

Slovenská asociácia jógy

Slovak Yoga Association

Svätoplukova 20, 821 08 BRATISLAVA

Prezident: Doc.Ing.G.M. Timčák PhD, Ko váčska 16, SK 040 01 KOŠICE, e-mail: gmtkg@tuke.sk,
Gejza.Timcak@tuke.sk, tel. +421 55 6022899; 6221075, fax: 6227641

The Holy See,
Congregation for the matters of faith
Vatican City
VATICAN

Košice, 25 December 2001

Your Excellencies,

I am writing you in the following matter:

This year, in June the Conference of Slovakian Bishops (CSB) issued a Pastoral Letter that raised a nation-wide controversy. The Pastoral letter has dealt with the question of practice of yoga and the tuition of yoga at the school level. As the contents of the letter - regrettably – contained a number of untrue statements and as it invoked negative emotions of Christians towards yoga I had – as the president of the umbrella institution of yoga organizations teaching classical yoga in Slovakia - to issue a protesting letter addressed also to the Conference of Slovakian Bishops. The Pastoral Letter harmed the good image of our organisations and we required the Conference of Slovakian Bishops to answer our points raised against the points of the Pastoral letter and to issue a corrective statement. Up to the present date not a single letter or statement has reached us, even though in the mean time – through other public statements of the CSB - it became crystal clear to us that the letter was addressed against the “Yoga in daily life” organisation against which the bishops have some reservations, and not against yoga. They did not make a corrective declaration, though. The Yoga in daily life is not our member as it has a different programme, different yoga tutor education system and ethical codex. I enclose the letter which we have sent to the Conference of Slovakian bishops and will cite here the main points in English:

1. The Letter wars against the – by now abolished – “RAST” project of the Minister of Education that would enable the tuition of “Yoga in daily life” exercises in primary and secondary schools. The programme contained physical practices, breathing reeducation and relaxation. The physical education teachers had – before starting such subjects – pass through a 190 hour training programme. I have to note that within the school system of

Slovakia yoga practice could be taught since 1990, so it is not a new point. The new point is that the “Yoga in daily life” system could also to be taught. The Letter did not make distinction between yoga and Yoga in daily life.

2. One particular exercise – the “Khatu pranam”, which is a series of forward and backward bending postures – in fact a variety of “Surya namaskara” (greeting to the Sun) - was declared in the Letter to be a Hinduistic ritual – which is an impossible statement. The letter said that everyone who practices Khatu pranam undergoes a religious ritual. I cannot see, how the CSB arrived at that conclusion.
 - a. Here it is important to note that classical yoga (as mentioned also in the 1990 material of the Congregation for the matters of faith addressed to bishops relating the use of Oriental practices for the deepening of spirituality of Christians) is not a religion. In the courses organised by organisations associated in SYA people without differences in denomination partake in training. No one ever reported any harm to his/her faith.
3. Then the letter arrives at a dramatic point: it declares bluntly that “Yoga rejects faith in God the Creator, rejects Jesus the Christ and the whole work of saviourship, the whole Christianity. It is a path to complete atheism.”
 - a. This is travesty on truth. Yoga philosophy is theistic, so could not lead to atheism. It has no reason whatever to reject God or Christ the Saviour or Christianity. As mentioned above, classical yoga is not a religion, so cannot possibly interfere with any faith.
 - b. This part caused damage to the credibility of Slovak Yoga Association (SYA) as:
 - i. The SYA holds that it does not interfere with any religion and the letter declares the opposite.
 - ii. It declares a false and negative, anti-Christian and anti-religious image of yoga and thus also of the SYA.
 - iii. This damage to our public image should be corrected by the CSB. Up to now no indication of that has happened.
4. The letter declares that in India yoga masters use yoga practices to achieve a dependence of the yoga practitioners on the masters (guru). Though this cannot be excluded as a possibility, true masters of yoga always stressed the importance of developing capacity for independence.

5. In the same paragraph the letter declares that yoga masters manipulate people. This again is a statement that cannot be generalized. If someone is a real yoga master there is no single reason why should he/she manipulate people. Manipulation is a tool of people desiring power and yoga is not designed to be a tool for gaining worldly power. Should anyone do it, would go against the principles of yoga.
6. Again in the same paragraph it is declared that yoga practices have a heavy negative toll on the health of yoga practitioners and specially of children. Should that be true, yoga practices would be banned worldwide, but fortunately the opposite is true. In any case this statement is also one damaging the image and services of the SYA tutors to the society.
7. Later the document declares something that implies that “Yoga and the associated religions” have a negative impact in the countries of their origin. Further it is declared that “Yoga leads to a spirituality that is oriented toward the person itself”
 - a. Here three statements have to be analysed:
 - i. Up to now it was not shown that yoga has a negative impact on the Indian society. On the contrary. It provides a means for greater will and ability to live a full life both in spirit and matter.
 - ii. Yoga does not have *associated religions*. Yoga is a philosophy, is a system of practices, but not even in India was/is there a religion named yoga. Many oriental religions borrow from yoga, but it is only natural as yoga can help effectively in spiritual unfoldment.
 - iii. The meaning of the expression “spirituality oriented towards the person itself” is not explained, but it seems to imply that it leaves out God in the spiritual evolvment and concentrates only on the limited person. Well, this is most certainly not the case of yoga philosophy. The idea is vague also theologically. A person cannot develop spiritually if he/she leaves out the concept of God. Yoga acknowledges the “Deus Pater qui me creavit”.
8. There is a statement in the letter that is an irony on Indian poverty: “Let us look to India, to the cradle of yoga. How is it possible that children and old people lie on the streets, next to dustbins and no one takes notice of them? It is possible due to the influence of Hinduism where everyone lives only for himself. How it is possible that Mother Theresa had to come there to collect those that are kicked away by this style of life?..” Well, here it has to be noted that regretfully, the number of

homeless people has risen dramatically even in our region. We also would need Mother Theresa and her brave sisters in numbers far greater than at present available. But in India the present poverty problem is not so much due to Hinduism (which - nota bene - is a completely different issue than yoga), but the change in social structure during the British rule, then after Nehru's social change programmes and finally due to mass medial influence. The influx of impoverished villagers to cities where they do not have where and how to live is perhaps the gravest problem of today.

The note on poverty in India is, however an unkind note that hurts the feelings of a poor nation that, however is still the greatest democracy working within the whole world.

9. Finally the letter declares that "We Christians should not forget that in our everyday life we do not need yoga..." "If we sincerely accept him (Christ) into our life, ... we will not be forced to seek alternative dubious techniques (implying yoga)". "Dear parents, we ask you to respond immediately to this proclamation of ours and turn to the school councils of parents as well as to the competent offices, educational departments (of Local Councils) up to the Ministry and request the revocation of the prepared yoga project – before it is too late."

a. This is indeed a manipulation of simple Christians and provoking them to fight a "jihad" against yoga. Indeed in churches priests had petitions prepared by the Christian Democrat Party that they asked the people attending masses to sign. It is truly unworthy of the Conference of bishops to use such methods and we are very sad to have had to state that.

b. Before and after the Letter, the catholic press (e.g. Katolícke noviny, Zrno) and catholic authors in teachers journals (Učiteľské noviny) and other press wrote a number of anti-yoga papers full of unjustified statements going even that far as to declare "that even Satanists practice yoga".

10. To close this letter, I would like to ask you to kindly exert your influence to settling this set of problems in a just manner and in the spirit of the 2nd Vatican Council. Our organisation suffered a serious and unjust loss of public image, specially amongst the Catholic lay population. People are virtually afraid to practice yoga, to attend yoga classes and to have their children to join yoga classes. Knowing the sad state of our health system and the high degree of health risks in our society due to the speeded up lifestyle and uncertainties of life, this has a negative impact on their health and life expectancy.

We need a public statement of the CSB that would put the issue into a true perspective. After all, yoga supports somatic and spiritual development of people and in that it supports also the aim of Catholic religion, of which I am also a member.

Looking forward to your early response and wishing your Congregation the full Light and Joy of Christmas and a New Year radiant with the Blessings of our Saviour and God the Creator

I remain yours In the Lord

Dr. Geza M. Timcak
President, SYA