

The Yoga of Jesus: Teachings of Esoteric Christianity



Mauri Lehtovirta

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Translated from Finnish into English by
Antti Savinainen

Edited by
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Preface to the English Edition

The Yoga of Jesus was published in Finnish in spring 2009. The text and title were already finished in January 2009 when I heard that there is a book compiled from Paramahansa Yogananda's writings having the same name in English. I didn't know at the time that we would translate the book into English for interested readers in the United States and elsewhere. The present work and Yogananda's book have only in common that they both comment on the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. It is interesting to note how close the interpretations coming from different traditions can be, as well as how sacred books can be opened with various keys, so to speak. It is also important to remember what Pekka Ervast (1875–1934), a Finnish Theosophist and expert on esoteric Christianity, advised: readers should delve into the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and find the interpretation that is closest to them. Ervast has been, and still is, an important spiritual teacher in Finland. He was an author who had deep insights into the meaning of Jesus's sayings. With great heart and wisdom, Ervast familiarized himself with the spiritual practices contained in the Sermon on the Mount; he probably was the first one in the world to talk about the changes that take place in those who follow Jesus's five commandments in their lives.

For the last thirty-five years, I have lived as an active truth seeker. I started to understand the deeper aspects of Christianity after I had a strong transformative experience thirty years ago. I have delivered lectures and written a great deal about it, and many times I've been asked whether I am planning to write another book. I have answered that I have no such plans: the system of spiritual development described in this book is enough for the rest of my life. Following the path taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is so demanding in practice that I'm quite certain that my lifetime is not enough to reach the goal. Seeking for truth, talking about spiritual matters, lecturing, and artistic performances in the form of music and songs have been important ways to

make spiritual knowledge and insights available to others. However, truth will begin to reveal itself only after we start applying it in everyday life, among people, as we make esoteric Christianity a touchstone of our lives.

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to Antti Savinainen and Richard Smoley for their diligent efforts to translate and edit *The Yoga of Jesus*, which has no doubt been a demanding process. Moreover, I wish to thank the Kulmakoulu Foundation, which has provided financial support for this project. It is my deepest hope that the teachings of *The Yoga of Jesus* will provide the reader's heart and mind with strength, joy, and light. I believe, and I know personally, that these teachings have the power to do so.

Mauri Lehtovirta

Helsinki

February 19, 2020

Introduction

I have titled this book *The Yoga of Jesus*. The title might give rise to wondering, even objections. Hence some justification is in order. Was Jesus familiar with the yoga tradition in the East? Did he study it at some point in his life? Isn't it daring to claim that he would have practiced yoga or that he would have had taught some kind of spiritual system?

Even today there are sources indicating that Jesus might have been in contact with spiritual schools and teachers outside of Palestine and Judea, that is, in Egypt, Persia, even India, during his "lost years," about which the Bible remains silent.*

It is highly likely that Jesus studied the ancient tradition of yoga and its philosophy during his earthly life. Furthermore, it is clear that he built his own teachings about the spiritual path on the ethics and spiritual knowledge that were available in the Middle East, Egypt, Persia, and India. This was the very foundation on which the yoga philosophy and ethics of that time were based. Yoga, an ancient tradition combining physical practices with spiritual aspirations, evolved in India thousands of years before Jesus was born. As a word, it means *union* or *connection*. The word is etymologically related to the Latin verb *jungere*, which means *to join*.

At present most of the yoga traditions adopted here in the West offer posture (asana) and breathing exercises. They chiefly aim at physical flexibility as well as calming and silencing the mind. The ultimate

* Swami Abhedananda, *Journey to Kashmir and Tibet* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1987); Pekka Ervast, *The Foundational Questions in Christosophia* [title translated from the Finnish; not available in English] (Imatra: Finnish Rosy Cross, 1940); Nicolas Notovitch, *The Unknown Life of Jesus* (Self-published, 1894); Gopala Das Venu, *The Secret Life of Jesus* [title translated from the Finnish; not available in English], (Järvenpää, Finland: Self-published, 2006); Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2004).

purpose of yoga is complete control of body and mind, and, through this, union with the highest consciousness, *samadhi*, and finally, escape from the wheel of reincarnation.

What is the meaning of the yoga of Jesus as I refer to it in this book? I mean the maxims of life Jesus gave us—his ethical teachings. Jesus provides us with these in his speeches and parables as well as in the exemplary actions of his life. The core of his teachings is summarized in the Sermon of the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew; it is codified in the beatitudes, the five commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and other supplementary guidelines for life, all of which are given here.

Up to now the notion of the yoga of Jesus has been used principally by the Theosophical movement, which has investigated the common origin and similarities of various religions and spiritual systems for over a hundred years. I have long been inspired by the idea of Jesus's ministry as a yoga, which could open a new perspective on the spiritual dialogue between the East and the West (which, we are told, never meet). The idea of Jesus's teaching as a yoga can create many methods of integration. It can inspire comparisons between different spiritual traditions, recognizing their similarities and common objectives.

On the one hand, it is possible to consider the Sermon on the Mount as a mere speech; after all, it is a sermon delivered by Jesus.* What kind of yoga could that be? On the other hand, isn't a sermon meant to be studied, practiced, and followed in life? If one goes into the words and beyond them, one can certainly see similarities and common objectives between the core of yoga and the teachings of Jesus. The latter clearly correlate with the yogic notions of *yama* and *niyama*, which form the basis of the code of ethics in yoga. In turn, if we take a look at the Lord's Prayer, we notice that it is a meditative and mantralike practice of yoga. When it is taken from the realm of ideas into everyday life, it can become the yoga of action: karma yoga. In this way it is possible to work on practicing forgiveness.

Pekka Ervast stated over hundred years ago: "Meditation is based on knowledge that a human being has been endowed with a spiritual tool allowing him to rule the worlds; this tool makes it possible to place

* *Editors' note.* Contemporary New Testament scholarship generally holds that this was never a sermon actually delivered by Jesus at a specific time, but rather a compilation of his sayings made by the evangelist.

When Christian thought is stagnant and ossified, with little spirit left, we must come back to the source of Jesus's teachings. We must ask what Jesus really taught.

Churches do not have a monopoly on interpretations of Christianity. Indeed, it belongs to all of us.

The Yoga of Jesus opens a fresh perspective on Jesus's teachings. It focuses on their very core – the Sermon on the Mount – and reflects upon Jesus's great ideas from the point of view of karma and reincarnation.

This book provides a bridge between the Western and Eastern spiritual traditions. They both lead us to insight, freedom, and enlightenment.



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