

Yoga need of the hour, says Catholic priest

Catholic priest Father John Ferreira, principal of St. Peter's College in Agra, one of India's oldest educational institutions, says Christian priests in Britain are completely ignorant about yoga.

'They know nothing about yoga. They should first study and experience the benefits of India's ancient science before commenting,' Ferreira, 57, told IANS in an interview.

He was commenting on the uproar in Britain after some British priests called for a ban on yoga classes for children, terming it 'unchristian activity'.

Not sex but yoga education is the need of the hour, Ferreira said, speaking after a half-hour yoga class at an assembly attended by over 1,500 students, teachers and office assistants. The yoga session is held every school day.

'Morning hours are pure hours,' says the father as the students do 'pranayam' and 'kapal bhati' (breath control and other exercises in yoga). For a moment it looks like Baba Ram Dev's class, but with a difference. The mentor is clad in a priestly gown and speaks in soft, chaste English.

'When I started these yoga exercises a month ago, there were natural reservations and opposition from students as well as parents. But I persisted. Now they all congratulate me because some have stopped suffering from colds and allergies while others are feeling more energetic,' says Ferreira, who dislikes students with stooping shoulders, obese or sickly postures.

'I want them to walk straight, with chest out, shoulders raised and head held high. At their age they should be a bundle of energy. Unfortunately, parents have no time for their kids and there is nobody around for guidance,' he says.

Denying charges that students have been regularly fainting during the assembly workout, Ferreira said: 'Yes, some students had tried to fake fainting, but I called them over along with their parents. Now they are positively responding to yoga exercises.'

Ferreira is against the introduction of sex education in schools. And he wants yoga education to be made compulsory.

'They will learn about sex when the time comes. It is nature's design. But at the school we must see that their body and mind are in fine shape and they are spiritually strong to face the world. We must go for holistic lifestyles in tune with the rhythms of nature,' he said.

According to him, humans can be compared with the six strings of the guitar. The six strings are body, mind, spirit, family, work and social life.

'If one string snaps, all others would be affected. Nature has given us so much. Look around. Sickness can be controlled through fasting, eating fruits and vegetables. Fruits can detoxify the body,' he said.

Unconcerned about what his fraternity thinks about him, Ferreira is on a mission.

'I have personally benefited a lot from yoga. Till 1981 I was a sick man regularly visiting doctors and hospitals. Now, after rigorous training and studies in yoga, I am as fit as a teenager ready to take on anyone,' he says.

His fervent appeal is to make yoga compulsory in schools. 'Forget sex education. First develop the mind and body, increase powers of mind control and concentration!'

No wonder over 3,000 students of his college coming from elitist backgrounds have begun listening to him. Even the doubting Thomases among the teachers are getting involved - slowly but surely.

Brij Khandelwal (© IANS / India eNews)