

away. If it is a real angel, it will understand. Let only the prayer exist: Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Don't imagine anything. Because what you will find through the keyhole, you can't imagine. It must be given to you."

"The heart is a vast realm," one wild-haired monk with the bearing of a joyful outlaw, told me as he passed through the monastery. "Enter it."

And the elder reminded us, "Love without martyrdom is like a kiss without love."

Meanwhile, I continued to dream of rubbing myself against everything in the monastery. Until finally: A certain spaciousness. A traveler in a space without other bodies. A quiet that comes when there isn't a city in sight. And somewhere out there in the bright darkness, as yet unknown to me, is the fullness of eros.

There is a famous story of a Christian monk who gazed on a prostitute from a pagan temple who was riding her horse through a square. When his brother monks turned away in horror, he said to them, "Does her beauty not astound you?" And when they drew back, scandalized, he asked again, "Does her beauty not astound you?"

The Holy Spirit is everywhere present and filling all things. God's act of creation is erotic, fecund, says Saint Dionysius. An outpouring of love overflowing itself. This is not only about the soul's yearning for God, but God's eros for all of creation.

Does her beauty not astound you? ■

The Yoga Remedy

BY DEBORAH COHEN

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graduated from Harvard College and Harvard Graduate School of Education. She runs an accredited yoga teacher training program and teaches sections for Harvard's "Positive Psychology" undergraduate class. She is involved with several research studies measuring the effects of yoga on schoolchildren.

MANY OF US WOULD FREELY admit to spending hours lost in the world of ideas, glued to a computer screen and keypad for hours at a stretch, and functioning as little more than disembodied heads. Cues from the rest of our biology are stoically pushed to the side so we can *just finish*. The mental pattern responsible for this phenomenon is reinforced until it becomes a default setting. We are helpless against its pull. However, practicing mindfulness disciplines such as yoga and meditation help us identify

and gain mastery over the patterning of our minds and bodies. In fact, it improves more than postural habits; it changes the very structure of the brain.

The proto-yogic ideas and practices of mindfulness, regulation of the breath, chanting and incantations, and shifts in states of consciousness can be traced back to 3,000–1,900 BCE in the Indus-Sarasvati civilization in what is now North India. However, hatha yoga, with its current emphasis on cultivating the body rather than concerning oneself with the metaphysical, is a more modern phenomenon. It derives from what Georg Feuerstein, a noted yoga historian, describes as the Siddha (meaning "accomplished" or "perfected") cult, which flourished between the eighth and twelfth centuries. Its aim was to cultivate an adamantine body that was capable of experiencing higher spiritual states. Today, many people practice yoga without any desire for psychospiritual change. The goal can be far more worldly than the original intent.

Many hatha yoga practitioners' goals range from losing weight to managing health concerns like back pain, diabetes, asthma, or infertility to cultivating more flexibility or improving posture. The primary appeal of yoga in mainstream culture is the manner by which it improves quality of life. This can be compared to an approach that recognizes yoga as a discipline whose ultimate aim is transcending ordinary life, but such a neat comparison is not accurate. Because spiritual experiences pepper our lives, because "spiritual" describes moments rather than people or fixed states, we do well to refrain from pitching tents around such experiences, holding on to them too tightly when it is time to move on. There is no need for condescension for those whose aims regarding yoga are moving them toward health and wellness and wholeness. The process of using the body as a tool to train the attention is powerful work. It bears fruit on many levels and "understanding yoga" comes along the way. One is always a beginner; the layers of subtlety are endless.

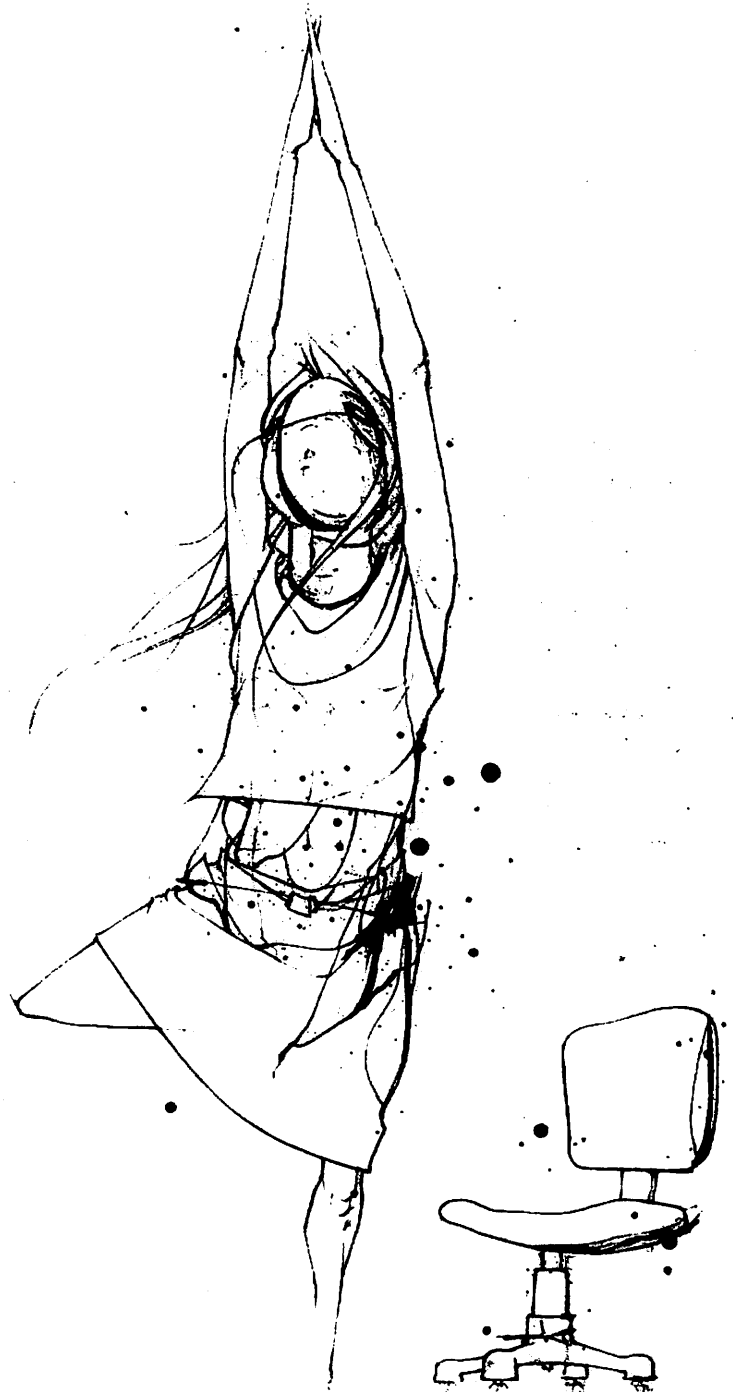
The mindfulness practices, where we tune in to what is happening while it is happening, without judgment or expectation, have been demonstrated to have beneficial effects on the physiology of the brain.

When we attune to our own body and mind, the effects in the brain are the same as when another tunes in to us. This experience of attunement is a human need, one that is necessary for the healthy emotional development of a child. A child whose mother is able to consistently attune to his or her thoughts and emotions is able to develop a secure attachment style, whereas a child lacking this experience becomes reactive in intimate connections with others. Fortunately, these mindfulness practices enable us to repattern the neural circuitry so that we can connect more fully with our own thoughts and feelings and to those of the people around us.

The opposite of this experience is when we go on automatic pilot, moving through our lives without really connecting, without experiencing the life of the senses, the life of the mind, and emotions in a fresh way. We "re-act," conceiving of our experiences based on past conditioning, making sense of events based on what we already know to be true. It is useful to the extent that it frees us to move more quickly and efficiently through the tasks set before us. However, if this is our only way of operating, then we become locked into experiencing the world according to our preconceived notions. We shut down and react based on our understandings of the past and because of the emotional charge of some of those events; we tend to repeat patterns over and over again. Mindfulness practices train the attention in order to enable us to experience our inner world and the world around us in a fresh way. They still the patterning of our consciousness. In this open, curious state, we are able to attune to ourselves and the world around us and open to new possibilities.

There are many people who draw a distinction between the life of the mind and the life of the body. There are aspects of our culture that encourage such an attitude. The working world receives positive reinforcement for sitting in chairs 8 to 12 hours a day, and our bodies wither, become brittle, and slump. Our culture overemphasizes technology, dismissing the value of human contact and the life of the senses, and our communication gets confused and lacks meaning. Rewards abound for those who can override the rhythms of the body for

the sake of productivity. Consistently, the message we receive and transmit to others is that doing trumps feeling. This is a dangerous strategy that leads to alienation and meaninglessness. Feeling leads to being grounded and connected to our sense of self. From there we can *do* much more effectively. How well are we able to pay attention to anything or anyone when the body does not allow for such attention because it is



2. This term describes what happens when the hypothalamus triggers the stress hormones, cortisol and epinephrine, to shift the body into a state of alert where heart rate, respiration, and blood sugar increase; digestion, the immune system, and reproductive system functioning are compromised; and muscle tension, or the tonus of the body, increases.

deprived of sleep, good nutrition, exercise, and conscious awareness?

What is important to understand is that the mind and body respond to one another. When one works with the body, to consciously relax it, there are shifts in thinking patterns and emotional states that accompany that relaxation. We are able to recognize when we are stuck in the physiological state often described as "the stress response."² Without conscious attention, many people's bodies and minds remain in the stress response instead of responding to a perceived threat with appropriate increased vigilance and then returning to a baseline relaxed state. When we live in that heightened state of alertness, experiencing chronic stress, or we shut down and collapse, never rising to appropriate levels of engagement, these two experiences manifest as anxiety and depression. In either case, the reaction is due to being unable to pull away from an unskillful thinking pattern.

The culprit is the speed of the thoughts. The remedy, then, is to slow down the thinking. Both seated meditation and hatha yoga are disciplines to effect that end. ■

Teflon Televangelists

BY MARK I. PINSKY

FAITH AND FORBEARANCE CAN sometimes be insurmountable barriers for religion journalists. When it comes to some true believers, I have learned, nothing you write that questions their idols seems to make any difference.

I have been covering Trinity Broadcasting Network and its flamboyant founders, Paul and Jan Crouch, for nearly two decades. During that time, I have chronicled and investigated the inexorable rise of the world's largest Christian media empire for newspapers on both coasts, in *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Orlando Sentinel*, as well as in chapters in several books.

My detailed exposés in the *Times* have included the Crouches' heavy-handed, corner-cutting, and even cutthroat dealings

with fellow Christians, as well as disputes between Trinity and the Federal Communications Commission and evangelical trade groups like the National Religious Broadcasters. In part because of my reporting, Trinity withdrew from the NRB, and was stripped of its Miami television affiliate because of what the FCC charged was misrepresentation of minority ownership.

I revealed dubious Trinity practices, like ordaining affiliate station managers (often Crouch relatives) in order for them to qualify for parsonage allowance tax breaks. Also, Paul Crouch's practice of cozying up to third world military dictators like Guatemala's Efraim Rios Montt, and puppets of the apartheid-era South African government, like General Bantu Holomisa of Transkei, in order to build television stations there.

I was not alone. Both cable and network news programs have also taken passes at Trinity, with no discernible result.³ In the end, none of this adverse publicity mattered. Nothing of this coverage has slowed Trinity's rise; we in the media huffed and we puffed and we did not blow their house down. Today, thanks to 67 satellites, Trinity spans the globe and is worth roughly one billion dollars.

There are outspoken critics of the huge salaries and lavish lifestyles of some preachers from within the evangelical community. "The opulent lifestyles of televangelists make me sick," said Rick Warren, who has returned all the salary he has ever taken from Saddleback Church, in Orange County, California. Warren accepts no speaking honoraria, and "reverse tithes," giving away 90 percent of the millions of dollars he has earned from his bestselling books, like *The Purpose Driven Life*. "I want to stay so far away from that stuff, that I've never personally met any of those folks, so they can't claim to know me."

But more than anything, it seems to me, my experience of covering the Crouches demonstrates the limits of journalism in matters of faith.

"Within conservative media ministries, criticism from outsiders often is seen as a badge of honor that validates a ministry's righteousness," said Quentin Schultze, author of *Christianity and the Mass Media in America*. "TV creates an especially strong,

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