

# Spiritual Practice Comparisons

Christian history and theology reveals a vast diversity of ways that we can come to know God, to worship and to serve him. There are many different denominations and streams within the body of Christ, all of them reflecting various aspects of God's glory and different approaches to a true relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Each approach has its own set of strengths and weaknesses. Growing to affirm our unity and celebrate our diversity is a part of our maturing process as unique children of God.

Discerning truth from error is not merely an either/or nor a black and white set of decisions. Over the centuries of Christian history, many approaches to intimacy with God and maturity in Christ have been employed. Concerning other religions and mindsets, some Christian practices of prayer and meditation may look similar to the practices of eastern religions. When the devil sows weeds, he does not sow them in a *weed field*. He sows weeds among the wheat (See Matthew 13:24-30). Truth and error do not grow up across town from one another; they grow up next door to each other. The devil is out to deceive us and to rob us of many of God's wonderful blessings. If your approach to the false and true is to run far away from anything that looks false, you will end up forfeiting the true blessings and gifts of God that are growing right beside the error. The process of our maturing in Christ includes learning to discern truth from error (Ephesians 4:14-15).

Approaches in spiritual practice are often like two ships departing from a harbor. Standing on the deck of the two different ships, looking back as they sail from the harbor, the departure will look alike from both ships. But if one ship is going to Hawaii and the other to Antarctica, they are headed for very different journeys and destinations. So it is with spiritual practice. The false and the true may look somewhat alike in certain stages; but the motive, practice, and goal bring about two totally different outcomes.

**The following chart** describes some of the major differences of spiritual journeys. While some practices may look similar, the motives, process, and outcome are totally different. Christianity is always about coming to know the God of the Bible. Our heavenly Father is personal, present, and available. Christian spiritual practices are concerned with our personal surrender to the God of the Bible who wants us to know him as Father through Jesus Christ. Our praying and meditating are set apart from all other religions, regardless of any similarities of practice, because we approach God with a totally different mindset, desire, and goal. (See Matthew 16:24-26; Psalm 46:10; Philippians 2:5-11; Ephesians 3:16-19; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 1 Corinthians 3:12-20; 1 Corinthians 6:17-20; Psalm 131:2; Acts 17:24-28.)

# Eastern vs. Western vs. Christian Mind

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Eastern Mind</b>	<b>Western Mind</b>	<b>Christian Mind</b>
<b>Self</b>	Self-flight (self is an illusion; only god is real)	Self-seeking (God is an illusion; only self is real)	Self-surrender (self is made by God and for God; both are real) (1 Cor. 6:19-20)
<b>Mankind</b>	Mankind is more than human; mankind is god	Mankind is less than human; mankind is an animal	Mankind is to be fully human; God and mankind are to be joined through love (1 Jn. 4:16)
<b>Self-emptying</b>	Leads to the annihilation of self	No self-emptying only self-centeredness	Leads to incarnation and being filled to the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19)
<b>God</b>	Identify with god	Deny God	Worship God (Rom. 12:1)
<b>Creation</b>	Turn away from creation; it is illusion	Use creation; it is a resource	Steward creation; it is a gift (Gen. 1:26)
<b>Guiding Philosophies</b>	Escape, absorption, nirvana	Rationalism, materialism, hedonism	Humility, surrender, incarnation (Lk. 1:38)