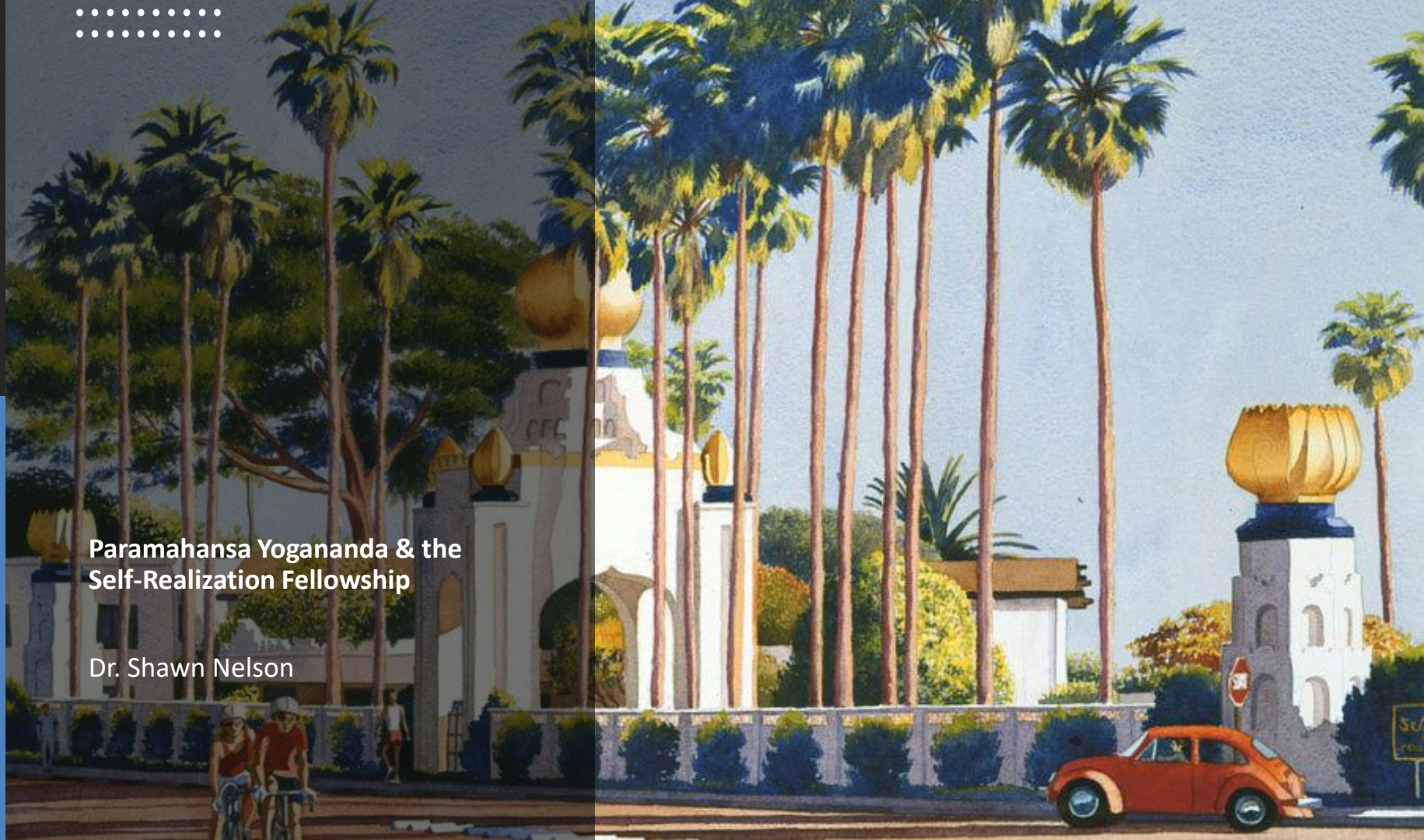




**Paramahansa Yogananda & the  
Self-Realization Fellowship**

Dr. Shawn Nelson



## 8 Week Class Schedule

- DONE** Introduction
- TODAY** Yogananda & Self Realization Fellowship
- Oct 31 **New Age?**
- Nov 7 Islam (Part 1)
- Nov 14 Islam (Part 2)
- Nov 21 Jehovah's Witnesses
- Nov 28 Mormonism
- Dec 5 Judaism





North  
Pacific  
Ocean



5 minutes down the street

Swan's Beach





Many have seen it!






Many surf here





A large, powerful ocean wave is breaking from left to right. The wave's face is a vibrant greenish-blue, and the crest is white with a thick spray of water. Several surfers are visible: one is riding the wave's face, while others are scattered in the water around it. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, and the overall scene is one of a busy surfing spot.

Beach Boys, Surfin' USA

...

Haggerties and Swami's  
Pacific Palisades

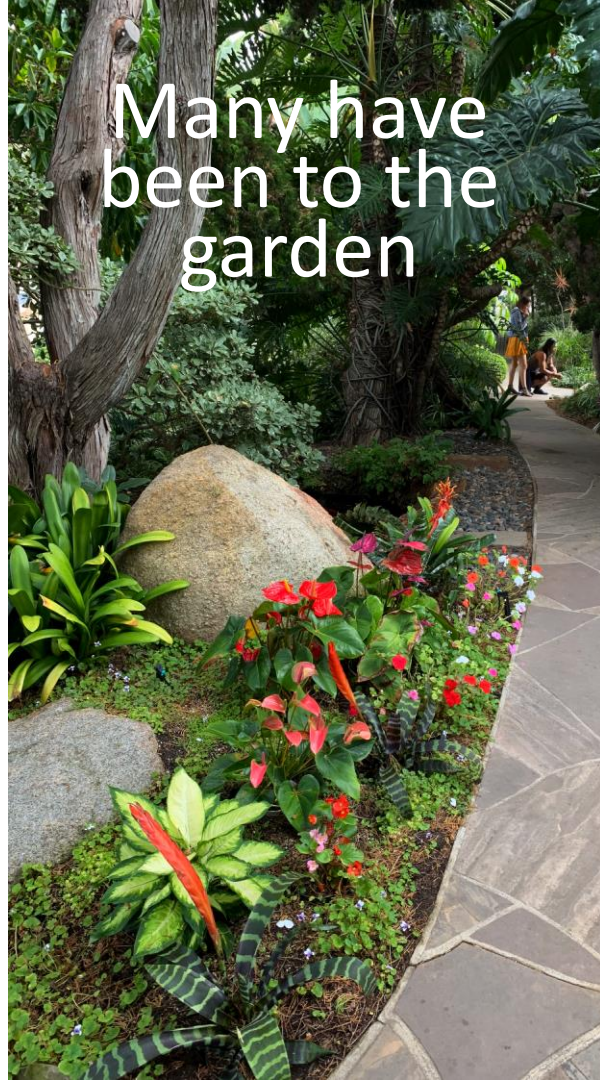
...

Everybody's gone surfin'  
Surfin' U.S.A.

JDN PHOTOGRAPHY







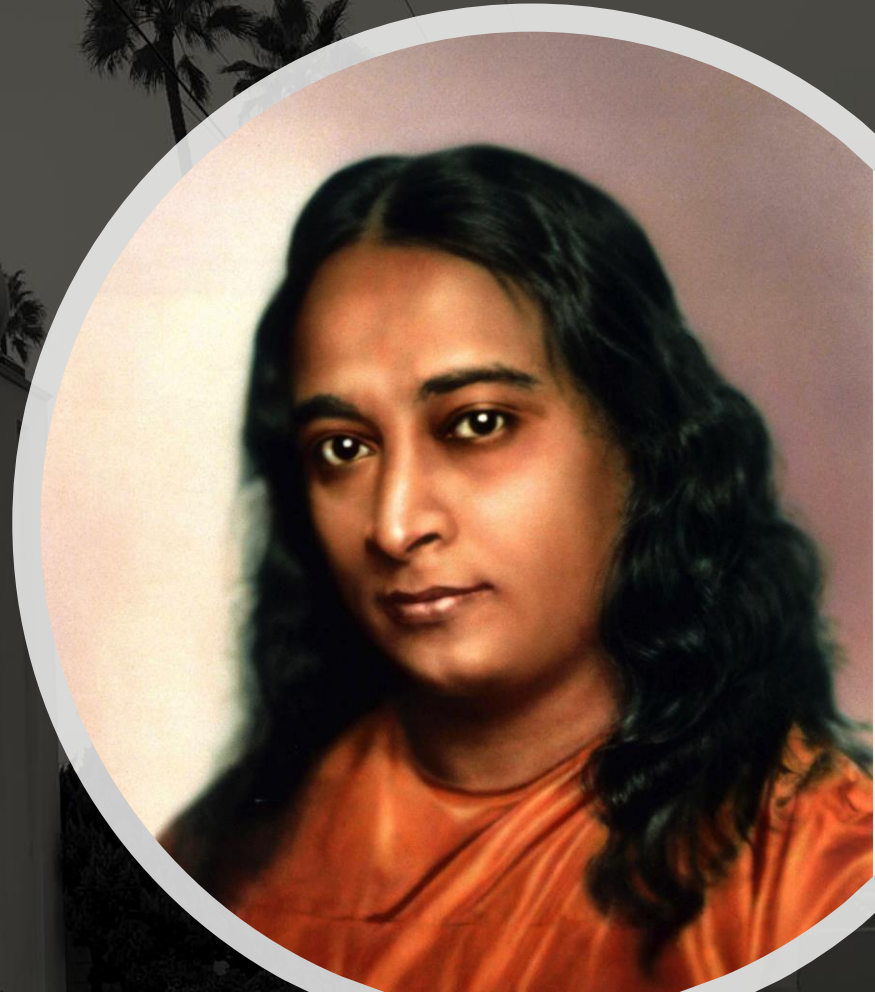
Many have  
been to the  
garden





Yet few locals know the story behind this iconic local landmark, and its founder...

Paramahansa Yogananda





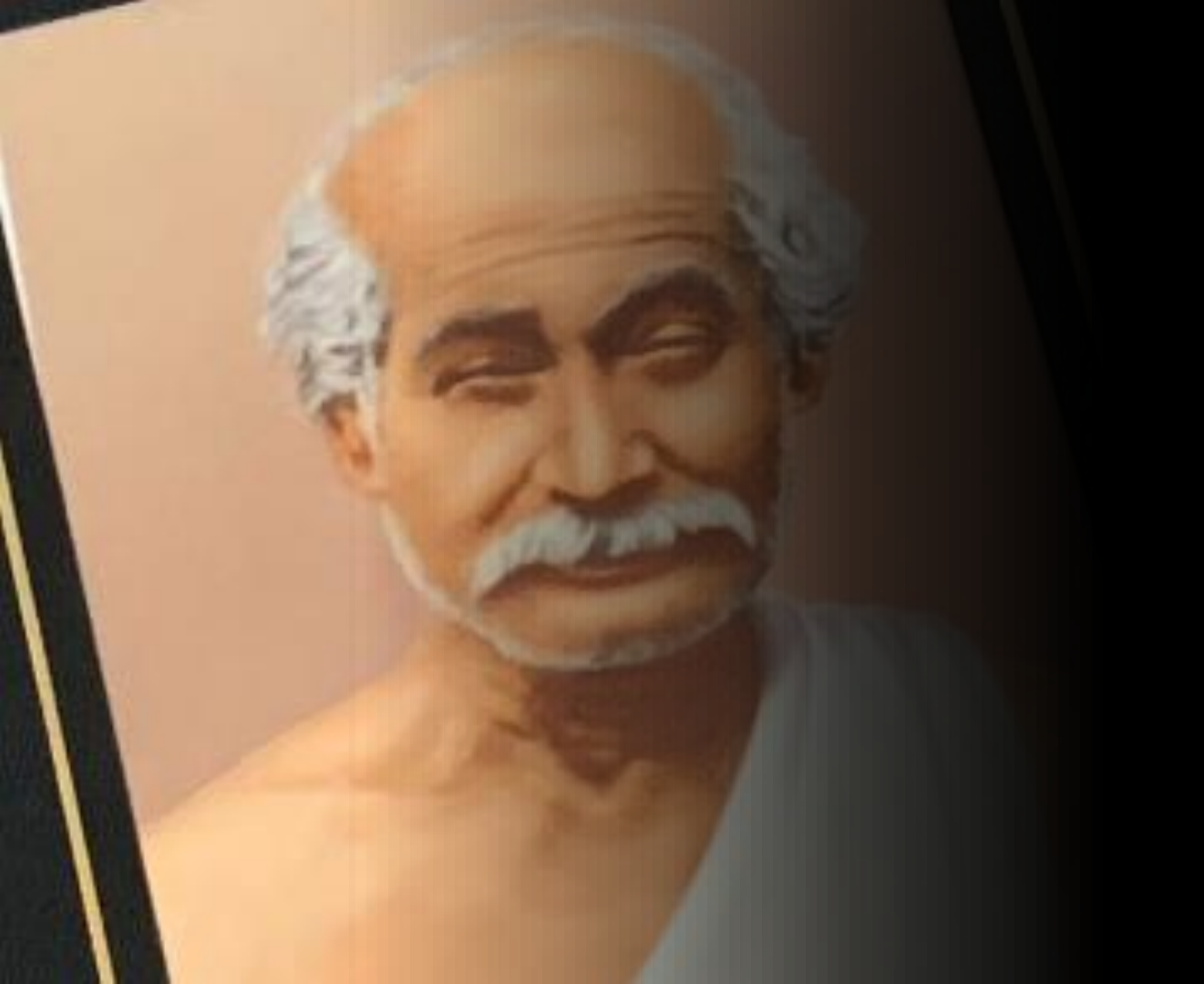
# Outline

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- **Paramahansa & SRF**
  - **His Background**
  - His Impact
  - His Teaching
  - A Christian Response
  - Ideas for Sharing







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## Story Starts with a Prophecy?

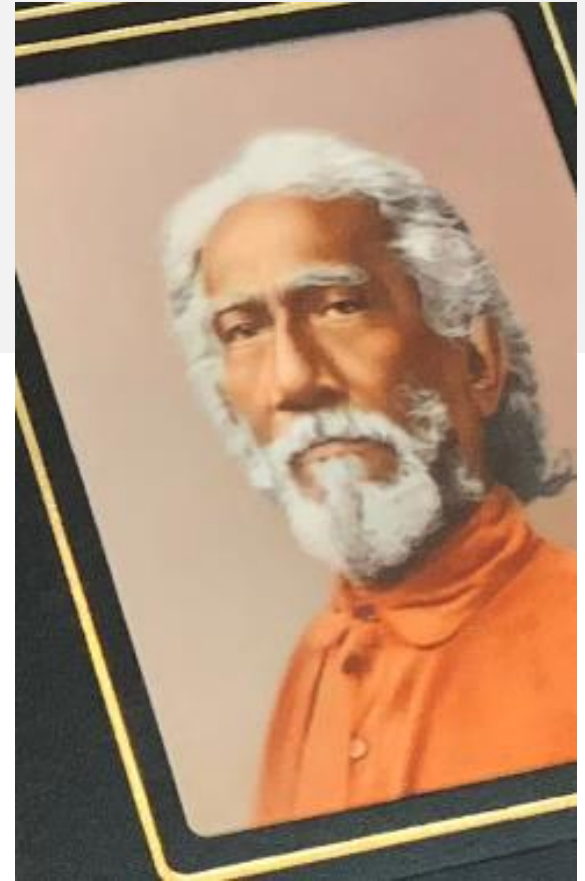
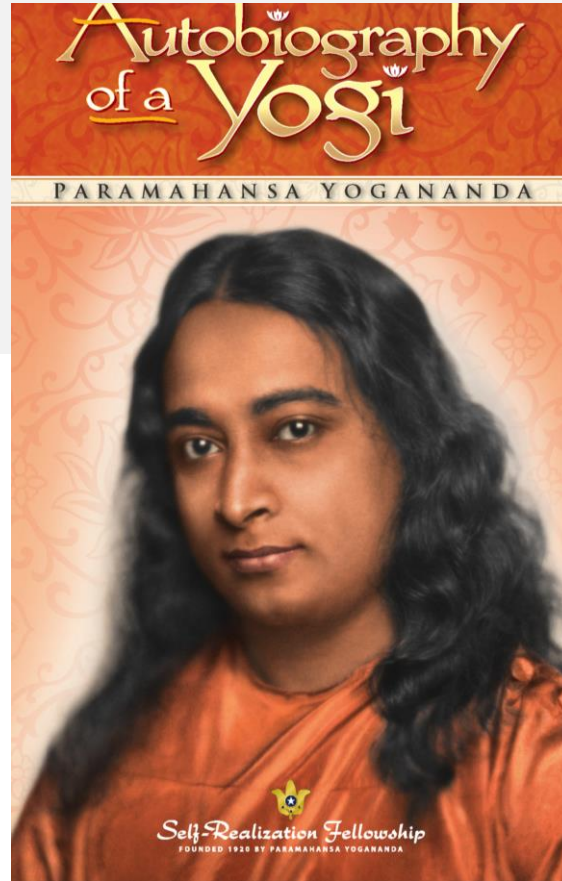
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- Yogananda born 1893 in India.
- His parents followed a Hindu guru named **Lahiri Mahasaya**.
- Lahiri said to have **prophesied** over Yogananda when he was a nursing infant that he would not only become a yogi like himself, but that he would be a **chosen catalyst** for bringing Hinduism to the West.

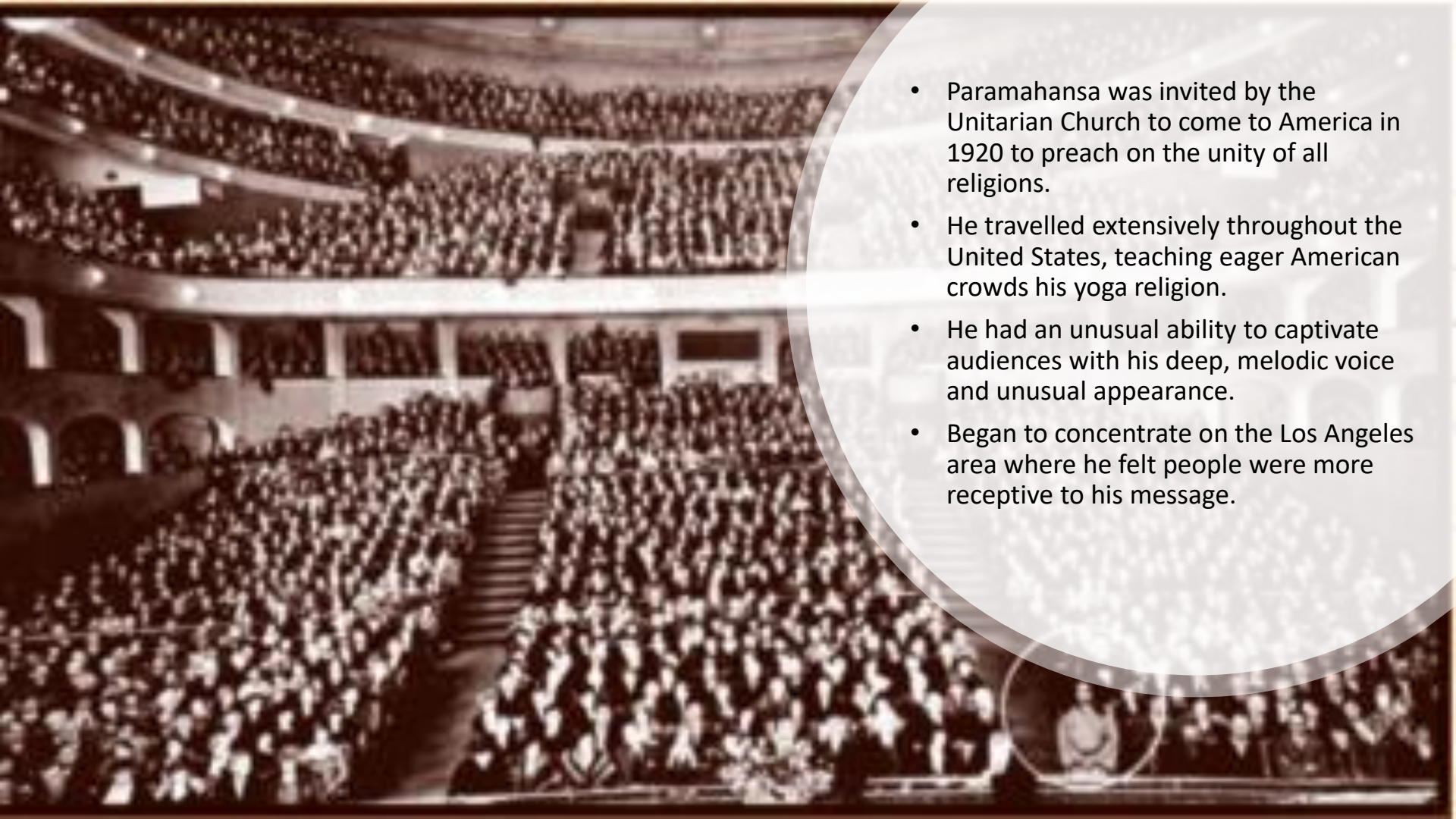




In his best-selling *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Yogananda chronicles his spiritual quest of seeking and finding his guru Yukteswar Giri (1855-1936) in India, and how he learned to master the Hindu religion to become a yogi guru himself.



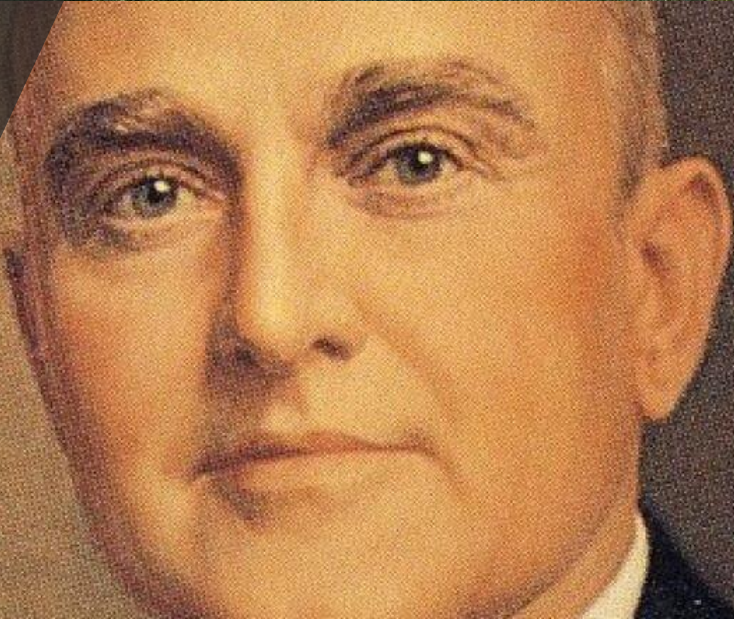




- Paramahansa was invited by the Unitarian Church to come to America in 1920 to preach on the unity of all religions.
- He travelled extensively throughout the United States, teaching eager American crowds his yoga religion.
- He had an unusual ability to captivate audiences with his deep, melodic voice and unusual appearance.
- Began to concentrate on the Los Angeles area where he felt people were more receptive to his message.

# Wealthy Convert

- James Lynn (1892-1955), a wealthy oil and insurance tycoon became a convert and bankrolled the first Self-Realization Fellowship center in Los Angeles in 1925.
- Ten years later, Lynn purchased the thirty-five-acre beachfront property in Encinitas, built a hermitage and temple—all while Yogananda was away in India—and gave it to Yogananda as a surprise gift upon his return.
- Now there are over 500 meditation centers in 25 countries.





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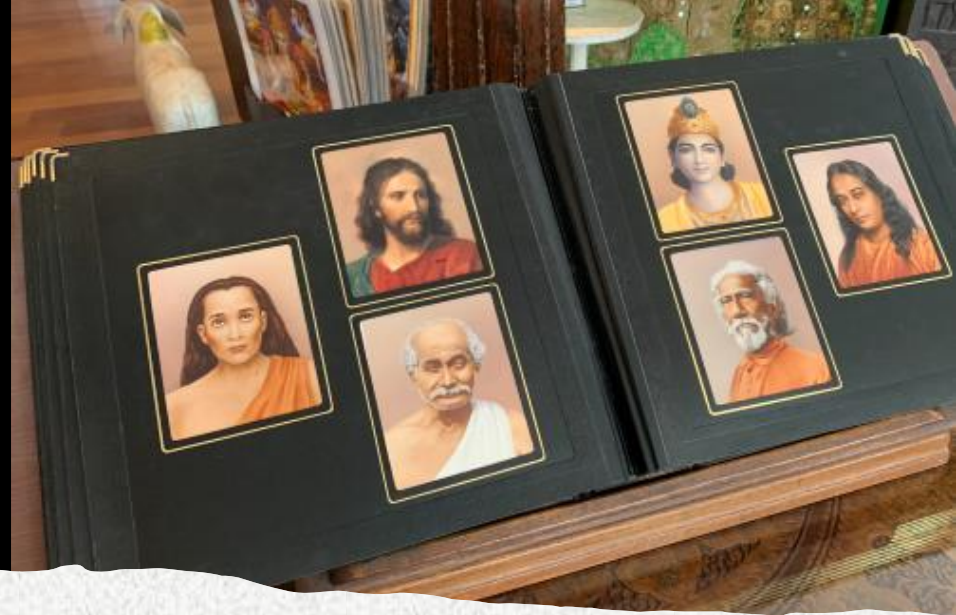




How big were the  
Beatles in the 60s?







Yukteswar Giri



Babaji



Lahiri Mahasaya



Paramahansa  
Yogananda

All four SRF gurus are featured on the popular Beatles album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967)

These were considered the **most significant people** to shape modern US culture.

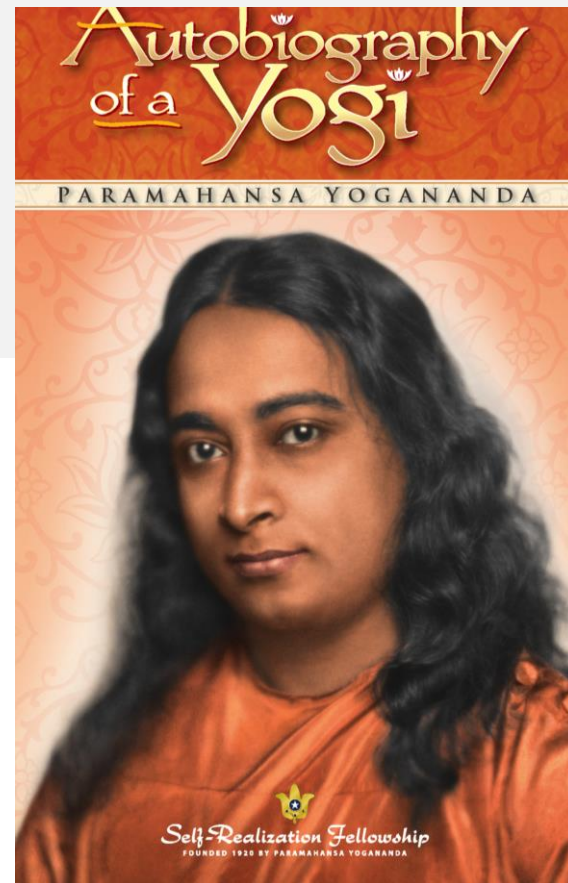
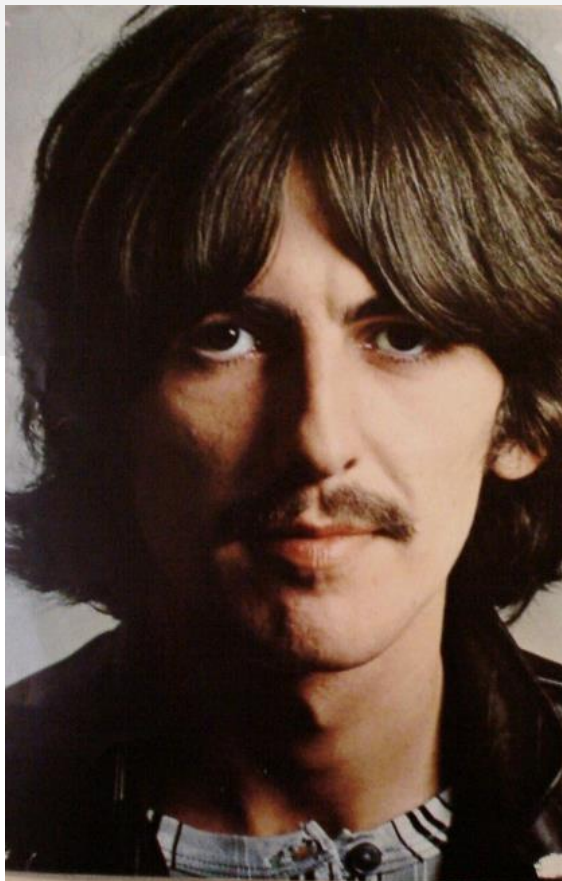


## Impact

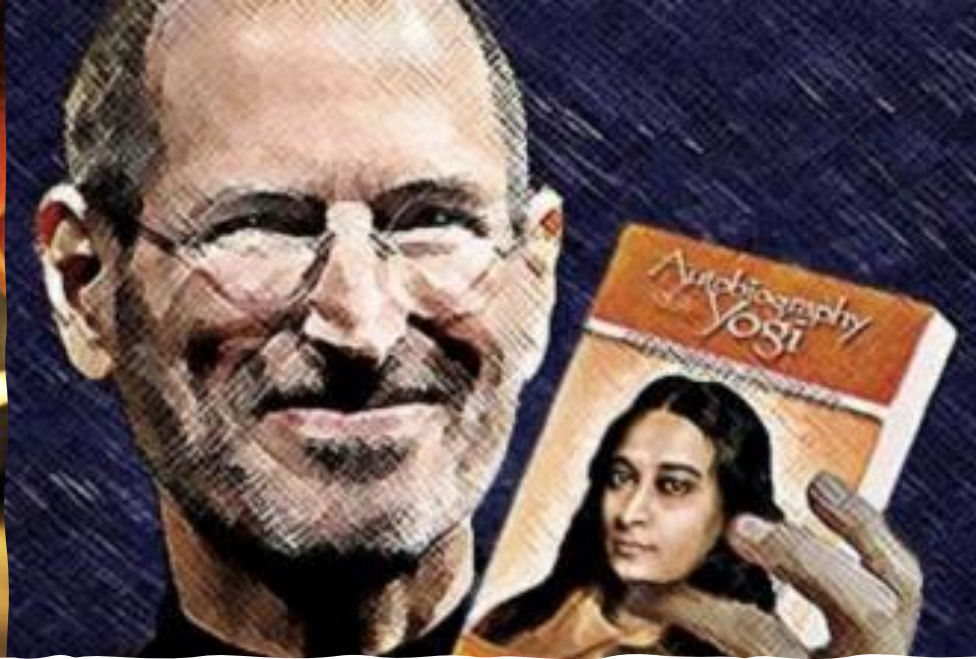
George Harrison, The Beatles:

“[I] just looked at the cover, and **he just zapped me with his eyes...** If I hadn't read that, I probably wouldn't have a life... I'd just be, you know, **some** horrible person with a pointless life. It just gave meaning to life...”

“The *Autobiography of a Yogi* is the book that I keep stacks of around the house. And **I give it out constantly, you know, to people.** You know, like when people need regrooving. Read this.”







# Huge Impact Today

- “**Steve Jobs** apparently had **only one book on his iPad**. Lo and behold, that book turns out to be the *Autobiography of a Yogi*.”
- Steve prearranged to **give every attendee a copy** of *Autobiography of a Yogi* at his memorial.

# It's Everywhere!

- Today **yoga** and **meditation** are now household words
- Taught in **community centers**, public **schools**, business **seminars**, **malls**.



START YOUR SUMMER OFF RIGHT WITH

## YOGA

*In the park*

REDUCE YOUR STRESS | ENJOY THE OUTDOORS | RELAX YOUR BODY

**FRIDAY JUNE 30TH**  
**6:00AM - 8:00AM**

**DOWNTOWN PARK, 1234 BROADWAY AVE**

PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN YOGA MAT

**REGISTRATION INFORMATION**  
must register before June 20th  
at Downtown Yoga Studio  
\$25 Registration fee

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
Please contact Sophie at 555-1234  
or [sophie@yogastudio.com](mailto:sophie@yogastudio.com)  
or visit [www.yogastudio.com](http://www.yogastudio.com)





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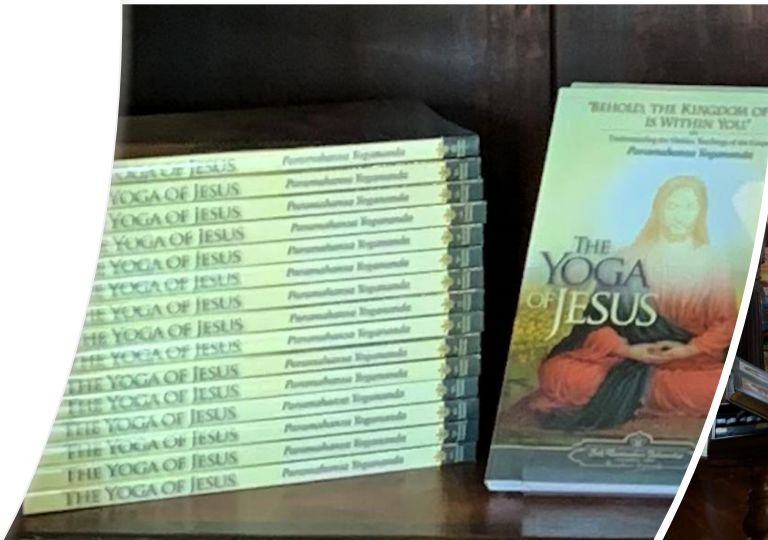
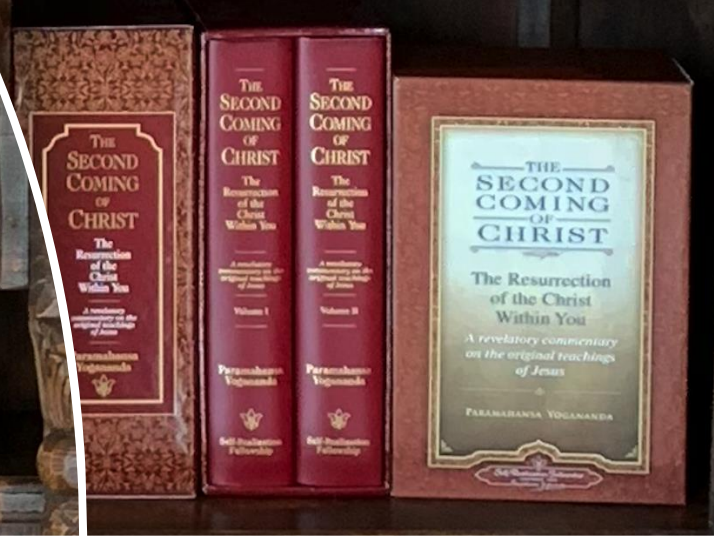
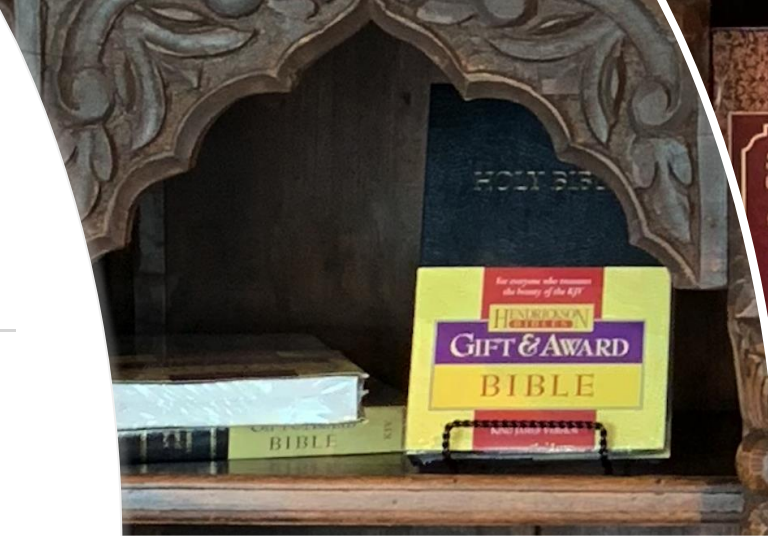


# Paramahansa's Teaching

Yogananda said he was revealing **true Christianity** to the West.

You will find books like:

- *Holy Bible*
- *Second Coming of Christ.*
- *The Yoga of Jesus.*





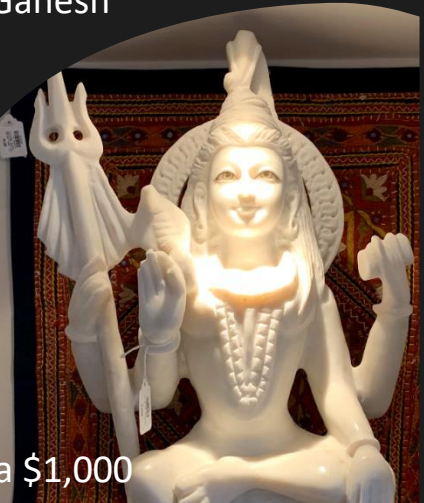
But what he brought was really **Hinduism**  
repackaged using Christian words.  
(Contextualization).



Ganesh



Krishna \$4,900

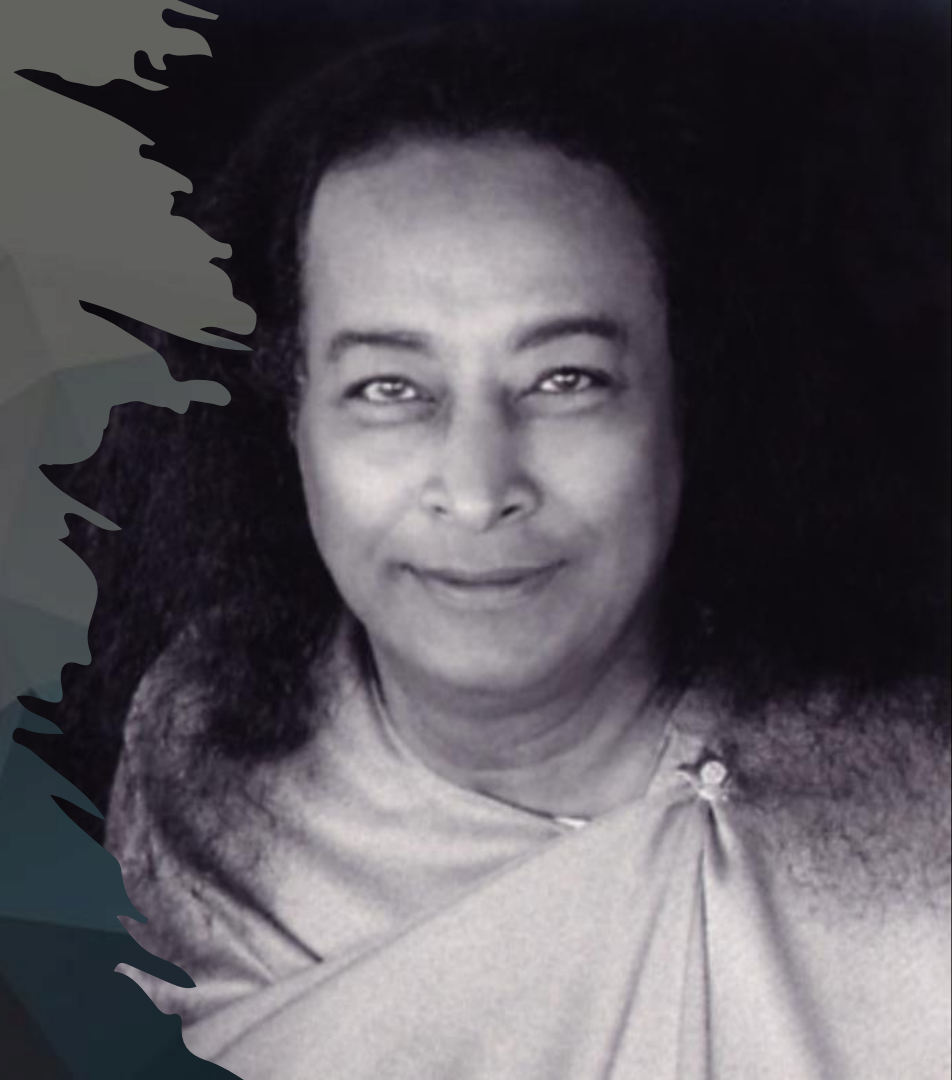


Shiva \$1,000



# Can see full Hinduism from teachings on...

- God
- Creation
- Humans
- Sin/Evil
- Jesus
- Salvation





# God

“Every grain of food you eat, every breath you take, is God.”

*(Scientific Healing Affirmations, K882)*

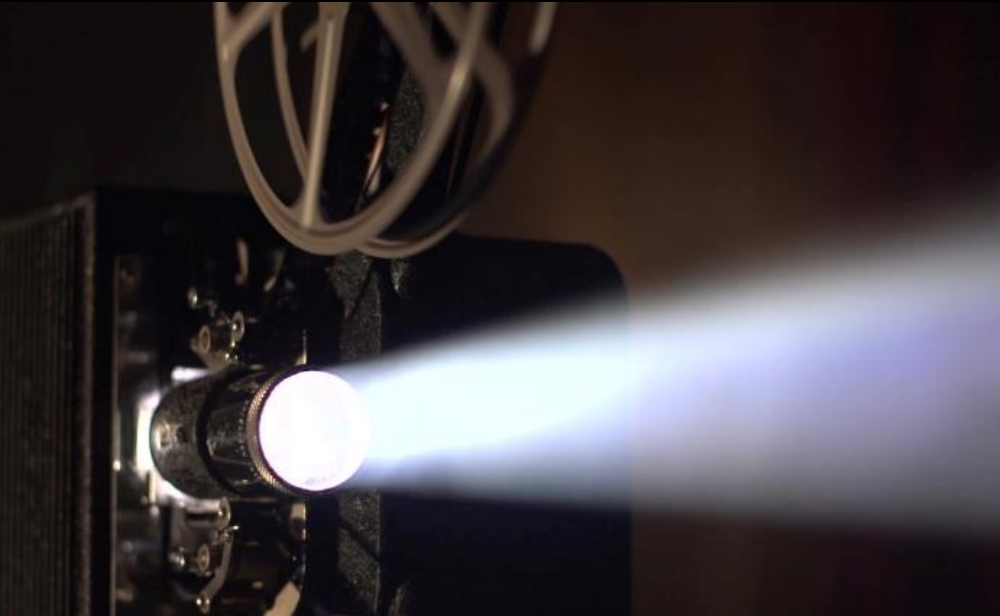
“Self-realization is the knowing in all parts of body, mind, and soul that you are now in possession of the kingdom of God; that you do not have to pray that it come to you; that **God’s omnipresence is your omnipresence**; and that all that you need to do is improve your knowing.”

- Pantheism: God is all and all is God
- Everything, including people, and even the matter of the universe, is divine.



# Creation

- God (Spirit) individualized itself through “vibratory activity” to create this world much like the rays of light from a projector are individualized onto a movie screen.
- Pure Spirit created a universe in which it divided itself “into many souls that they may play with Me.”  
(*Journey to Self-Realization*, 32)
- Just like a movie is not real, creation is not real. The entire universe is an illusion (maya).





# Humans

- Man is also an illusion.
- Man's true essence is divine.
- Goal is for people is to recognize that their true nature is divine and that they are actually one with God.
- This is called "self-realization."

The Lotus Flowers around the Encinitas complex are illustrations of man realizing this divinity within.



## Sin & Evil

- Ignorance is “the root-cause of all human maladies.” (*The Yoga of Jesus*, K630)
- We’re merely duped into thinking everything is real, including our pain.
- But “When we have finished seeing the motion picture, we know that nobody was killed; **nobody was suffering.**” (*Journey to Self-Realization*, 20)
- There is really no sin, **no evil, no disease**, no disharmony, no separateness.
- Even **Satan** himself is an illusion (he is taught to be symbolic). Hell does not exist.





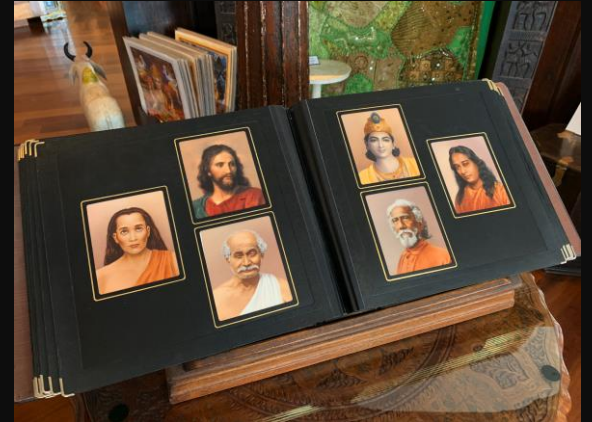


# Karma & Reincarnation

- Illusion (maya) keeps people trapped in a near-endless **cycle of rebirth**.
- Man is travelling a path of **upward evolution** played out over many lives.
- Actions from previous lives affect subsequent ones. This is the **law of karma**.
- Yogananda said people **work out karma** through “**many lifetimes** of physical, mental, and spiritual evolution.” (*The Yoga of Jesus*, K929). Only then can we break the cycle of rebirth.

# Jesus

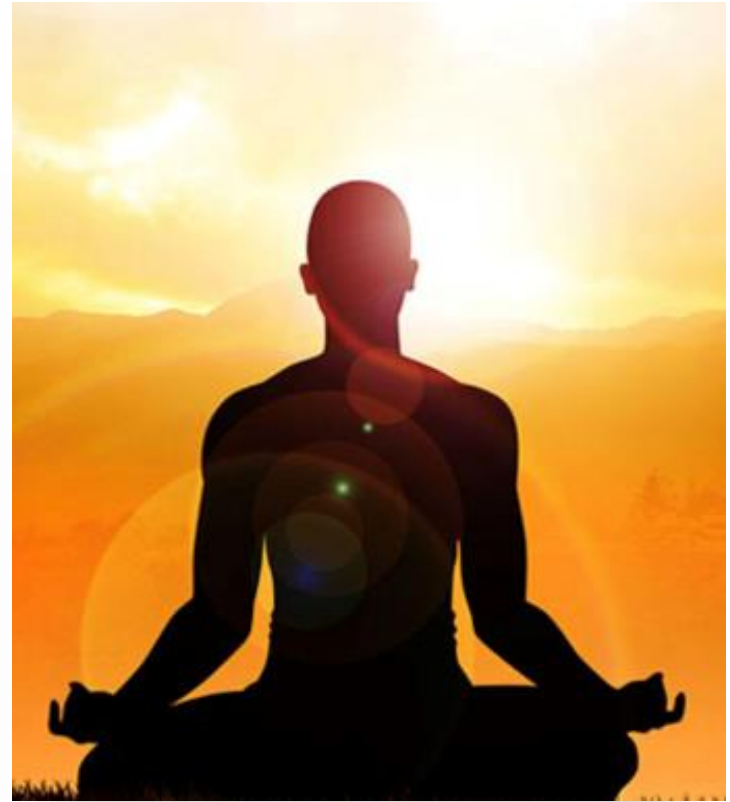
- Jesus was an **ordinary man** who attained “**Christ Consciousness.**”
- Jesus was just one of many sent to help mankind throughout history (there were many others including **Krishna, Buddha, Yogananda and his gurus**).
- Jesus did not die on the cross to provide salvation for our sins, but to **be an example** for us and show us the way to self-realization.





# Salvation

- **Self-realization** (not forgiveness) is what we need.
- Our problem is **ignorance** of our divinity.
- We must **follow the example of Jesus** and become like Christ, resurrect the Christ within us, and **attain “Christ Consciousness”** for ourselves.
- The **“second coming”** of Jesus will be when the masses finally achieve this.





# Kriya Yoga

- Most who practice yoga today are **completely unaware** it is an ancient **Hindu practice** aimed at producing “union” with God (*yoga* means “divine union”).
- Yogananda taught that it would normally take the average **person a million years** to climb the upward path of **spiritual evolution** to achieve self-realization. However, using his yoga technique, it is taught that one can achieve this enlightenment in just **three years’** time.
- The key to Kriya Yoga, according to Yogananda, is that it is **direct access to God**. Other Hindu devotees seek reunification with God through personal deities (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Krishna, etc.). But Yogananda taught it is far better (and faster) to have **direct experience** of God through yoga union.

This is how he said it works...



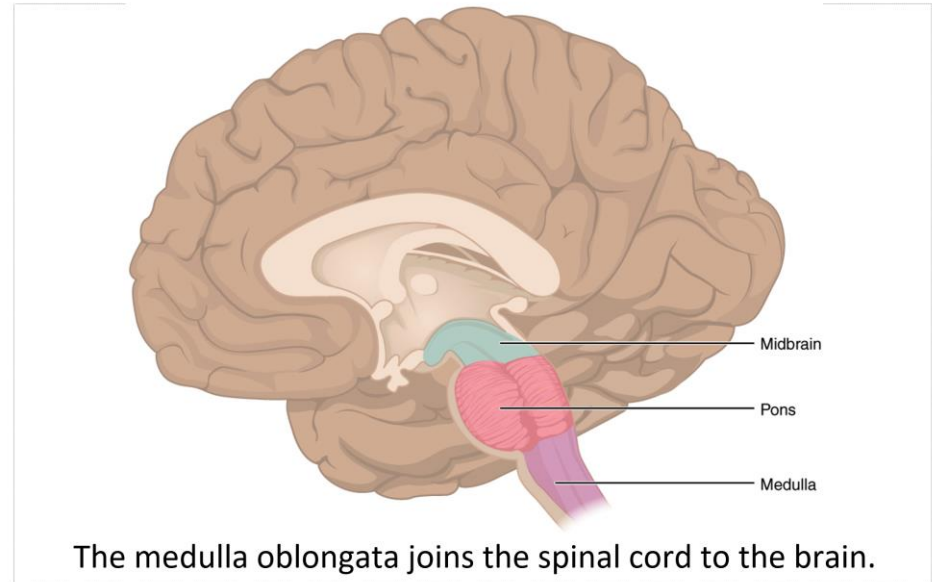
# Medulla Oblongata

Per Yogananda, there is a point of contact between a **person's divine spirit** and a **person's body**. The medulla oblongata (which sits between the brain and the spinal cord) is where the contact occurs.

Following Hindu teaching, he said that during creation, **divine Spirit energy** moved at **different vibratory rates**. This resulted in **Spirit individualizing itself into conscious thought**, and then it further condensed to **create matter**, including our own bodies.

The medulla is the **doorway** through which the divine Spirit provided and continues to provide the energy and lifeforce of matter.

Using Kriya Yoga techniques, one learns to open this doorway not only to **commune** with the divine flow, but also to **release vibratory Spirit power** for healing of self and others.



## Direct Experience with the Divine

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Yogananda taught yoga was a way for people to have direct experience with the divine. Through it, “God can be known, **not as a theological concept** but as an actual **personal experience.**” (*Yoga of Jesus*, Kindle 628, 629.)

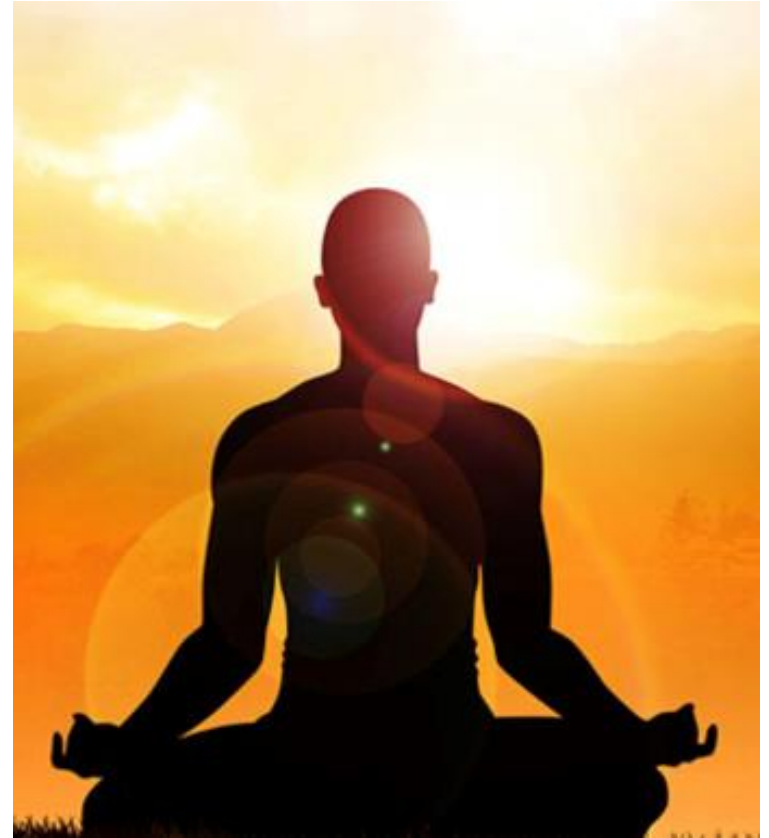
The **divine intuition** that comes from meditation not only serves to make one aware of their divinity, but also acts as a type of **soul guidance.** (Yogananda, *The Yoga of Jesus*, Kindle 2420, 2421.)





# Chanting and Affirmations

- Since ultimately mind (conscious Spirit) drives matter, the **mind** has power to cure diseases. One can concentrate the mind to consciously **increase the supply of cosmic energy** into a sick part of the body. It is said this can be done through **positive affirmations** made by the mind which reject the illusion of sickness.
- Some **examples of affirmations** from Yogananda are: “I am charming and magnetic, I am pleased with all; I wipe away all tears and fears. I have no enemy. I am the friend of all. I have no habits, in eating, thinking, behaving; I am free, I am free.” (*Scientific Healing Affirmations*, Kindle 718-723)
- Affirmations can be made for anything: material success, social success, sexual purity and curing bad habits. Or, they can be made for healing things like eyes, stomach and teeth.



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# Response to Pantheism

- The Bible repeatedly teaches there is only one God (Deut. 3:35,39; 6:4; 1 Chron. 17:20; Isa. 43:10,11; 44:6,8; 45:21).
- One example: “For I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me.” (Isaiah 46:9).
- God is **distinct** from his creation (Isaiah 55:8-9). God is **omnipotent** (all-powerful) and omnipresent (everywhere at once) while his creatures are not.



# What the Bible says about Sin & Evil

- The Bible says we have a serious sin problem.
- The Bible records the **Fall of mankind** in Genesis 2. Prior to the Fall everything was declared by God to be “good.” But after the Fall, the earth became cursed (Gen. 3:17). Sin and death entered the world through Adam and Eve’s sinful choice to disobey God (Rom. 5:12).
- The purpose for Jesus coming as Savior was to **atone for man’s sin** (Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 2:2; 1 Jn. 4:10; Isa. 53:4-5) and provide reconciliation (Col. 1:20-22) back to God through faith in Jesus’ finished work on the cross (Rom. 5:1; Rom. 6:23).
- This is the only way to enjoy fellowship with God (John 14:6).







# Response to Karma & Reincarnation

---

- **Karma.** The bible does not speak of an impersonal law of karma governing the universe. But there is one God who will hold all people accountable. All people “will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” (1 Pet. 4:5)
- **Reincarnation.** The Bible says, “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...” (Heb. 9:27) It’s very important for people to receive Jesus since they only live one lifetime.

# Jesus & Salvation

- **Jesus.** Jesus was not an ordinary man who became the Christ. 'Christ' was added to Jesus' name because he was the promised Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament. There is no **"Christ Consciousness"** which he attained that is available to all mankind.
- **Salvation.** Mankind cannot become 'god' by recognizing the divinity within. The lie that we could become gods is a **lie from Satan** which he used against Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This led to the Fall of mankind (Gen 3). **It is also how Satan fell** from being a holy angel to a demon (Isa. 14:12-14). Instead of exalting themselves, people need to recognize their need of salvation and receive the free gift of salvation offered by Christ upon the cross. All people need to be saved (1 Jn. 1:8-10; Rom. 3:10, 23; 6:23).



# The Bible

Christians believe the below are clear examples of *eisegesis* (ignoring the plain, ordinary meaning of the text and inserting one's own meaning instead).

- ***Man shall live by the medulla oblongata.*** The familiar passage from Jesus' Temptation says, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). Yogananda said the "mouth of God" refers to the medulla oblongata and the words that proceed from it "is life energy or cosmic vibratory force." (*Scientific Healing Affirmations*, Kindle 199-203) What we really need for living is not food alone but the life energy that comes from our medulla oblongata.
- ***Jesus said the light of the body is the "third eye."*** Matthew 6:22: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light." Yogananda said this refers to a "third eye" that becomes visible during deep meditation, appearing in the middle of the forehead. This is a doorway into the presence of God. (*Scientific Healing Affirmations*, Kindle 1340-1344) If this "third eye" is healthy, then we are full of light.

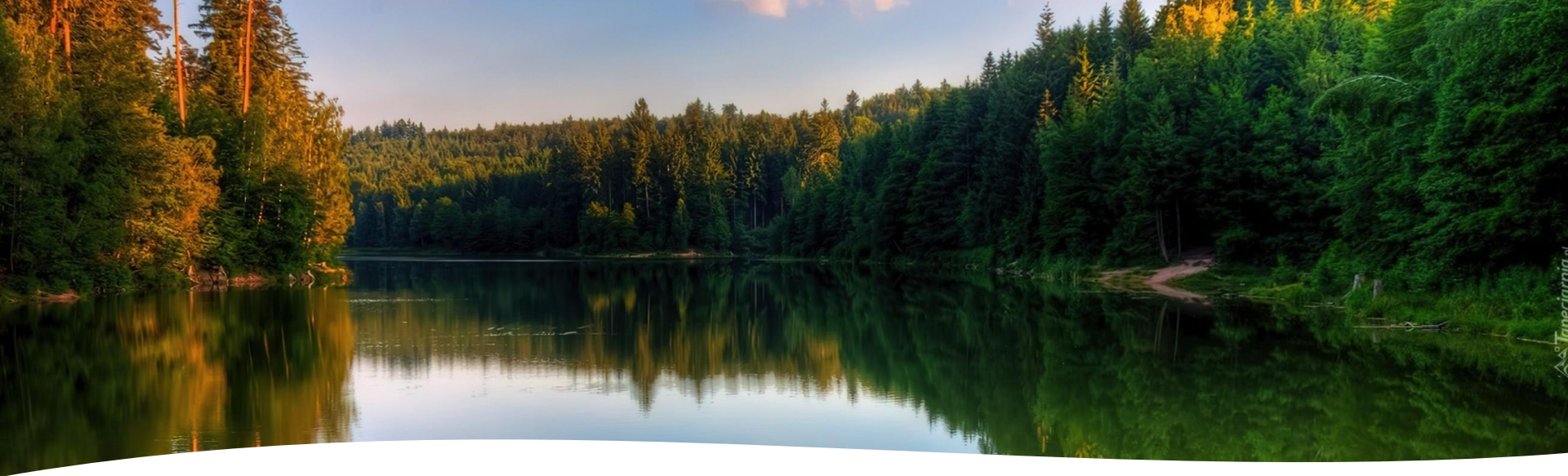




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# Things for Hindus to Ponder

Christians can offer the following suggestions to Hindus who are interested in learning more about Christianity.

- ***Jesus offers rest.*** Most Hindus are troubled by the idea of being hopelessly locked into a cycle of rebirth based on their actions—a cycle they cannot escape. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”
- ***Why not study the words of Jesus for yourself?*** Hindus think highly of Jesus. Gandhi said, “I shall say to the Hindus that your lives will be incomplete unless you reverently study the teachings of Jesus.” There are four Christian gospels which are very interesting to read. These can be read for free through many Bible apps or online.<sup>1</sup>
- ***Consider the uniqueness of Jesus.*** At first glance, Hindus might not think Jesus is unique. However, each Hindu should read the gospel of John for themselves. They will quickly see how Jesus stands out among Hindu incarnation stories. For example, (1) there were at least ten incarnations of Vishnu; (2) historicity is not essential; (3) the purpose of Vishnu’s incarnation was for destruction of evil-doers; and (4) the avatars pointed to a way to attain enlightenment over many lifetimes of striving zealously. In contrast, (1) Jesus had one incarnation in human form; (2) his historicity is essential; (3) his purpose was to seek and save the lost; and (4) he himself is the way people can freely receive eternal life *immediately*.

<sup>1</sup> For example, the Gospel of Luke can be found online here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1&version=NIV>

# Important Hindu terms

<b>Atman</b>	Atman or the 'true self' is deep down inside our souls and this is Brahman.
<b>Caste</b>	Hindus believe all people are born into their caste based on karma. It is not possible to switch castes or marry outside one's caste. Four basic castes are: Brahmins, Vaishyas, Shudras, Dalits.
<b>Dharma</b>	The natural universal laws which must be observed to be happy and content. This Hindu word literally means 'religion.'
<b>Enlightenment</b>	The awareness that a person's true self is divine (Brahman).
<b>Guru</b>	A mentor or spiritual leader.
<b>Karma</b>	Actions in previous life determines effect of next life. Must accept suffering.
<b>Liberation</b>	Happens when a person breaks free from the cycle of rebirth through enlightenment.
<b>Mantra</b>	A phrase a person meditates on to invoke the powers of a deity, inviting it to enter them.
<b>Maya</b>	Everything else that is not Brahman is not real and called maya. Maya encompasses all physical objects, our feelings and emotions.
<b>OM</b>	OM is the mantra containing the 'primal vibrations' of the universe.
<b>Swami</b>	A religious teacher from a monastic order.
<b>Reincarnation</b>	Endless cycle of higher/lower lives (animals are lower, humans higher).



## Questions

1. Do you think it's ok for a Christian to practice yoga? Why or why not
2. What's the difference between karma and sowing/reaping found in Galatians 6:7,8?
3. Have you met anyone who believed in Hinduism?
4. There are many alleged miracles mentioned in Paramahansa's autobiography. Do you think they really happened? Does the Bible say anything about false signs/miracles?
5. What are some differences between salvation in Christianity and salvation in SRF/Hinduism?



## 8 Week Class Schedule

- DONE** Introduction
- DONE** Yogananda & Self Realization Fellowship
- NEXT** **New Age?**
- Nov 7 Islam (Part 1)
- Nov 14 Islam (Part 2)
- Nov 21 Jehovah's Witnesses
- Nov 28 Mormonism
- Dec 5 Judaism





# More Info

## More Info

- For more about Paramahansa: Shawn Nelson, "Paramahansa Yogananda and the Self-Realization Fellowship," 2018, <https://nelson.ink/paramahansa-yogananda-and-the-self-realization-fellowship/>
- More about Hinduism in General: Shawn Nelson, "Answering Hinduism with Christianity," 2020, <https://nelson.ink/answering-hinduism-with-christianity/>

## Christian Responses:

- Summary: Dean Halverson, ed., *The Compact Guide to World Religions* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1996).
- Chapter 6 (The New Age Movement) and chapter 8 (Hindu-Based Cults) in Ron Rhodes, *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).
- More detailed and academic: See Douglas R. Groothuis, *Jesus in an Age of Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2002).
- New Age: J. Yutaka Amano and Norman L. Geisler, *The Infiltration of the New Age* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Pub, 1989).



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