

Kidding Around Yoga vs. Christian Theology

By Katie Rose

One thing I liked about KAY when I joined the family back in 2012 was I didn't feel forced to follow some new philosophy or change my religion. Sure, I learned about KAY's roots in Integral Yoga, the Science of Yoga, and so many valuable tools to share with a variety of students from all backgrounds. What I really learned most was a **method** of sharing yoga with children. The dictionary defines the word **method** as: *noun* "a particular form of procedure for accomplishing or approaching something, especially a systematic or established one." What I also learned is that yoga has been used as a method by people of all faith traditions worldwide in their pursuit of spiritual discipline, growth, and physical health. Integral Yoga, founded by Sri Swami Satchidananda, teaches peace and harmony between all faiths, and is NOT a faith, religion, or cult in itself. What does that really mean? It means, everyone based on their background views right and wrong, truth, peace, salvation, and afterlife through different filters. What may be right for one person may not apply to another because of differences in culture, religious upbringing, and personal values. Everyone who adheres strongly to a particular religion or discipline believes their way is the True path; if they didn't, they likely would not live their life governed by its principles. What Integral Yoga does is recognize all of those path choices and creates a community where all paths are welcome. We do not have to agree or conform to the various differences, and at the same time we offer respect for those differences. Within each faith there are concepts, guidelines, rules, and values which are universal. Sri Swami Satchidananda brings those universal concepts together in his teachings, offering guidance for employing the techniques of Raja Yoga, a discipline that can accompany any spiritual practice one chooses. He teaches, as we do at KAY, "Truth is one, paths are many."

Why Christians recoil when we talk about yoga:

First, this answer is not the final authority, merely the viewpoint of one yoga teacher who was raised as a preacher's kid in a Baptist home. I have spent countless hours researching and praying about how to use yoga to deepen my relationship with Christ, and how to better use this physical practice as a means of living a healthy lifestyle so my vessel can be of service to further the message and mission of Christ. The main reasons you will find for Christians rejecting yoga or specifically KAY are fear and misinformation/lack of knowledge. Many yoga professionals also respond or react to rejection from a place of their own fear and misinformation/lack of knowledge. No one wants to feel as if what they believe or practice is wrong or under attack. Hopefully this sheds some light.

Initially I looked at how yoga could be **compatible** with my life and belief in Christ. I learned a word while in my Yahweh Yoga training, **syncretism**. Syncretism is the mixing of different systems of belief and is never advised in the Bible. In fact, throughout Scripture, God tells us he is the one TRUE God and we shall have no other gods before him. For example, in the Old Testament Israel was told to be set apart, holy, and never mix faiths or worship other gods. As Christians, we are taught any practices are to be scrutinized by Scripture. Christians proclaim there is only one way to God—through acknowledgement, belief, and surrender to Christ. He is called The Way, The Truth, and the Life. Christians guard themselves with regards to being "open minded" or yoga practice from viewing Christ as just one of many acceptable ways to salvation/peace. 1 Timothy 2:5 says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Another thing they consider is slapping the word "Christian" on practices which actually deny Christ in their theology; this goes for endorsing such activities. This happens by offering a traditional yoga class in a Christian environment but not changing the substance of the offering. Christians don't believe all humans are divine, so statements like "Namaste (the divine light within me sees and honors the divine light within you—just one common translation)" can even be contradictory to their faith. Christians believe Christ is their center, the

governing teacher and sovereign Lord. I once had someone from within my faith community berate me for posting a photo from my trip to Camp Harmony with the caption “Peace Begins with Me.” Her argument was that peace begins and only comes from Christ. I responded with “One must ultimately **choose** Christ in order to receive that peace. Therefore, peace begins with a **choice** made by me.” They do not believe their souls seek release, transcendence or union, but instead seek **communion** with the Maker through the personal relationship with Christ. Beyond life in this world, a Christian’s hope is in eternal life with God.

How can we as KAY teachers speak from a place of understanding and bridge the gap, or walk away with grace when needed?

As KAY teachers, we practice a method more than a theology. In case you don’t know, our method is our class outline, aka, The Golden Ticket. So while some of the methods we teach are the same methods that other world religions employ, including Christians, it is the **theology** that sets them apart and makes them uniquely Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, etc. When talking with a Christian group or facility and meeting opposition, just focus on a few key things:

- **The beneficial physical (non-spiritual) elements:** stress relief, movements of the spine, cardio, improved focus, strength building, balance and coordination, mindfulness tools, behavior management, relaxation
- **The truly neutral nature of what we teach.** Our method is designed to include all beings, from all backgrounds, all ages, and all religions. This is not dissimilar from Christ in the concept of unity, who while some believe he only came for the Gentiles, came to teach and be a sacrifice for ALL mankind (unlimited atonement). Some Christians may forget this or even believe he only died for the sins of believers (limited atonement); you will not win with those in this category. Some scripture to affirm that Christians are actually *called* to support unity in humanity in order to further the mission of Christ rather than contradict it (for your info and in case you should encounter a scriptural battle of some sort):
 - Pointing to the idea of “all mankind, all nations, etc.”: 2 Cor. 5:14-16; 1 John 2:2; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 4:14; Psalms 22:27; Psalms 86:9; Isaiah 53:1-6
 - 1 John 3:18 says, “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” Whether the organization or individual you encounter is an example of this or not, we as KAY instructors can be.
- Remember, the tools we teach through Kidding Around Yoga help to cultivate and spread greater universal (and even Scriptural concepts) like peace, patience, kindness, self-control, joy, love, light, respect for others, truthfulness, contentment, gratitude, healthy living/caring for our bodies (as a temple), and the list goes on. If anything, our program will reinforce things children learn in their religious practices as well. Christians may not see it that way since they believe these virtues can only be obtained by the power of the Holy Spirit, through Christ. Others, may see it more openly. Denominations more **likely to be accepting:** Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, some Catholics, and possibly Methodists. Denominations with stricter adherence and **less wavering:** American Baptists, Southern Baptists, anything Free Will, Pentecostal, Church of Christ, Church of God.

Not everyone will hear you. Not everyone will see yoga as a science or a physical practice separate from its presumed religious origins. There will always be fear, misunderstanding, and unwillingness. There are countless scriptures and books we could study and explore. Know we are doing good work. I always say, we are teaching concepts some children may have never been exposed to if not for our classes. Who knows how that may change the trajectory of their lives, putting them on a path to a more peaceful, joyful way of being.

What it boils down to is we are teaching something helpful for people to live healthier, happier, more peaceful lives. So are many Christian churches (hopefully). If we can't be united in space usage or practice together, we can be united in one portion of each other's goals and wish one another well.

Sample response letter when you've been denied facility usage, consideration as an offering at a Christian school, daycare, etc.:

Dear (Recipient name),

I appreciate your time and consideration on this matter, and I'm sorry to hear you don't feel comfortable offering yoga to the children in your program at this time. At Kidding Around Yoga we love sharing Stress Management using yogic tools with children in our communities around the world, and in no way want our work to put a child, family, or school/program/daycare in a position of conflict with their theology. I respect your decision at this time, and if you should ever change your mind, I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this further and even tailor a yoga program to fit your specific needs and educational goals.

Respect and Regards,

(Instructor Name & Title)

(phone number)

(email address)

(website)