident.

Did Jesus meditate? We have no direct evidence of this, but when the scriptures tell us he went up into the mountains early to pray or stayed up all night in prayer, my sense is that his prayer practice didn’t simply involve going through lists of what he was thankful for and beseeching God for what he wanted. I believe it is reasonable to conclude that he followed a meditative/contemplative practice of divine communion. Indeed, this pattern of early morning and late-night prayer fits the practice of many Raja Yogis. Using Jesus as an example, Yogananda taught that

even as Jesus . . . every man, by the right method of deep meditation, can learn consciously to lift the soul from body consciousness into the presence of God. . . . The prodigal soul is taken back from its wanderings in matter to its ever-blessed spiritual home in God.¹⁷
Some of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, spiritually sensitive

individuals in the third century who separated themselves from a corrupt church and lived in the Egyptian desert to commune with God, defined prayer the same way Raja Yoga defines meditation.¹⁸ Theologian Roberta Bondi, a leading expert on these Desert Abbas and Ammas, speaks to a key difference in how prayer is seen today in contrast to the ancient period:

We are so verbal [today] . . . that it's hard for us not to imagine prayer either as monologue, in which I tell God things and God listens, or as a conversation in which I tell God things and God answers back. But from what I understand out of the ancient monastic materials I work on, prayer is really an entire relation-

would lack enjoyment and meaning without them," or we'll ask, "How can we love without being attached?"

Love. Love is indeed worth looking at a bit more deeply. I believe learning to love like Christ is the key to spiritual growth and to unity with God and others. If we link love with attachment, then it is logical to conclude that without attachment, we cannot love. On the other hand, the Yogic mind would ask, "How can you be free to love when you are stuck and attached to so many different things?" Clinging to people and things without being able to detach from them limits our vision, flexibility, creativity, and mobility—all of which are crucial for spiritual development and progression, as well as deep loving.²³



Non-Attachment is the basis for true love, true compassion, and truly righteous behavior since we come to operate from a divine point of reference in contrast to one embroiled in the endless churning of human desire and need that seldom, if ever, allows us to escape self-interest in even our most noble efforts.

ship, and the verbal part is only one element. A lot of what we learn when we pray is to be quiet. We need to stop thinking that a relationship is constituted only by language. . . . The issue is not so much "Does God talk back and if so how?" but whether we can learn just to be in God's presence.¹⁹

I believe Jesus was deeply devoted to the practice of meditation.

THE BHAGAVAD GITA, written hundreds of years before the New Testament, is often referred to as the "jewel" of Indian scripture. It is a classic Yogic text that discusses each of these four forms of yoga. The last time I read it, I noticed that each of these yogas is rooted in and supported by a pair of principles and practices I have come to call the Yoga of Christ.

Simply stated, the Yoga of Christ consists of the principles and practices of communion with God and Non-Attachment.²⁰ I will focus first on Non-Attachment and then merge that discussion into the context of spiritual communion.

As I interpret Non-Attachment in terms of the Savior's teachings, our feeling "heavy laden" and "burdened" is a result of being overly controlled by our attachments to what we think will meet our needs and desires and our avoidance of what we believe gets in the way of these needs and desires. Buddhism's Four Noble Truths place this Attachment/Aversion complex at the core of its diagnosis of human suffering and its prescription for how to be free from it.²¹ Attachment and aversion also comprise two of the five obstacles to unity with God detailed in Yogic literature and referred to as the *Klaysh*.²²

Western minds usually cringe or even scoff at the notion that Non-Attachment is a good thing, much less a core spiritual principle. When we hear the term, many of us immediately think of all the people and things we love and enjoy to which we are deeply attached. We think to ourselves, "Life

Attachment comes in two basic forms: (1) attachment to specific outcomes of our actions and desires; (2) attachment to people, things, and situations. Aversion is simply the flip side of attachment since we resist those people, things, and situations that get in the way of the ones we want. Most of us function according to the pleasure/pain principle as we seek and cling to what we believe is pleasurable or beneficial and try to avoid what we perceive as painful or undesirable. It's easy to see in children. We do the same things as adults, but in a more sophisticated garb. Mature and responsible people will sacrifice lesser pleasures and desires for more noble ones, but it is still the same game. In the big picture, attachment is a very limiting and narrow way to live. It results in feeling heavy laden and burdened since we are typically at the mercy of people and events in the external world in spite of our best efforts to be in control. Very few of us, if any, are able to become attached to enough "good" people, things, and situations or to be able to avoid enough "bad" people, things, and situations to feel complete, whole, satisfied, and at rest (peace). The principle of Non-Attachment teaches that even if we are successful in attaching only to the most desirable people and things, this "success" comes with built-in fear, for there is always the possibility of their loss. The contemporary mystic, Eckhart Tolle comments on this problem:

You can never make it on the level of form. You can never quite arrange and accumulate all the forms that you think you need so that you can be yourself fully. Sometimes you can do it for a brief time span. You can suddenly find everything working in your life: Your health is good; your relationship is great; you have money, possessions, love, and respect from other people. But before long, something starts to crumble here or there, either the finances or the relationship, your health or your work or living situation. It is the

nature of the world of form that nothing stays fixed for very long—and so it starts to fall apart again. . . Watch the clouds. They will teach you about the world of form.²⁴

In the East, the concept of Non-Attachment is viewed positively since it refers to the ability to find happiness beyond the play of pleasure and pain, because it points to a kind of happiness rooted in something deeper than the world of form.²⁵ Also, practitioners of Non-Attachment know that being non-attached does not mean that you don't care, don't assume responsibility, nor ignore the needs and feelings of others. As discussed later, Non-Attachment is actually the basis for true love, true compassion, and truly righteous behavior since we come to operate from a divine point of reference in contrast to one embroiled in the endless churning of human desire and need that seldom, if ever, allows us to escape self-interest in even our most noble efforts.

DID JESUS TEACH the principle and practice of Non-Attachment? Why not ask the rich young ruler described in Matthew, who, though he had kept all the commandments, asked Jesus what he still lacked in order to attain eternal life. Jesus replied, "If you want to be perfect [whole, complete], go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Matthew 19:16–22, NKJV). The young man went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. He had great attachments, and his attachments were so great he preferred to cling to them rather than to receive the perfection and treasure in heaven that Jesus promised.

Did Jesus teach the principle and practice of Non-Attachment for all of us? I think so, despite suggestions in church classes that Jesus' instruction to the rich young ruler was just a test for this particular person. A number of teachings of Jesus found in Gnostic Gospels or other extracanonical writings look like the Yogic philosophy of Non-Attachment. The same is true of the writings of many Christian mystics. But the principle of Non-Attachment is taught in many passages from the New Testament itself. The following is just a partial list:

- "If anyone wants to . . . take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also." (Matthew 5:40, 42, NKJV)
- "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19–21, NKJV)
- "[F]or one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Jesus then tells the story of a rich man who amasses great wealth and possessions so he can have many "years of ease" and so he can "eat, drink, and be merry." But when the man achieves what he desired, God takes his life and asks

him who now will have his material abundance. Jesus concludes, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:15–21, NKJV)

*Jesus is telling us not to be attached to possessions, treasures, and riches; anything that can be destroyed or stolen.*²⁶



- Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? . . . Therefore, do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear? (Matthew 6:25, 31, NKJV)

- If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. . . . If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. (Matthew 5:29–30, NKJV)

Jesus is telling us not to be attached to our bodies themselves nor to the sins to which the body is inclined.



- I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. . . And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. (Matthew 5:39, 41, NKJV)

- Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men to be seen by them. . . . When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting. (Matthew 6:1, 17–18, NKJV)

- But all their works they do to be seen by men. . . . They love the best seats at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues. . . . But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. . . . (Matthew 23:5–6, 11)

Jesus is telling us not to be attached to image, pride, reputation, position, and power.



- Do not worry about tomorrow. . . . (Matthew 6:34)

Jesus is telling us not to be attached to the future. This includes the desired outcomes of our behavior, as well as any dreams, fan-

tasies, or projected fears that divert our attention from living effectively in the present. Since Latter-day Saints are taught that laws and commandments produce specific desired outcomes (D&C 130:20–21), many Church members expect to control the future and secure the blessings they want by keeping particular commandments. Many lose their faith when the blessings don't occur or when tragedy enters their "commandment-protected" lives. A famous Yogic saying is, "Established in yoga, perform action." The meaning is that we should seek first to be in present union with God and then do our work accordingly, "without selfish attachments, and alike in success and defeat." (Bhagavad Gita 2:47–48)



- No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62)

Jesus is telling us not to be attached to the past. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors would go out of business if most people could eliminate their heavy burdens of unhealthy attachments to the pain and disappointments of their pasts. There are also those who are so unhappy with their present life situation that they suffer from a type of "Good Old Days" syndrome and look for happiness in pleasant past memories. Since spiritual unity with God (who lives in the eternal now) is a present-moment experience, attachment to both future and past divorces one from the inspiration and creativity of God's presence.



- If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. (Matthew 18:15, NKJV)
- If you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23–24, NKJV)
- If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14–15, NKJV)

Jesus is telling us not to be attached to anger, resentments, and offenses against us (victim mentality). These attachments disrupt unity with God and others, whether someone has sinned against us or someone thinks we have sinned against them.

The third passage states clearly that if we are unforgiving, we become unforgivable. Why? If we are attached and stuck, clinging to anger, resentment, and offenses, how can Heavenly Father bless us with the freedom that comes from the experience of forgiveness? In my dealings with people, it is clear to me that those who haven't experienced forgiveness and acceptance by God are unable to offer it to others. Since they do not feel acceptable to themselves and God, they need to hold others in a similar state of unacceptability, which means clinging to offenses and resisting the call to forgive.



- Judge not, that you be not judged. . . . Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? . . . Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:1–5, NKJV)

Jesus is telling us not to be attached to judgments, comparisons, and condemnations. Judging is often used to lift ourselves inappropriately or to exercise power over others. It disrupts personal spiritual growth and sabotages unity with others. I love Paul's words to the Corinthians: "Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? . . . For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But, they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. . . . For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends" (2 Corinthians 10:7, 12, 18, NKJV).



- He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:37–39, NKJV)

Jesus is telling us not even to be attached to our own family members! Jesus must have anticipated some distress with this attachment since he follows that statement with, "And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me." This is a particularly difficult one for Mormons to grasp for we are sealed (ultra attached) to our families for eternity.



In summary, Jesus asks us not to be attached to the following:

- Material possessions
- Our bodies and the life of the body
- Sin
- Image, pride, reputation, position, power
- The future
- The past
- Anger and resentments
- Judgments and comparisons
- Family members

SO WHAT IS it that burdens us and creates heaviness and suffering? Clearly, it's all of these things listed above. "Well, sure," you say. "If the Yoga of Christ means not being attached to these things, there seems to be no basis for burden and suffering. But wait! Not all of these things are bad in and of themselves! Many of the people, things, and situations in our lives bring satisfaction and happiness! Can't position and power be used to accomplish good? What's wrong with enjoying our material possessions? Yes, problems with family members can be tormenting, but these relationships are also deeply enriching. Non-Attachment might mean no burdens, but it also looks like it means no purpose, no accomplishments, and no happiness! Who wants to be a yogi in a cave with no job, no possessions, no family?²⁷ Where will we find meaning and happiness in life?"

Jesus answered all these questions with one simple perspective. We find what we are really looking for *in God*. He said we are to love God with *all* our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Did he mean we could go to church, pray, study scriptures, get 100 percent home teaching, and then go cling to our stuff? No. He said, "seek ye *first* the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33, *emphasis added*). And when asked by the Pharisees, who thought of the kingdom of God as an external thing, when it would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation: neither will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20–21). The answer isn't looking outside for good people and good things to cling to. The answer is found by looking inside where we experience the essence of our divine nature and the presence and fullness of God.

This solution is usually overlooked because of our external attachments. Once we seek and find wholeness in this inner kingdom, then Jesus says, "all these things (the potentially good things or proper application of the things listed above) shall be added to you." This phrase "shall be added to you" is contrary to the indulgent idea that we can do our spiritual things and *then* go dive into our attachments. Instead, it supports the perspective that once we are established in wholeness (the inner kingdom) then the people, things, and situations we need or would enjoy for mortal living will flow to us in a natural way. Commenting on this principle, Daya Mata, Yogananda's successor, said, "It is a most beautiful way to live. Everything you need, you find in Him. When you seek him first, so many blessings are given without your even desiring them."²⁸

This perspective is in harmony with the "taking up our cross" statement in Matthew 16:24–26:

If anyone desires to come after me, let him *deny* himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? (*emphasis added*)

We assume that when Jesus says we should "deny" ourselves, he is talking only about sinful things. But he is really talking about the whole world of external attachment! In the context of properly "counting the cost" of becoming his disciple, Jesus states: ". . . Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33, NKJV). When Jesus says, "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life . . . will find it," what is he referring to? When you meet someone new and ask questions to learn about their lives, how do they respond? They list their particular collection of attachments to people, things, places, and situations. A Yogic interpretation of this phrase would be "whoever desires to save his collection of attachments will lose his core spiritual nature, and whoever loses his collection of attachments will find his core spiritual nature."

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Mormons usually associate impurity with immorality, but that is only one kind of attachment. Something is impure when it has become mingled with any other element from the outside, even if that element might be considered "good" in another context. Spiritual purity is the result of surrendering our external attachments. This purity opens up an awareness that allows us to see God, which helps us to see through his eyes and to love with his heart.

The Bhagavad Gita states:

The devotee whose mind is disciplined, who moves in the world with the senses controlled and is free from attachments and aversions, is established in tranquility. That purity of spirit removes all sorrow. That devotee is soon firmly established in permanent peace. (Bhagavad Gita 2:64–65)

Jesus leads us to find our peace, fullness, wholeness, happiness, and satisfaction only *in God*. Once that is established, our desires and relationships with people, things, and situations change radically in two ways. First, since we are complete (perfect) in God, anything ungodly becomes undesirable and unnecessary. Doctrine and Covenants 20:22 states that Jesus "suffered temptations but gave no heed to them." Why not? When there is no need, there is no heed. When we are established in something other than God, we have many needs and often give heed to anything we think will give us relief in the moment but which later typically proves to be burdensome. We take on many yokes looking for relief and end up crushed under the weight.

Second, anything good in the people, things, and situations of our lives now becomes an avenue for the expression of God's purposes and love rather than being used for our narrower desires and needs. As explained by the yogi Brijendra, Non-Attachment is not trying to become detached from something, but rather being so fulfilled in our relationship with God



PROVIDENCE LITHOGRAPH COMPANY, 1899



“You can never make it on the level of form. You can never quite arrange and accumulate all the forms that you think you need so that you can be yourself fully. Sometimes you can do it for a brief time span. . . . It is the nature of the world of form that nothing stays fixed for very long—and so it starts to fall apart again. . . . Watch the clouds. They will teach you about the world of form.” —Eckhart Tolle



Reconsider the famous words of Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Jesus taught this lesson over and over.

that we feel less neediness and dependency on outside forms (people and things) and situations for our well-being.²⁹

In this context, re-consider the famous words of Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Jesus taught this lesson over and over. He told the Samaritan woman at the well that he would give her "living water" and that she would never thirst again (John 4:10–14). In Capernaum, Jesus chided those whom he had miraculously fed the day before for following after him for more food! He then offered himself as the bread of life and promised that they would never hunger again if they would eat his flesh and drink his blood, which he defined as them dwelling in him and him dwelling in them (John 6:27–58). What did he mean? Certainly they would become hungry and thirsty and require food and drink for their bodies. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Ravi Ravindra explains that

the knowledge of the Son, and the belief in his name, in the Gospel, means a participation in the being of Christ; this is conveyed concretely by an invitation to eat his flesh and to drink his blood, so that a disciple will become of one substance with him.³⁰

Clearly, the only thing Jesus could have meant was that having soul satisfaction from divine indwelling, they would no longer be dependent on external attachments to meet core needs.

Our attachments reflect our self-centeredness and spoil the expression of divine purpose and love. I think it is fair to say that 90 percent of most people's prayers revolve around their external attachments. As long as we have a sense of neediness, there will always be an element of getting and using as opposed to serving. This is easy to see when it comes to money, things, image, and positions of power but harder to grasp when it comes to that most difficult attachment: our loved ones. Western culture is full of romantic notions about deep attachments to one's beloved. These are often expressed in phrases such as, "I need you," "I can't live without you," and "Life has no meaning or joy without you." In twenty years of marriage counseling, I met many couples who "needed" and "had to have" the other and who alternated between moments of happiness and bitter conflict and disappointment. When I took them back to the point of their initial passionate attraction to and desire for the other and asked why they "needed" the other, their answers always reflected selfish interests: "She made *me* happy." "He made *me* feel loved and secure." What happened after that to cause these couples to experience conflict? As time passed, life became more complicated, weak-

nesses and flaws surfaced, and they each felt the other had stopped meeting their needs. The result was blame, anger, and resentment.

Little in these stories reflects real love. These couples are examples of using one another to meet personal needs and desires. But what if one's needs and happiness were complete in God? Then a spouse's problems, failures, weaknesses, and limitations would not be as threatening. He or she would be easier to accept and love in spite of imperfections. Rather than becoming wrapped up in disappointment and resentment from being attached to our spouse's having to be a certain way so we can be happy, we could step back, look at our spouse from God's perspective and offer the kind of love that would empower our beloved to put away imperfections. Non-Attachment opens space for love to really work!

Although I have always been committed to my children's healthy development, most of the parenting mistakes I made had to do with my need for them to be and to act a certain way—all of which stemmed from my attachment to the image of being seen as a good and successful parent. That attachment only reflected a hole in me, one that often caused my children to feel unacceptable if they weren't meeting my needs. When that hole was filled with God's love and presence, they became wonderful whether they were currently meeting my needs and desires or not. I became free from the burden of expectation, and as a result, they became free from the burden of judgment, making the pure love of Christ a more real possibility. Wanting to be a good and successful parent is not a bad thing in itself, but attachment to that ideal or to a rigid map for our children's life course can narrow our view of their needs or unique gifts. Real love detaches from preconceived notions and allows for endless, wonderful possibilities. It is the key for finding perfect love in imperfect relationships.

A MYSTICAL INTERPRETATION of two core scriptural events can help clarify the context for Jesus' Yoga of Non-Attachment. The first is the Adam and Eve story, and the second is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In each of the stories, the key elements are Spirit, Nakedness, and Ego.

Our original state as Adam and Eve in Eden represents our core identity as spirit children made in the image of God.³¹ When we partake of mortality (the fruit) and our spirit nature is encased in flesh, we identify with our bodies and minds, particularly in comparison with the world around us, and realize we are naked. Both the Bible and the Book of Mormon use the word "nakedness" metaphorically. Consider the following passages:

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may *be clothed*, that the shame of your *nakedness* may not be revealed. . . . (Revelation 3:18, NKJV. This counsel was given to the "lukewarm" church at Laodicea)

Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our *nakedness*;

and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, *being clothed* with purity, yea, even the robe of righteousness. (2 Nephi 9:14)

For behold, when ye shall be brought to see your *nakedness* before God. . . and the holiness of Jesus Christ, it will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you. (Mormon 9:5)

Our “nakedness” is the awareness of our weaknesses, sins, foibles, flaws, fears, neediness, and vulnerabilities that we feel in our body/mind-identified state. This sense of nakedness generates a need for self-protection. What did Adam and Eve do when they felt weak and vulnerable? They hid. They covered themselves. And they blamed whomever and whatever they could.

In our state of nakedness, we do the same three things. We cover and hide behind an assortment of psychological defense mechanisms (such as denial, projection, repression), and when all else fails and we become exposed anyway, we claim that it's not our fault. Some other person or life circumstance is the culprit. Most of us fight ferociously to keep from being exposed, and this struggle for cover leads to the development of an Ego—a life story, a social mask that explains away our weaknesses and fears while accentuating particular strengths, associations, possessions, and sources of power or control.³² When these fail and our nakedness is in danger of being exposed, we often distract ourselves by turning to sinful activities to compensate, manipulate, or dominate. Others can't see our nakedness if we scare them away. On either side of this equation, separateness and individuality are accentuated and the spiritual ideal of unity is undermined.³³

All of these things, good and bad, are our attachments, and they are always attachments to something in the external world. Even mental images and emotional states that we usually consider to be internal are part of the external world since they are outside of our essential nature as pure spirit. A few people intentionally expose themselves in order to shock others, knowing that most will turn away and not look. Some craft victim identities out of their nakedness in the hope that someone else will cover them. In most cases, our attachments work fairly well, especially when they are honorable and respectable and even spiritual. Being a “good” or a “spiritual” person is the ultimate cover-up, something Deepak Chopra refers to as “spiritual materialism.”³⁴ Jesus is not impressed by the “spiritual materialistic” cover-up. In Matthew 7:21–23, Jesus rejects those who have “done many wonderful works” in his name but never experienced the intimacy of “knowing” him.

The problem with covering nakedness, whether with good or evil, is that it is ongoing, labor-intensive, and stressful because our nakedness is always lurking just below the surface. We soon feel “heavy laden” and “burdened” due to all the Ego stuff we have piled up. Worst of all, we become so lost in a forest of defense mechanisms and covered over by our stories about ourselves and others that we lose connection with our and others' divine nature. According to Yogic philosophy, we



Our spiritual experiences are windows into the true nature of our being. They offer a taste of the kingdom of God within.

suffer primarily as the result of our attachments to false ideas about God, ourselves, and others. We suffer because we are not living in harmony with our true nature. And the big secret is that we are not really naked after all!

A brief meditation: Stop reading, and recall a time when you had a profound spiritual experience. What were the qualities and characteristics of that experience?

As I have asked people this question over the years, the following responses have been prevalent:

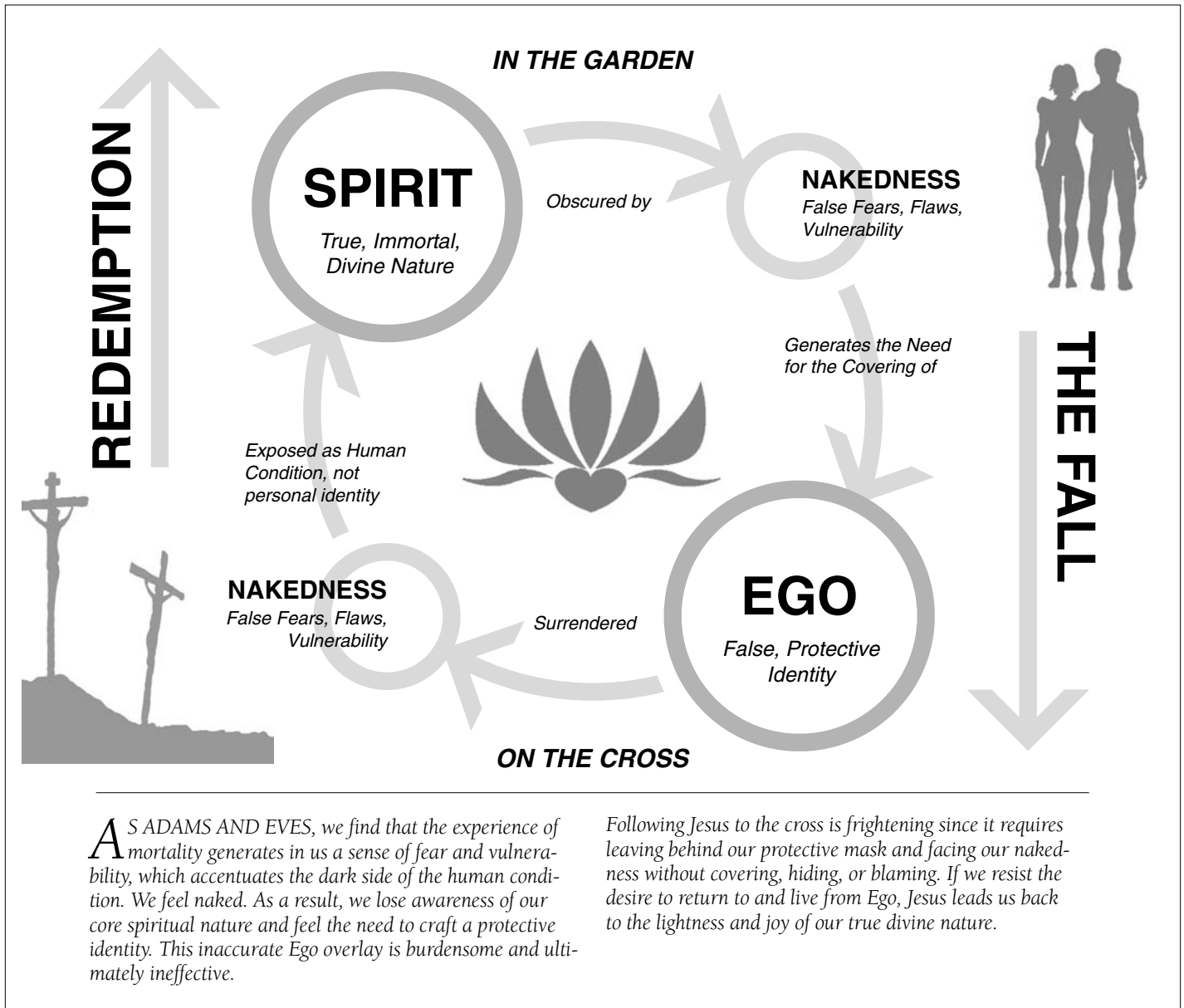
- Enveloping feelings of peace, love, and joy
- No fear, no needs
- No desire to do evil but only to do good
- Problems and worries seem external and unimportant
- Absence of hard feelings toward others
- A sense that forgiveness could be offered even to those who have seriously injured me
- A sense of wholeness, completeness, and satisfaction
- A sense of oneness with God, self, others, and creation
- A sense of lightness

Can you see how these qualities are the exact opposite of nakedness? Our spiritual experiences are windows into the true nature of our being. They offer a taste of the kingdom of God within which Jesus said we should be seeking. Most people think of spiritual experiences as being touched by something divine from the outside; they think that the wonderful qualities and characteristics listed above are external. What is truly external is the sense of nakedness that we try to escape from by running to and hiding in Ego games.

The truth is we are not weak, vulnerable, afraid, and flawed. We have experienced these qualities outside of Eden, and unfortunately we have identified with them and made them real. But identification with our spiritual nature is the ultimate reality. Satan's role in the Garden is to use fear to point out nakedness and embroil us in a lifelong, burdensome, cover-up. Jesus' role is to use love to point out our innate divinity, which liberates us from worldly burdens.

The way of the cross reverses the pattern established in Eden and is more about surrender than suffering (see diagram, next page). Jesus did not live in a state of Nakedness and Ego. He lived according to his true spirit nature. However, his body became our Nakedness and Ego. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus surrendered Ego: “Not my will, but Thine, be done” (Luke 22:42)

Is suffering involved? Yes—at first. We are determined to seek for salvation our way, clinging to our attachments and trying to force things to work according to our understanding



in spite of the burdens these create. Surrender, like Non-Attachment, is another concept Western minds resist, but resistance or non-surrender only strengthens Ego function and takes us away from the flow of God's will and peace.³⁵ The day after his surrender of Ego in Gethsemane, Jesus allowed his body (now representing our Nakedness and Ego) to be nailed to the cross. In this, he taught us three crucial lessons.

The first is that we must deny our Ego attachments and nail them to the cross with the body of Jesus. Even though part of the shame of crucifixion was being hung up naked before all, we tend to cover the nakedness of Jesus in our images (paintings, icons) and in our minds. We do it instinctively. It's part of our cover/hide/blame survival programming. But in Christ's allowing his nakedness to be displayed, we learn the second lesson: nakedness is not to be feared. Jesus exposed the fallacy that our fears, flaws, and vulnerability are reality, revealing that they are simply characteristics of the overall human condi-

tion.³⁶ The exposure of our nakedness will not destroy us but open the way to spiritual unity.

Finally, Jesus commended his spirit into his Father's hands (Luke 23:46). We follow him by giving up our covering, hiding, and blaming and putting them on the cross. We stand naked and unafraid before God and the world and commend ourselves into the Father's hands, at which point, we learn the third and final lesson: Those loving hands will clothe us in our true identity as spiritual beings made in His image. As this happens, the qualities and characteristics of a spiritual experience become a permanent state of being.

Jesus' objective is not just to make Ego and Nakedness burdens lighter nor to help us hold them up. His mission is to assist us in giving up our burdens of body/mind identification, Ego/Nakedness strategies, and subjection to a pleasure/pain orientation. Christ's Yoga is to detach us from these and to help us assume his only attachment, the love of God, and to know

the “light burden” of rest in our true nature. In this way, we discover the “kingdom within” and become liberated from binding, external attachments. In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord says, “I am easily attained by the person who always remembers me and is attached to nothing else. Such a person is a true yogi” (Bhagavad Gita 8:14–15). Daya Mata offered this encouragement: “Above all, as I urge you again and again, develop love for God. Hunger for just one attachment—to God.”³⁷

BOTH JESUS AND the yogis taught that understanding and being able to live this yoga of Non-Attachment can come only from deep communion with God. The entire Gospel of John is devoted to the concept that Jesus was able to accomplish his life-changing, world-changing mission only because of his oneness with the Father: “He that sent me is with me” (John 8:29). To eat his flesh and to drink his blood is to partake of the nature and presence of the Father. This spiritual communion completely satisfies and results in fulfillment and peace (John 6:56, 35; John 16:33).

Jesus spent substantial time alone in prayer. Prayer in its richest manifestation is pure communion with God. Meditation is the yogi’s preferred method of spiritual communion. The Ego and Nakedness concepts I have used are spoken of in the Yogic literature as lower functions of the mind and as barriers to spiritual communion. The Bhagavad Gita explains: “It is true that the mind is restless and difficult to control. But it can be conquered . . . through regular (meditation) practice and detachment” (Bhagavad Gita 8:35). Yogananda shares these perspectives:

Transparency to truth is cultivated by freeing the consciousness, the heart’s feeling and the mind’s reason, from the dualistic influences of attraction and aversion. Reality cannot be accurately reflected in a consciousness ruffled by likes and dislikes, with their restless passions and desires. . . . But when . . . human knowing and feeling is calmed by meditation, the ordinary agitated ego gives way to the blessed calmness of soul perception.³⁸

A true yogi is a practitioner of real renunciation (non-attachment), even if he lives in the world and to outer appearances looks like any ordinary person of the world. . . . Have God-contact first through meditation; and then through attachment to God, the attachment to material objects will drop away. . . . The physical austerities of renunciation (non-attachment) alone without the yoga of God-union are unnecessarily arduous.³⁹

In another classic Yogic text, the Katha Upanishad, which also predates the New Testament by hundreds of years, we read, “Like the sharp edge of a razor, the sages say, is the path. Narrow it is, and difficult to tread.”⁴⁰ In almost the same words, Jesus said, “Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way . . . and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:14, NKJV). This teaching reminds me of Jesus’ concluding statement in Matthew 19:24, after the rich young ruler was unable to give

up his many possessions and walked away from Jesus and the promise of perfection (wholeness) and treasure in heaven: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” The “rich” man symbolizes any person laden with external attachments and points out the impossibility of trying to enter the “inner” kingdom of God so overburdened.

Jesus is asking us to follow him and to practice his yoga of communion with God and Non-Attachment, which enables us to easily pass through the narrowest gate and the eye of the smallest needle into the “inner” kingdom which expands into the fullness of the universal kingdom of God. This yoga means immersing ourselves in spiritual communion, which weakens the false identifications of Ego and Nakedness, along with their burdensome attachments and aversions, and restores the awareness of our divine nature. That awareness leads us deeper into our communion with the Father. In that holy presence, we are baptized in fire; our false ideas about God, ourselves, and others, as well as any ungodly desires, behaviors, and other barriers to loving like Christ, are consumed. This is followed by an unfolding of our innate divine qualities so that our relationships, activities, and possessions become expressions of divine nature and love. Then is the prayer of Jesus fulfilled: “that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:22–23).

I think Yogananda is correct: the core spiritual teachings of East and West are in harmony. “Original yoga” and “original Christianity” are joined by the yoke or yoga of Christ. Oneness with God, or the state of yoga, is the light burden Christ offers to us.

“Practice my yoga, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” ☸

NOTES

1. Today, I have experienced a reversal of this, in that the person of Christ is now my guiding influence instead of a list of principles.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1966), 129.
3. Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 10.
4. Philip G. McLemore, “Mormon Mantras: A Journey of Spiritual Transformation,” *SUNSTONE*, April 2006, 20–31.
5. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1988), 481.
6. In the words of Roy Eugene Davis, my meditation teacher and a direct disciple of Yogananda: “At the deepest level of your being, you are pure, whole, and serene. It is only the surface of your awareness that can be modified or fragmented.” Roy Eugene Davis, *Guidelines to Inspired Living* (Lakemont, Georgia: CSA Press, 2006), 5.
7. Mormonism has elements of both the Christian (deficiency) and Yogic (wholeness) models. Mormonism’s dual perspective that human beings are literally the children of Heavenly Parents imbued with divine nature, and also carnal, sensual, and devilish, creates conflicting interpretations. A few LDS authors have leaned heavily toward the divine nature side and have taught that the carnal, sensual, and devilish characteristics are elements of the human condition layered over one’s divine nature, similar to the Yogic view. For instance, in Allan Bergin’s book, *Eternal Values and Spiritual Growth*, he writes: “Understanding your personal identity requires knowing that underneath your outward personality is a unique, indestructible, spiritual core. . . . ‘Mortal overlay’. . . is the unique, complex set of characteristics that covers or overlays our spiritual selves during earthly life. It is the

combined physical body and mortal mind with all their positive and negative features acquired through biology, genetics, and life experience. . . . When we are born, our eternal identities are obscured by a veil. . . . between the physical world and the spiritual world. . . . [E]ach person has a brilliant inner core that is obscured by a mortal overlay." See Allan Bergin, *Eternal Values and Spiritual Growth* (Provo: BYU Studies, 2002) 27, 29.

Despite wonderful exceptions such as this, in my thirty-seven years of adult Church membership, my experience has been that the predominant teaching is that we have elements of both the divine and the diabolical at our core, and that our faithfulness and choice-making determine which one will prevail throughout eternity. Most Mormon preaching related to repentance and change of heart assumes deficiency. In my view, a loving God would never stop working with his children to bring them into a state of divine unity and wholeness (perfection) if they were capable. The fact that Mormon scripture places individuals into a lower kingdom with the edict that "where God and Christ dwell they cannot come, worlds without end" (D&C 76:112) is a statement about the eternal deficiency of a group of people "as innumerable as the stars."

8. Was Jesus endorsing the Yogic point of view when he uttered the famous words cited in Luke 23:34, "Forgive them Father; for they know not what they do?"

9. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ* (Los Angeles: Self Realization Fellowship, 2004), 936.

10. Others have also noted that Jesus' teachings seem to have more affinity with Eastern spiritualities than the Jewish tradition from which Jesus emerged and the culture in which he taught. The following is the text of a footnote commentary found on page 949 of Yogananda's *The Second Coming*:

In *The Vision of God* (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1932), Dr. Kenneth E. Kirk, Anglican bishop of Oxford, points out that Jesus' ideals of renunciation were not derived from traditional Jewish teachings:

The ascetic outlook of the Gospels is seen to stand out of any recognizable relation with contemporary Judaism. The passages about turning the other cheek, about taking no thought for the morrow, about laying up no treasure on earth, about forsaking parents and possessions, about bearing the Cross are foreign to the genius of the [Jewish] race.

Though Bishop Kirk concludes that the historical origins of these teachings are something of a mystery, other historians relate them to evidence of Jesus' link with India.



According to the tests, it's not water you are retaining.
You're holding a grudge.

The distinguished scholar (and former president of India) Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan writes in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (Oxford University Press, 1939): "In his teaching of the Kingdom of God, life eternal, ascetic emphasis, and even future life, Jesus Christ breaks away from the Jewish tradition and approximates to Hindu and Buddhist thought. Though his teaching is historically continuous with Judaism, it did not develop from it in its essentials."

11. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1976), 1:512.

12. Each of these is detailed in the Bhagavad Gita, a classic Yogic text of which many translations are available. The translation I use and quote from in this article is: Eknath Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita Translated for the Modern Reader* (Tamales, California: Nilgiri Press, 1985).

13. A good explanation of this can be found in Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1953), 40.

14. Hatha Yoga, the practice of postures for balance, strength, and flexibility, is one of the components of Raja Yoga that was designed to prepare one for meditation and direct communion with God.

15. Paramahansa Yogananda, "How to Use Thoughts of Immortality to Awaken Your True Self," *Self Realization*, vol. 77, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 11.

16. In Matthew 25:12, the virgins with oil (those who were not impure from worldly intercourse and who were rooted in spiritual communion) were those whom God "knew." This deeper "knowing" is the result of a mature relationship beyond parent/child.

17. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming* (Los Angeles: Self Realization Fellowship, 2004), 364.

18. Evagrius Ponticus was a Desert Father who left his monastery for the Egyptian desert in 383 A.D. Father Laurence Freeman, a Benedictine monk, gave the following description of Evagrius's concept of prayer: "Prayer itself is the absence of all thoughts, even pure thoughts. . . . Pure prayer itself, he says, is like Moses who takes off his shoes when he approaches the burning bush. So we must leave thoughts behind, take our thoughts off, if we are to see the One who is beyond every thought and every perception." See Laurence Freeman, OSB, *All and Nothing: Following the Tradition of Meditation from the Desert Fathers and John Cassian to John Main*, six audiocassettes (London: Medio Media, 1993).

19. "Learning to Pray: An Interview with Roberta C. Bondi," originally published in *The Christian Century*, 20–27 March 1996; available online at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=302> (accessed 2 May 2007).

20. Many Yogic and Buddhist writers use the terms "detachment" or "non-attachment" according to personal preference. Since the concept to which both terms refer has a built-in negative association to Westerners, I prefer "non-attachment" since it has a softer feel.

21. There are many translations of the Four Noble Truths. One I like is:

1. Life means suffering
2. The origin of suffering is attachment
3. The cessation of suffering is attainable.
4. There is a way leading to the cessation of suffering.

The way mentioned here is the Eightfold Path, which is: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. In this context, "right" does not refer to one specific way, but to a balanced and appropriate application.

22. The five *Klaysh* are seen as responsible for human suffering, uneasiness, and lack of satisfaction. They are:

1. Ignorance of one's true identity
2. Self-centeredness and a sense of separateness from God, others, and creation
3. Attachment to pleasure
4. Aversion to pain
5. Fear of death.

See Chapter 2, verse 3 of the classic Yogic text, *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, which is available in many different translations. Fear of death is a result of attachment to and identification with those things which are temporary.

23. The quintessential story used by yogis and Buddhist monks to illustrate the problem of attachment is the technique once used to catch monkeys in South India:

One takes a coconut and makes a hole in it, just large enough that a monkey can squeeze its hand in. Next, the coconut is tied down, and a sweet put inside. The monkey smells the sweet, puts his hand into the coconut, grabs the sweet, and because the hole is so small, he cannot get his fist out. The monkey doesn't consider letting go of the sweet, so it is

literally tied down by its own attachment. Often the monkeys only let go when they fall asleep or become unconscious because of exhaustion.

24. Eckhart Tolle, *Eckhart Tolle's Findhorn Retreat* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2006), 16.

25. It is obvious that for a human being to develop in a healthy and balanced fashion, a child needs to experience secure and appropriate attachments to people, places, and things. Children who do not form these connections are prone to psychological and emotional problems. We can transcend attachments and their limitations once a healthy personality has developed. This transition is reflected in the move from a Parent/Child relationship to a Bride/Groom relationship with God.

Many of my hospice patients express the anger and anguish of a sense of losing themselves, since each week seems to bring a new loss. They have lost or are in the process of losing their ability to work and to enjoy hobbies and interests. They have lost friends and family members. Their health, independence, and ability to care for themselves, along with their privacy and dignity, are ebbing away. Many have had to give up homes and lifelong possessions. The patients who suffer the most are those who have placed their identity and sense of being in these external things. My job is to help them reconnect with the part of them that is unchanging and eternal, the part that is beyond the world of form they are used to controlling. In my follow-up work with family members, I have discovered that those who experience unhealthy and unresolved grief are those who have persistent, inappropriate attachments. These are horrible burdens.

26. The tag on a Yogi Tea Bag came with the following aphorism, which captures this idea perfectly: "True wealth is the ability to let go of your possessions."

27. Although there are yogic, Buddhist, and Christian renunciates/monks who give up all possessions and family relationships to seek and serve God, Yogananda, who himself was a celibate monk, states: "The corollary of outer renunciation is the non-attachment of inner renunciates" (Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ*, 949). He does not believe that outer renunciation (the life of a monk) is necessary to attain the state of yoga (with God) but that inner renunciation (non-attachment) for either monks or "householders" is essential.

28. Daya Mata, "Spiritualizing Your Everyday Thoughts to Make Meditation Easier," *Self Realization* 78, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 22. An interesting sidenote about Daya Mata that relates to Mormonism: After Yogananda was in America a while, Yogananda heard that Mormons were devilish people who actually had stubby horns on their heads. Yogananda said, "I have to see this for myself." Accordingly, he came to Salt Lake City in 1931 to give a series of public lectures. He later reported that the stories told to him about Mormons were untrue and that he found the Mormon people to be good and reverent.

A young Mormon girl from Salt Lake City named Faye Wright attended his lectures, became convinced Yogananda was a man who really "knew God," and became a celibate nun in his monastic order. She received the monastic name of Daya Mata, meaning "mother of compassion." She later served as Yogananda's personal secretary for more than twenty years, and in 1955, became the president of his worldwide organization, "Self Realization Fellowship." Daya Mata holds that position today at age 93.

29. Brijendra, *The Essence of Patanjali Yog Sootras Course* (Boca Raton, Florida: Transformation Meditation, 2003), 34.

30. Ravi Ravindra, *The Gospel of John in the Light of Indian Mysticism* (Richester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2004), 199.

31. Another way of seeing Adam and Eve in the Garden is through the lenses of the LDS teaching about our pre-Earth lives. Adam and Eve's qualities are the same as what we are taught about spirit children in the pre-existence. If we follow this a bit further, Eden can be seen as the pre-existence, and partaking of the fruit as our decision to come to earth.

32. Although Yogic literature details the proper and ideal functions of body, mind, and ego, they are usually dealt with in a negative context—as things that need to be put away to unveil our divine nature. Body, mind, and ego can be reference points for God's love but only if they are our servants. Usually they are our masters.

Most of us are aware of the ways we use exaggeration and distortion to maintain an image. For instance, my home teacher, who played football in high school, remarked that he becomes a better player as each year passes.

Deepak Chopra contrasts Ego and Spirit:

Behind the curtain of your intellect and emotions is your self-image or ego. The ego is not your real self; it is the image of yourself that you have slowly built over time. It is the mask behind which you hide, but it is not the real you. And because it is not the real you, but a fraud, it lives in fear. It wants approval. It needs to control. . . . The world of ego is time-bound, temporary, fragmented, fearful, personal, self-centered, self-absorbed, and attached to the known. The world of spirit is time-

less and eternal, free of past and future, whole, joyful, open, and accessible to all . . . undivided, unshakable, dynamic creative, self-sufficient, powerful, and free of limitation, expectation, and attachment.

Deepak Chopra, *Power, Freedom, and Grace* (San Rafael, California: Amber-Allen Publishing, 2006), 81, 85.

33. Ego takes two forms: (1) soothing stories to cover nakedness; and (2) resistance and resentment that accentuate our individuality and separateness. The classic two-year-old armed with his battle cry of "no" signals the firm rooting of Ego.

Much like the comment on attachment in note 25, human beings need to develop a healthy, appropriate ego to even be capable of spiritual growth. That's why therapy and psychological work are needed for many to move on to greater spiritual development. Since even a balanced and healthy ego has limitations, once established, it needs to be transcended for deeper spiritual unity with God.

34. Deepak Chopra, *The Book of Secrets* (New York: Harmony Books, 2004), 49.

35. Consider this perspective on surrender from Eckhart Tolle:

Surrender. . . does not mean to passively put up with whatever situation you find yourself in and to do nothing about it. . . Surrender is the simple but profound wisdom of yielding to rather than opposing the flow of life. . . . Non-surrender hardens your psychological form, the shell of the ego, and so creates a strong sense of separateness. The world around you and people in particular come to be perceived as threatening. . . [Y]our perceptions and interpretations are (then) governed by fear. . . Tension arises in different parts of the body, and the body as a whole contracts. The free flow of life energy through the body, which is essential for its healthy functioning, is greatly restricted. . . . If you find your life situation unsatisfactory or even intolerable, it is only by surrendering first that you can break the unconscious resistance pattern that perpetuates that situation. . . . Surrender reconnects you with the source-energy of Being (God). . . . No truly positive action can arise out of an unsundered state of consciousness."

Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now* (Novato, California: New World Library, 1999), 171–74.

We have the habit of defining ourselves in terms of what is *not* me, and so our "me story" cannot be sustained without opposition and resistance, which becomes a barrier to spiritual unity.

36. Tolle says, "Your own frustrating story is not your personal dilemma but the human condition, and you derived your sense of self from that which is nothing personal whatsoever. It's the human condition in its unconscious, unenlightened state. And that's what gave you your sense of personal selfhood and what you wanted to cling to!" (From the audio recording of Eckhart Tolle's *Findhorn Retreat* (New World Library, Sept 2005).

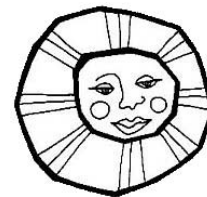
As we move from Eden to the cross and beyond, we experience the Atonement as detachment from Ego and Nakedness and a whole-souled attachment to God. In this process, any influence that creates fear and tries to get us to cover, hide, and blame as was done in Eden, should be met with Jesus' words from Matthew 16:23: "Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

37. Daya Mata, *Finding the Joy Within You* (Los Angeles: Self Realization Fellowship, 1990), 201.

38. Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ*, 440.

33. *Ibid.*, 769.

40. Katha Upanishad 1.3:14. Quoted in the Parabola Anthology Series, *The Inner Journey: Views from the Hindu Tradition* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2007), xi.



silent, the deacon
waits while his brother ponders
his choice of bread crumb

—ELIZABETH PETTY BENTLEY