

World Yoga Day: Let's not demonise what we reject

"Yoga". **Catchy subject.** With conflicting views and arguments. It creates numbers and tv skirmishes. The show presenters are very happy. **Supporters** see it as a panacea for the human body and soul. On the other hand, **the critics** accuse it of containing an attractive wrapper but with dark and occult content.

Without understanding the reason for this issue, it has become topical again. June. In the month that "hosts" it as world day. My thought traveled through time. **Five years ago.** To the first celebration of World Yoga Day established by the United Nations. I re-read my thoughts imprinted in my diary:

June 21, 2015. It was one more day and it passed...

I'll confess. I have always been wary of the world's days of celebration of an event set by the UN. Not on a whim or a snob's tendency, but because... "every day something else" becomes a little funny in the end. Important and insignificant situations, all in the same cauldron. Come on, figure it out.

Understandably, then, when the news of the establishment of world yoga day came to **my ears, I felt suspicious.** Suspicion is a bad thing. And as the time for the day of the first celebration approached, the more I had my "antennas" stretched to listen to what was happening and especially what was "hidden".

It was one more day and it passed! And I experienced it in India, in the home country of yoga.

I saw the Indian government promoting the celebration in every way. Giant ads, messages on our cell phones. Endless tv

shows. Events in squares and streets in all Indian cities. The prime minister of the country was the first to participate in the celebration. First topic on all TV channels. The government's intention was expressed from the very first moment: Yoga was born in India. Our "offer" to the world culture. National pride. A part of the Indian heritage that resonates on every side of the globe. Even if you follow the modern forms of yoga. Forms that have nothing to do with its traditional form (asanas).

Suspicion is a bad thing. I kept looking and observing thinking I'd find out what's hiding and not being told!

My research is fruitful.

I noticed **Hindu gurus** declaring that yoga only takes power and dimension when you enrich it with Hindu beliefs. Back to the roots.

Muslims shout in all tones that they participate in the celebration without making religious Hindu movements in asanas (e.g. such as invoking the god sun).

Protestant groups complain that the celebration is on Sunday and that they should move it to Monday. First the church, then the celebration. They protested but participated in the celebration in response to the government's call.

Doctors urging people to do yoga exercises for good health.

Multinational sportswear companies to give promotional gifts taking advantage of the celebration for their own advertising and promotion. Opposition MPs to stating that yoga is for the rich "fat ones" who should lose a kilo and not for the poor people who have to work all day for their wages. The government is unnecessarily pouring money. All "bread and spectacles." Elections here and now!

Each man and an opinion. India has a large population. You're going to have to figure it out. It is like Babel. Many opinions, strong arguments, passionate reactions. **But nothing dark and occult.**

Then I was informed of what they're saying in my country. In Greek TV shows, each one tries to anoint himself an expert and say whatever comes to their mind. All in a lifestyle investment, the majority of which not really knowing.

Unfortunately, very few had knowledge of....

I saw the celebrations in various countries of the world. From the United States of America to Iran! And in other Muslim Countries. I was impressed.

I met our children at the Orphanages of our Orthodox Church in Kolkata, India. I wanted to talk to them about this topic... To explain to them. To protect them. To learn what they think about it. Children of seven, eight, ten and twelve years old.

So, **I asked them what they knew about yoga?** And then laughing and giggling they started pulling me from the robe and took me to the dining room. That's where they lined up on their own and **started exercising.** The elder children explained me that what I saw was yoga. **I was surprised.** I saw different exercises than those I had seen in the past. My kids smiled. **They started explaining to me:**

"We do not do these movements because they are only for Hindus. Not even those and some others... We don't do meditation." I didn't say a word.

The kids had taught me a lesson. Not me. Tears came to my eyes. Young children and they knew how to distinguish their tradition as Indians and their faith as Orthodox Indians. They knew that themselves.

Suspicion is a bad thing. But distinguish is a blessing. The one that does not reject the **tradition** of people with great and ancient history. The one that removes and does not accept those parts which are incompatible with our faith and our communication with God.

After all, Greeks **did the same thing in their Ancient Greek tradition.** We "renewed" that through the Christian teaching, and we removed all pagan elements that had no content and replaced them with the Christian ones that now expressed us. **But we did**

not deny either our tradition or our identity! We simply gave it a new meaning and substance.

Nor, of course, have we denied anything good that our “past” offers to us. **In his time, Hippocrates was accused many times that his rational way of dealing with diseases was disrespectful to the gods.** He was never disrespectful! Even today **in India there are 30,000 "Yunani" doctors who treat exclusively with the methods of Hippocrates.**

At the same time, I remembered that the traditional Thai therapeutic massage comes from Buddhism. Tradition states that Buddha’s doctor in this way helped him relax while meditating and cured his body injuries caused by stillness in this way. In fact, in its traditional form, there are specific prayers for before and after the massage. It was a religious rite! Shall I assume that anyone who currently massages or takes physical therapy accepts the principles of Buddhism? Physiotherapists are Buddhists and they're hiding it from us?

It was one more day and it passed. Great virtue. Nothing is wrong if it doesn't offend me as a human being and it doesn't change my choices and my faith. Knowledge and faith defeat suspicion and fear. Knowledge is needed. And distinguishing. It is what sets the line.

"Yoga." One more world day for the UN.

An important part of India's cultural heritage.

For the Hindu, it's a "way" to nirvana.

For the Western man, one more reason to search the "exotic" atmosphere of the East.

For gymnasts, it is a form of training.

For me, it's an important lesson. Anything far from my tradition and my own way of thinking is not a priori reprehensible.

Maybe it doesn't suit me. Maybe it doesn't fit into my life. Maybe it never becomes my choice. But what we reject must not be demonised. There's no need.

After all, for the Christians **God is the Truth.** The truth that illuminates everything. Even the dark paths. We're usually afraid of the dark... **But if you're in the Light, why are you afraid?**