

*Mrinalini Mata*

The  
Guru-Disciple  
Relationship




*Self-Realization Fellowship*

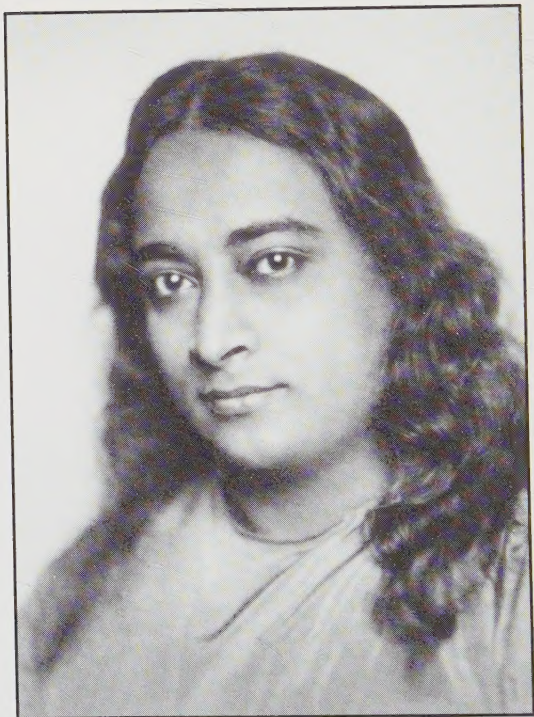
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*Parashansa Jagananda*





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PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

(1893-1952)

# The Guru-Disciple Relationship



by  
Mrinalini Mata

**“How-to-Live” Series**

No. 1974



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*Paramahansa Yogananda*

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ABOUT THE "HOW-TO-LIVE" SERIES: These informal talks and essays were originally published by Self-Realization Fellowship in its quarterly magazine, *Self-Realization*. Some have also appeared in anthologies and on audiocassette recordings produced by the society. The "How-to-Live" series was created in response to requests from readers for pocket-size booklets presenting Paramahansa Yogananda's teachings on various subjects. The series offers guidance by Sri Yogananda and some of his longtime disciples, members of the monastic Self-Realization Order, many of whom had the opportunity to receive the spiritual direction and training of this beloved world teacher over a period of many years. New titles are added to the series periodically.



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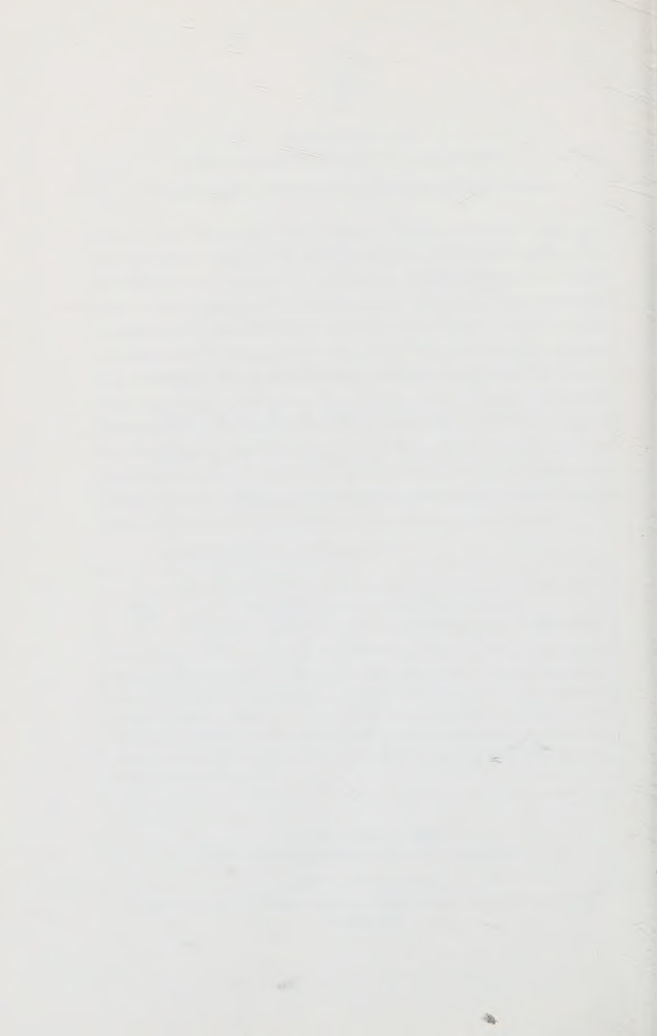
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*There is a Power that will light  
your way to health, happiness,  
peace, and success, if you will  
but turn toward that Light.*

—PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA







# The Guru-Disciple Relationship

BY MRINALINI MATA

*A talk given by the vice-president of  
Self-Realization Fellowship/Yogoda Satsanga  
Society during the SRF/YSS Golden Anniversary  
Convocation, Los Angeles, July 7, 1970*

God sent us into this world to play a divine drama. As individualized images of the Lord Himself, our lives have a singular purpose: to learn; and through learning, to grow; and through continual growth, to express ultimately our true nature and return to our original state of oneness with God.

When we begin our earthly adventure as infant souls, we first gain knowledge through trial-and-error experiences. We perform an action, and if it yields good results, we repeat that action. But when a specific act causes us pain, we strive thereafter to avoid it.

Next, we learn to profit by the example of others. We observe the behavior of our family, friends, and the people in our community, and benefit from analysis of their mistakes and successes.

Our experiences lead us ever onward, seeking deeper understanding of our earthly life until a time comes to each one of us when we begin an earnest search for Truth. The man whose consciousness has evolved to this point asks himself: "What is life?" "What am I?" "Whence have I come?" And the Lord responds to such a seeker by drawing him to a teacher or to religious and philosophical books that satisfy this initial thirst for understanding. As he imbibes from the knowledge of others, his understanding unfolds and his spiritual growth is quickened. He approaches a little nearer to Truth, or God.

Finally even this knowledge becomes inadequate. He begins to yearn for a personal realization of Truth. The soul within him prompts him to think: "Surely this world is not

my home! Surely I am not solely this physical body; it can only be a temporary cage. There must be something more to this life than my senses now perceive, something that exists beyond the grave. I have read about Truth; I have heard about Truth. Now I must know!"

To answer the anguished cry of His child, the compassionate Lord sends an enlightened teacher, one who has realized the Self and knows the Self to be Spirit—a true guru. The life of such a one is an unhindered expression of the Divine.

### **Definition of a True Guru**

Swami Shankara\* described the guru in this way: "There is no known comparison in the three worlds for a true guru. If the philosophers' stone be assumed as truly such, it can only turn iron into gold, not into another philosophers' stone. The venerated teacher,

\* India's greatest philosopher. Reorganizer of India's ancient Swami Order (in the eighth or early ninth century A.D.), Swami Shankara was a rare combination of saint, scholar, and man of action.

on the other hand, creates equality with himself in the disciple who takes refuge at his feet. The guru is therefore peerless—nay, transcendental.”

Paramahansa Yogananda, guru-founder of Self-Realization Fellowship, said: “The guru is the awakened God awakening the sleeping God in the disciple. Through sympathy and deep vision, a true guru sees the Lord Himself suffering in the physically, mentally, and spiritually poor. That is why he feels it his joyous duty to assist them. He tries to feed the hungry God in the destitute, to stir the sleeping God in the ignorant, to love the unconscious God in the enemy, and to rouse the half-awake God in the yearning devotee. By a gentle touch of love he arouses instantaneously the almost fully-awake God in the advanced seeker. A guru is, among all men, the best of givers. Like the Lord Himself, his generosity knows no bounds.”

Paramahansa Yogananda thus described the infinite understanding, the infinite love,

the omnipresent, all-embracing consciousness of a true guru. Those *chelas* (disciples) privileged to know Paramahansaji\* saw these attributes perfectly manifested in him.

### **The Guru-Disciple Relationship**

This God-created universe runs by orderly cosmic law, and the guru-disciple relationship is rooted in that law. It is divinely ordained that he who seeks God shall be introduced to Him through a true guru. When a devotee sincerely desires to know God, his guru comes. Only one who knows God can promise the disciple: "I will introduce you to Him." A true guru has already found his way to God; therefore he can say to the *chela*, "Take my hand. I will show you the way."

The guru-disciple relationship encompasses the disciplines and principles of right action which the disciple must follow to prepare himself to know God. When the disciple, with the guru's help, perfects himself,

\* "Ji" is a respectful suffix added to names and titles in India.

the divine law is fulfilled, and the guru introduces him to God.

### **Loyalty to the Guru and His Teachings**

The first principle of the covenant between guru and *chela* is loyalty.

Ego, the consciousness and self-assertion of the little "I," is the one thing that keeps us from God. Banish the ego, and in that moment one realizes he is, ever has been, and ever will be one with God. The ego is a cloud of delusion surrounding the soul, veiling and diffusing its pure consciousness with endless misconceptions about the nature of oneself and of the world. One effect of the ego delusion is fickleness. As the Truth-seeker begins to manifest his divine soul qualities, he banishes this unreliable tendency of human nature and becomes a loyal and understanding person.

Loyalty to the guru is one of the most important steps of discipleship. Most human beings have not perfected the quality of loyalty even toward their own flesh and blood,

or husband, wife, or friend. That is why the concept of loyalty to the guru is not fully understood. To be a true disciple, the *chela* must be loyal to the guru sent by God: he must abide faithfully and one-pointedly by his guru's teachings.

Loyalty is not narrowness. The heart that is loyal to God and His representative is magnanimous, understanding, and compassionate toward all beings. Remaining centered in one-pointed unconditional loyalty to his own guru and his teachings, such a devotee beholds in correct perspective all other manifestations of Truth, according them due appreciation and respect.

Paramahansaji spoke on this subject many times. He said: "Many persons worry about becoming narrow-minded before they have learned to be balanced. Superficial seekers, in their wish to appear broad-minded, indiscriminately absorb differing ideas without first distilling the essence of truth within them by realization. The result is a spiritually

weak, diluted consciousness. Though I regard lovingly all true religious paths and all true spiritual teachers, you see that I am one-pointedly loyal to my own."

"All true religions lead to God," he said. "Seek until you find the spiritual teaching that draws and fully satisfies your own heart; and once having found it, let nothing touch your loyalty again. Give that path your full attention. Put your entire consciousness upon it, and you will find the results you are seeking."

When speaking about loyalty, Gurudeva\* Paramahansaji sometimes made the following comparison: "If you have a disease, you go to a doctor and he gives you medicine to cure your ailment. You take the medicine home and use it according to the doctor's instructions. When your friends come to visit you and learn the nature of your illness, each one is likely to exclaim: 'Oh, I know all about that disease! You must certainly try

\* "Divine teacher," the customary Sanskrit term for one's spiritual preceptor.



such-and-such remedy.' Should ten persons give you ten different remedies, and you try them all, your chances for cure are doubtful. The same principle underlies the importance of loyalty to the guru's instruction. Do not mix spiritual remedies."

Divine loyalty means gathering together one's scattered attention, affection, and effort, and concentrating them one-pointedly on the spiritual goal. The loyal disciple travels swiftly along the path to God. Paramahansaji expressed the guru's role in this way: "I can help you more if you are not diluting your forces. Attunement with the guru comes through one hundred percent loyalty to him and his associates and activities; through willing obedience to his counsel (whether verbal or written instruction); through visualizing him in the spiritual eye; and through unconditional devotion.... In the souls of those who are in tune with him, the guru can establish a temple of God." Only through loyalty is one able to concentrate his efforts effec-

tively upon the pursuit of God. The loyal disciple's consciousness becomes magnetized by divine love, and is drawn irresistibly to God.

### **Obedience Develops Discrimination**

Obedience or surrender to the guidance of the guru is another basic tenet of the guru-disciple relationship. Why this divine imperative? Man must learn obedience to a higher wisdom in order to overcome the stumbling block of ego and its self-made delusions. Through countless incarnations—from the time we were the most ignorant of mankind—the ego has had its way. It has dictated our behavior, our views, our likes and dislikes, through emotions and sense attachments. The ego enslaves the will and binds the consciousness to the limited human form. Undulating moods, waves of emotion, ever-changing likes and dislikes constantly buffet man's consciousness with one kind of feeling or another. What he likes particularly today may strike him differently tomorrow, and he goes after something else.

This vacillating state of consciousness renders man blind to the perception of Truth.

A primary requisite of a *chela's* discipleship is the ability to bend his undisciplined and whimsical will in obedience to the guru's wisdom—to surrender his ego-centered will to the divinely attuned will of the guru. The disciple who does so breaks the powerful grip of the limiting ego. When Paramahansaji entered the ashram of Swami Sri Yukteswar as a disciple, his Guru almost at once made the following request: "Allow me to discipline you; for freedom of will does not consist in doing things according to the dictates of prenatal and postnatal habits or of mental whims, but in acting according to the suggestions of wisdom and free choice. If you tune your will with mine, you will find freedom."

How does the disciple attune his will to the guru's? Each spiritual path has its own prescriptive and proscriptive rules. *Sadhana* is the Indian term for this spiritual discipline: the "do's and don'ts" defined by the guru as

necessary to the *chela's* search for God. By following these instructions sincerely and to the best of his ability, and by constant effort to please the guru through right behavior, the disciple demolishes every ego-erected barrier between his will and the will of the guru as expressed through his wise precepts.

In obedience to the guru the disciple finds his will gradually freed from enslaving egoistic desires, habits, and moods. And the mind, once so restless and fickle, ceases to be diffused and develops the ability to concentrate. As it becomes correctly focused, the disciple's mental vision begins to clear. Veil after veil of misunderstanding and confusion lift. The errors of countless actions that once seemed right, but led only to suffering, are suddenly bared in a dazzling perspective of truth. The disciple then *knows* what is right, what is true: he is able to discriminate between good and evil. Paramahansaji taught that discriminative behavior is doing the thing we ought to do when we ought to do it.

In order to succeed on the spiritual path, the devotee of God must develop discrimination; otherwise his instincts, moods, habits, and past emotional tendencies—gathered through incarnations—will continue to mislead him.

Until the disciple's discrimination is fully developed, obedience and surrender to the guidance of the guru are the *chela's* only hope of salvation. It is the guru's discrimination that saves him. The Bhagavad Gita (IV:36) teaches that the raft of wisdom will carry even the greatest among sinners across the sea of delusion. Through following the *sadhana* prescribed by the guru, the disciple builds his own lifesaving raft of wisdom.

The disciple's obedience must be sincere and wholehearted. To give lip-devotion to the guru and continue to behave according to the dictates of the ego's bad habits is folly. He alone is the loser who cheats in his efforts on the spiritual path.

Gurudeva gave those *chelas* who requested his discipline this simple counsel: "Pray always to please God and guru in every way." These words sum up the whole of *sadhana*. Yet to carry it out is not a simple matter. To please God and guru requires more than passive love and appreciation of God, guru, and the path. Even coming from the heart, this prayer is not in itself enough to please God or guru. Paramahansaji often told us that he didn't like to hear people exclaim, "Praise God! Praise God!" as though the Lord were some pampered lady who loves flattery. "That does not please God," he would say. "God is weeping for us, and for all His children who are lost and suffering in the darkness of delusion." God and guru want for us only our highest good: freedom from this world of bewildering inconstancies — health and disease, pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrow — and safe harbor in the ever-new joy of the changeless Spirit.

Therefore the way to please God and guru is by right behavior, by which we enable

Them to grant us salvation. Consistently right behavior, in turn, is possible only when one practices obedience and surrender to God through His channel, the guru.

### **Respect and Humility Before God's Representative**

On the altars in Self-Realization Fellowship temples are placed images of Jesus Christ and Bhagavan Krishna, our *paramgurus* Mahavatar Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya, and Sri Yukteswar; and our guru Paramahansa Yogananda. Thus we accord reverence and devotion to them as the instruments of God in bringing the teachings of Self-Realization Fellowship into the world. Respect in its highest form is reverence, another important aspect of the divine law that guides man to God-realization through the guru-disciple relationship.

How little respect for God or man is shown by human beings today! Many among our troubled youth are losing respect for the wisdom of years, for the social order, and, as a conse-

quence, for themselves. When self-respect goes, decadence sets in. True respect, for oneself and others, arises out of understanding one's divine origin. He who knows himself as the Self, an individualized spark from the flame of Spirit, knows also that every other human being is likewise an expression of Spirit. In joy and awe he bows to the One in all.

By cultivating respect for the guru as God's agent, and for one's fellow beings as images of God, the devotee helps himself to grow spiritually. From a respectful attitude toward the guru comes receptivity to God through guru, and from receptivity comes understanding of what is right and noble, which leads to reverence for God and guru. When one is finally able, within one's heart as well as physically, to bow down to Something other than the ego, a transformation takes place within; one develops humility. The ego is like a stout impenetrable prison wall around the soul, man's true nature; the only force that can shatter this wall is humility.



You who have read *Autobiography of a Yogi* will recall that when Lahiri Mahasaya saw the *mahavatar*, Babaji, washing the feet of an ordinary *sadhu* at the Kumbha Mela,\* he was astonished. "Guruji!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"I am washing the feet of this renunciant," Babaji replied, "and then I shall clean his cooking utensils. I am learning the greatest of virtues, pleasing to God above all others—humility."

Humility is the wisdom that acknowledges One who is greater than ourselves. Most human beings worship the ego-self. But as the disciple bows instead to the ideal of a greater Self, and to the guru as the instrument of the Divine whose aid he seeks in realizing that Self, he gains the humility necessary to tear down the imprisoning wall of ego, and feels within him an ever-expanding divine consciousness welling up from that greater Self.

\* A religious fair attended by thousands of ascetics and pilgrims.

The humble man is a truly peaceful man, a truly joyous man. He is unruffled by the fickleness of human behavior and human love. He is not hurt by the inconstancy of human companionship or the transitory nature of position and security in this world. All thoughts of self-gain and self-worship diminish and fade in the humble man. The scriptures say: "When this 'I' shall die, then will I know who am I." When the ego goes, the soul—that image of God sleeping within—is able at last to awaken and express itself. The devotee then manifests in his life all the divine soul-qualities, and is freed forever from the ignorance of *maya*, the world delusion imposed upon all creatures who play in God's drama of creation.

So remember: respect gives rise to reverence; and humility follows. As the devotee develops these qualities, he begins to race toward the Goal of his spiritual quest.

### **The Quality of Faith**

The guru-disciple relationship perfects in the *chela* the quality of faith. The world in

which we live is founded on relativity, hence it is unstable. We know not from day to day whether our bodies are going to be well or beset by disease. We know not whether our loved ones, with us today, will be with us tomorrow or taken from this earth. We know not whether the peace we enjoy today will be shattered by war tomorrow. This unknowing creates in man great insecurity. That is why there exists today so much mental illness, and so much restlessness. It is also the reason man clings blindly to material possessions. He wants higher position, greater name and fame, more money. He wants a larger house, more clothing, a new car. All of these things, he believes, bring security in a world fearful and uncertain. He grasps at mere objects and makes them his gods.

True faith is born of *experience* of truth and reality, a direct knowledge and certainty of the divine forces sustaining all creation. Man is insecure because he has no such faith. Jesus Christ said: "Verily I say unto you, If

ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matthew 17:20).

We do not begin to express faith in our lives because it is hard for us even to believe in "things unseen." The fact is, man cannot have faith unless and until he experiences something in his life which will not fail him. The guru-disciple relationship leads one to this assurance. The disciple discovers in the guru the one who represents Divinity: the guru lives by divine principles; he demonstrates the spirit of God in his life; he is an embodiment of "things unseen."

The guru is also a manifestation of unconditional divine love. He is one who, no matter what we do, never changes in his love for us. This love, we realize, can be trusted. And as we see it demonstrated day after day, year after year, our faith in the guru's love grows. We realize God has sent to us one who

will watch over us moment by moment, day by day, life after life—one who will never lose sight of us. This is the guru, our faith in whom flowers through recognition of his unity with the ever-constant, changeless Spirit.

The guru-disciple relationship calls for complete faith on the part of the disciple. The guru says to the *chela*, “My child, if you want to know God, if you want the power to go back to Him, you must develop faith in That which you cannot see, which you cannot at this moment touch, That which cannot be known by sensory perception. You must have faith in that One who is unseen, for He is the only Reality behind all that now appears so real to your limited human senses.”

To help the disciple to cultivate faith, the guru says: “Follow me; blindly, if need be.” Ego impairs our vision, but the guru’s sight is flawless. His eyes of wisdom are always open. To him there is no difference between

yesterday, today, and tomorrow. In his divine perception past, present, and future are all the same. Paramahansaji often said, "In God's consciousness there is no time, no space; everything is happening in the eternal now. Man sees only a tiny link in the chain of eternity, yet he thinks he knows it all." The guru, who is one with God, and whose consciousness has been stripped of the delusion that clouds the ordinary human mind, beholds eternity. He sees the present state of the disciple, he sees what the *chela* is striving to become, the struggles he already has passed through during many incarnations, and the obstacles that lie ahead. The guru alone can say, "This is the way to God." Even though the disciple has to follow blindly, his path is safe and sure.

From the very beginning of one's *sadhana*, one must listen and follow with faith, even when some aspect of the guru's teaching is not fully understood. Gurudeva would occasionally remark, when a disciple started rea-

soning with him about some instruction he had given: "I don't have time for your logic. Just do what I said." In the beginning, this often seemed unreasonable to the *chela*. But those who obeyed without questioning saw the rewards of this kind of training. Follow the teaching of the guru, because he sees, he knows. He will inwardly guide you through your attentive and willing action in carrying out his precepts. Trust in the guru enables him to nurture the omnipotent power of faith in his disciple.

By having in the guru one who can give us security in God, one whose hand we can take with assurance that we will be guided safely through the darkness of *maya*, we begin to develop the faith necessary to know God.

### **The Guru's Help**

The guru helps the disciple in countless ways. Perhaps greatest of them all, he inspires the *chela* through his exemplification of divine attributes: He is the "speaking voice

of silent God”\* and the incarnation of highest wisdom and purest love; he embodies the soul-qualities that reflect God; he symbolizes the way and the Goal. Christ Jesus said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). The guru is the way; as a supreme example of the *sadhana* he gives to his disciples, he demonstrates divine laws of Truth and teaches how to apply them in order to realize God. He gives the *chela* spiritual inspiration and vitality to follow the path that leads to eternal life in God.

The novice disciple may rationalize that since the guru is divine, the *chela* cannot hope to emulate him. One such disciple, asked by Paramahansa Yogananda to perform a task he considered beyond his ability, protested that he could not do it. Paramahansaji’s response was quick and emphatic.

“I can do it!”

\* From Paramahansa Yogananda’s tribute to his guru, Swami Sri Yukteswar, in *Whispers from Eternity*, published by Self-Realization Fellowship.



“But, Gurudeva, *you* are Yogananda. You are one with God.” The disciple expected Paramahansaji to say, “Yes, you are right. Just take your time. Eventually you will succeed.”

But Gurudeva replied: “There is only one difference between you and a Yogananda. *I* made the effort; now, *you* have to make the effort!”

Two utterances Paramahansaji never permitted from the disciples he trained: “I can’t,” and “I won’t.” He insisted that one be willing to make the effort.

“Life is like a swiftly flowing river,” Paramahansaji often said. “When you seek God, you swim against the current of worldly tendencies that pull your mind toward limited material and sensory consciousness. You must make the effort to swim ‘upstream’ every moment. If you relax, the strong current of delusion will carry you away. Your efforts must be constant.”

Vedic scriptures state that the spiritual effort of the disciple constitutes only twenty-

five percent of the spiritual forces required to bring his soul back to God. An additional twenty-five percent is given through the blessings of the guru. The remaining fifty percent is bestowed by the grace of God. Thus the devotee's effort is equaled by the guru's, and God is doing as much as guru and disciple together. Although the disciple's effort is but one quarter of the whole, he must go ahead and fully do his part, and not wait to receive, first, the blessings of God and guru. As the devotee puts forth his utmost effort to do his share, the guru's blessings and God's grace are automatically with him.

The guru also helps the disciple by assuming much of his burden of karma.\* He may also, at God's behest, take on a part of the mass karma of humanity.

"The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his

\* Effects of past actions, in this or a former life; from the Sanskrit *kri*, "to do." See glossary.

life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Jesus allowed his body to be crucified in order to assume a part of the individual karma of his disciples and some of the mass karma of mankind. Often we saw this ability demonstrated by Paramahansa Yogananda. Sometimes the symptoms of an illness from which he had healed a person would manifest for a time in his own body. During the Korean war, in a state of *samadhi*, he cried out in pain as he suffered with the injured and dying soldiers on the battlefield.

### **A Mirror of Perfection**

The guru also serves as a mirror reflecting the character image of the disciple. When the devotee has said, "I want God," he sets himself on the path to perfection, because to realize God he must re-express his innate soul-perfection. He must eliminate ego and its influence on his thinking and actions. If the disciple stands before the mirror of guru with reverence, devotion, faith, obedience, and surrender, it will show him

all the personal flaws and weaknesses that block his way to the Goal.

Though Paramahansaji saw our flaws and candidly pointed them out to receptive devotees, he never dwelled upon those faults. Only when he had to discipline for the spiritual welfare of a disciple would he mention them. He concentrated primarily on each one's good qualities. When he admonished someone, he would add: "Introspect to understand the nature of your shortcoming, and its cause and effect; then dismiss it from the mind. Don't dwell on the flaw. Concentrate instead on cultivating or expressing the opposite good quality."

Thus if one is filled with doubts, he should strive to practice faith. If he is restless, he should affirm and practice peace: "Assume a virtue, if you have it not."\*

### **How to Follow the Guru**

The disciple must learn to follow the guru by emulating his example and by practicing

\* *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene IV.

faithfully the *sadhana* he gives. When the disciple first tries, he is not able to follow perfectly, but he must continue to make the necessary effort until he succeeds.

For those on the Self-Realization Fellowship path, following the guru means to imbue daily scientific meditation with devotion, and to balance that meditation with right activity. As Paramahansaji taught us from the Bhagavad Gita, right activity, that is, God-reminding activity, is performed without desire for the fruits of action, seeking no result for self, but only to please God.

Some think that life in the presence of a guru means spending one's days at his feet, meditating in blissful *samadhi* and absorbing his words of wisdom. Such was not the training we received from our guru, Paramahansa Yoganandaji. We were very active, and often wholly engaged in serving. Gurudeva was tireless in his work for God and humanity; by example he taught us to be wholly dedicated. To be spiritual means to abolish self

and selfishness. If he worked all night, we worked all night. Gurudeva's boundless love for mankind was actively expressed in his unstinting service. Yet he continually reminded us to balance this activity with the deep meditation that leads to God-communion and Self-realization.

### **“The Teachings Will Be the Guru”**

“When I am gone,” Paramahansaji said, “the teachings will be the guru. Those who loyally follow this path of Self-Realization and practice these teachings will find attunement with me, and with God and the Paramgurus\* who sent this work.” Through the teachings of Self-Realization Fellowship one finds all the guidance and inspiration he needs to follow confidently the path to God. Every Self-Realizationist should strive unceasingly to live by Gurudeva's counsel.

\* Lit., “gurus beyond”; in this case, Swami Sri Yukteswar (guru of Paramahansa Yogananda), Lahiri Mahasaya (guru of Sri Yukteswar), and Mahavatar Babaji (guru of Lahiri Mahasaya).

His teachings are applicable to every aspect of our lives. They must not be for us a philosophy only, but a way of life. Those who live by Paramahansaji's teachings unqualifiedly know this truth: Between disciple and guru no separation exists. Whether the guru is in physical form or has left this earth to dwell in an astral or causal realm, or in the Spirit beyond, he is ever near the disciple who is in tune. This attunement leads to salvation. In his oneness with God, a true guru is omnipotent; he can reach down from heaven to help the disciple to realize God. This spiritual succor is the divine and eternal promise of the guru. Great is the fortune of the disciple who is led to a true guru. Even greater his fortune, if he strives earnestly for perfection by obedience and true dedication to the guru's teachings.

### **The Guru-Disciple Relationship Is Eternal**

The guru is omnipresent. His help, his guidance, and his teachings prevail, not only for the brief years he dwells on earth, but

forever. How often our Guru said: "Many true devotees have come during my lifetime. I recognize them from lives past. And many more are yet to come. I know them. They will come after I have left this body." The guru's help to sincere followers does not cease when he leaves his body. If it did, he would not be a true guru. The consciousness of the true guru is eternal: ever-wakeful, ever-attuned, uninterrupted by the opening and closing doors of life and death. His awareness of the disciple and his link with him are constant.

Paramahansaji referred to the eternal responsibility of the guru when one day he spoke of the time he would be with us no more in physical form: "Remember always, when I leave the body, I will no longer be able to talk to you with this voice, but I will know every thought you think and every action you perform."

As God is omnipresent, so the guru is omnipresent. He knows what is in the mind and heart of every disciple. "I never enter the lives



of those who do not wish it," Paramahansaji said, "but with those who have given me this right, and who seek my guidance, I am always present. My consciousness is attuned to them; I am aware of even the slightest tremor of their consciousness."

Even when Gurudeva was physically embodied among us, he taught us not to become dependent on his personality, but rather to strive for attunement with him in mind and consciousness. He dealt with our thoughts, our states of consciousness. Because of the resulting attunement, there is no difference today whether Gurudeva is present in physical form or not. He is ever with us.

Among us here at this Fiftieth Anniversary Convocation are hundreds from many parts of the world who did not meet Paramahansaji during his lifetime. Yet see how each of you has gained from Gurudeva's teachings in your earnest spiritual quest! His blessings have come to you because he is omnipresent and because you have made

yourselves receptive by your devotion, by your practice of his teachings, and by your loyalty to the institution he founded. These good actions and qualities have given you, the disciple, deep spiritual attunement with Paramahansa Yogananda, the guru.

### **Guru Diksha**

The guru-disciple relationship is formally established by the blessing of God when the disciple receives *diksha*, initiation or spiritual baptism, from the guru or through the channel established by the guru. During initiation there is a mutual exchange of unconditional, eternal love and loyalty; a bond is formed with the disciple's pledge to accept and follow the guru faithfully, and the guru's promise to lead the disciple to God.

A part of *diksha* is the bestowal by the guru of a spiritual technique which is to be the disciple's means of salvation, and which the disciple promises to practice diligently. In Self-Realization Fellowship, *diksha* is the

bestowal of Kriya Yoga, either in a formal initiation ceremony or, if this is not possible for the devotee, in the *bidwat* or nonceremonial manner.

In the practice of even such a spiritually powerful technique as Kriya Yoga, an essential ingredient is missing without the blessing of the guru-disciple relationship. The guru clearly outlines the conditions precedent to acceptance of any devotee as a disciple. Initiation must therefore be received in a way that fulfills these conditions and thereby directly links the disciple with the guru; then the spiritual power of this relationship begins to work in the devotee's life.

The great Indian poet-saint Kabir sang the praises of the guru in these words:

It is the mercy of my true guru that has made  
me to know the unknown;

I have learned from him how to walk without  
feet, to see without eyes, to hear without  
ears, to drink without mouth, to fly  
without wings.

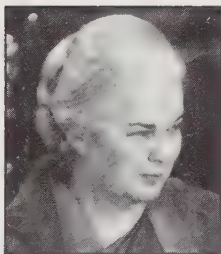
I have brought my love and my meditation  
into the land where there is no sun and  
moon, nor day and night.

Without eating, I have tasted of the sweet-  
ness of nectar; and without water, I have  
quenched my thirst.

Where there is the response of delight, there  
is the fullness of joy. Before whom can that  
joy be uttered?

Kabir says: The guru is great beyond words,  
and great is the good fortune of the disciple.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sri Mrinalini Mata, a close disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda and one of those chosen by him to carry on the Self-Realization Fellowship work after his passing, has served as vice-president of the society since 1966.

It was in 1945, at the Self-Realization Fellowship Temple in San Diego, that the future Mrinalini Mata first met Paramahansa Yogananda. She was then fourteen years old. Just a few months later, her desire to dedicate her life to seeking and serving God found fulfillment when, with her parents' permission, she entered Sri Yogananda's ashram in Encinitas, California, as a nun of the Self-Realization Order.

Through day-to-day association during the years that followed (up until the time of his passing in

1952) Paramahansaji devoted much personal attention to the spiritual training of this young nun. From her earliest years in the ashram, he prepared her for the task for which he had chosen her: editing and overseeing the publication of his *Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons* and other writings, transcribed lectures, and scriptural commentaries. Mrinalini Mata (whose name refers to the lotus flower, traditionally regarded in India as a symbol of purity and spiritual unfoldment) has served for many years as editor-in-chief of Self-Realization Fellowship books, lessons, and periodicals. More than 150 of Paramahansaji's talks have been published under her direction, including two anthologies, as well as several volumes of his poetry and inspirational writings; other major works are in preparation.

Mrinalini Mata has made a number of visits to India to guide the work of Sri Yogananda's society there and has lectured on his teachings in principal cities of the subcontinent. In her capacity as vice-president and as a member of Self-Realization Fellowship's Board of Directors, she assists president Sri Daya Mata in overseeing the spiritual and humanitarian activities of Self-Realization Fellowship Yogoda Satsanga Society of India, including the worldwide dissemination of Paramahansa Yogananda's teachings and the establishment and guidance of temples.

centers, and retreats. She is also responsible for the spiritual direction of the Self-Realization Fellowship monastic communities.



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*The Interior Life*





## PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA (1893–1952)

*“The ideal of love for God and service to humanity found full expression in the life of Paramahansa Yogananda.... Though the major part of his life was spent outside India, still he takes his place among our great saints. His work continues to grow and shine ever more brightly, drawing people everywhere on the path of the pilgrimage of the Spirit.”*

—from a tribute by the Government of India upon issuing a commemorative stamp in Paramahansa Yogananda’s honor

Born in India on January 5, 1893, Paramahansa Yogananda devoted his life to helping people of all races and creeds to realize and express more fully in their lives the true beauty, nobility, and divinity of the human spirit.

After graduating from Calcutta University in 1915, Sri Yogananda took formal vows as a monk of India’s venerable monastic Swami Order. Two years later, he began his life’s work with the founding of a “how-to-live” school—since grown to twenty-one educational institutions throughout India—where traditional academic subjects were offered together with yoga training and instruction in spiritual ideals. In 1920, he was invited to serve as India’s delegate to an International Congress of Religious Liberals in Boston. His address to the Congress and

subsequent lectures on the East Coast were enthusiastically received, and in 1924 he embarked on a cross-continental speaking tour.

Over the next three decades, Paramahansa Yogananda contributed in far-reaching ways to a greater awareness and appreciation in the West of the spiritual wisdom of the East. In Los Angeles, he established an international headquarters for Self-Realization Fellowship—the nonsectarian religious society he had founded in 1920. Through his writings, extensive lecture tours, and the creation of Self-Realization Fellowship temples and meditation centers, he introduced hundreds of thousands of truth-seekers to the ancient science and philosophy of Yoga and its universally applicable methods of meditation.

Today the spiritual and humanitarian work begun by Paramahansa Yogananda continues under the direction of Sri Daya Mata, one of his earliest and closest disciples and president of Self-Realization Fellowship/Yogoda Satsanga Society of India since 1955. In addition to publishing his writings, lectures, and informal talks (including a comprehensive series of *Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons* for home study), the society oversees temples, retreats, and centers around the world; the monastic communities of the Self-Realization Order; and a Worldwide Prayer Circle.

In an article on Sri Yogananda's life and work, Dr. Quincy Howe, Jr., Professor of Ancient Languages at Scripps College, wrote: "Paramahansa Yogananda brought to the West not only India's perennial promise of God-realization, but also a practical method by which spiritual aspirants from all walks of life may progress rapidly toward that goal. Originally appreciated in the West only on the most lofty and abstract level, the spiritual legacy of India is now accessible as practice and experience to all who aspire to know God, not in the beyond, but in the here and now...Yogananda has placed within the reach of all the most exalted methods of contemplation."

## HOW-TO-LIVE SERIES

### GLOSSARY

**ashram.** A spiritual hermitage; often a monastery.

**astral world.** The subtle world of light and energy that lies behind the physical universe. Every being, every object, every vibration on the physical plane has an astral counterpart, for in the astral universe (heaven) is the “blueprint” of the material universe. A discussion of the astral world and the still subtler causal or ideational world of thought may be found in Chapter 43 of Paramahansa Yogananda’s *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

**Aum (Om).** The Sanskrit root word or seed-sound symbolizing that aspect of Godhead which creates and sustains all things; Cosmic Vibration. *Aum* of the Vedas became the sacred word *Hum* of the Tibetans; *Amin* of the Muslims; and *Amen* of the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians. The world’s great religions state that all created things originate in the cosmic vibratory energy of *Aum* or *Amen*, the Word or Holy Ghost. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things were made by him [the Word or *Aum*]; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1,3).

**avatar.** From the Sanskrit word *avatara* (“descent”), signifying the descent of Divinity into flesh. One who attains union with Spirit and then returns to earth to help humanity is called an avatar.

**Bhagavad Gita.** "Song of the Lord." Part of the ancient Indian *Mahabharata* epic, presented in the form of a dialogue between the avatar (*q.v.*) Lord Krishna and his disciple Arjuna. A profound treatise on the science of Yoga and a timeless prescription for happiness and success in everyday living.

**Bhagavan Krishna (Lord Krishna).** An avatar (*q.v.*) who lived in India many centuries before the Christian era. His teachings on Yoga (*q.v.*) are presented in the Bhagavad Gita. One of the meanings given for the word *Krishna* in the Hindu scriptures is "Omniscient Spirit." Thus, *Krishna*, like *Christ*, is a title signifying the spiritual magnitude of the avatar—his oneness with God. (See *Christ Consciousness*.)

**Christ center.** The center of concentration and will at the point between the eyebrows; seat of Christ Consciousness and of the spiritual eye (*q.v.*).

**Christ Consciousness.** The projected consciousness of God immanent in all creation. In Christian scripture it is called the "only begotten son," the only pure reflection in creation of God the Father; in Hindu scripture it is called *Kutastha Chaitanya*, the cosmic intelligence of Spirit everywhere present in creation. It is the universal consciousness, oneness with God, manifested by Jesus, Krishna, and other avatars. Great saints and yogis know it as the state of *samadhi* (*q.v.*) meditation wherein their consciousness has become identified with the intelligence in every particle of creation; they feel the entire universe as their own body.

**Cosmic Consciousness.** The Absolute; Spirit beyond creation. Also the *samadhi*-meditation state of oneness with God both beyond and within vibratory creation.

**guru.** Spiritual teacher. The *Guru Gita* (verse 17) aptly describes the guru as “dispeller of darkness” (from *gu*, “darkness” and *ru*, “that which dispels”). Though the word *guru* is often misused to refer simply to any teacher or instructor, a true God-illumined guru is one who, in his attainment of self-mastery, has realized his identity with the omnipresent Spirit. Such a one is uniquely qualified to lead others on their inward spiritual journey.

The nearest English equivalent to *guru* is the word *Master*. As a mark of respect, Paramahansa Yogananda’s disciples often use this term in addressing or referring to him.

**karma.** The effects of past actions, from this or previous lifetimes. The law of karma is that of action and reaction, cause and effect, sowing and reaping. By their thoughts and actions, human beings become the molders of their own destinies. Whatever energies a person has set into motion, wisely or unwisely, must return to that person as their starting point, like a circle inexorably completing itself. An individual’s karma follows him or her from incarnation to incarnation until fulfilled or spiritually transcended. (See *reincarnation*.)

**Krishna.** See *Bhagavan Krishna*.

**Kriya Yoga.** A sacred spiritual science, originating millenniums ago in India. A form of *Raja* (“royal” or

“complete”) *Yoga*, it includes certain advanced techniques of meditation that lead to direct, personal experience of God. *Kriya Yoga* is explained in Chapter 26 of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and is taught to students of the *Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons* who fulfill certain spiritual requirements.

**maya.** The delusory power inherent in the structure of creation, by which the One appears as many. *Maya* is the principle of relativity, inversion, contrast, duality, oppositional states; the “Satan” (lit., in Hebrew, “the adversary”) of the Old Testament prophets. Paramahansa Yogananda wrote: “The Sanskrit word *maya* means ‘the measurer’; it is the magical power in creation by which limitations and divisions are apparently present in the Immeasurable and Inseparable.... In God’s plan and play (*lila*), the sole function of Satan or *maya* is to attempt to divert man from Spirit to matter, from Reality to unreality.... *Maya* is the veil of transitoriness in Nature... the veil that each man must lift in order to see behind it the Creator, the changeless Immutable, eternal Reality.”

**paramahansa.** A spiritual title signifying one who has attained the highest state of unbroken communion with God. It may be conferred only by a true guru on a qualified disciple. Swami Sri Yukteswar bestowed the title on Paramahansa Yogananda in 1935.

**reincarnation.** A discussion of reincarnation may be found in Chapter 43 of Paramahansa Yogananda’s *Autobiography of a Yogi*. As explained there, by the law of karma (*q.v.*), the past actions of human beings set into

motion the effects that draw them back to this material plane. Through a succession of births and deaths they return to earth repeatedly to undergo here the experiences that are the fruits of those past actions, and to continue a process of spiritual evolution that leads ultimately to realization of the soul's inherent perfection and union with God.

**samadhi.** Spiritual ecstasy; superconscious experience; ultimately, union with God as the all-pervading supreme Reality.

**Satan.** See *maya*.

**Self.** Capitalized to denote the *atman*, or soul, the divine essence of man, as distinguished from the ordinary self, which is the human personality or ego. The Self is individualized Spirit, whose essential nature is ever-existing, ever-conscious, ever-new Bliss.

**Self-realization.** Realization of one's true identity as the Self, one with the universal consciousness of God. Paramahansa Yogananda wrote: "Self-realization is the knowing—in body, mind, and soul—that we are one with the omnipresence of God; that we do not have to pray that it come to us, that we are not merely near it at all times, but that God's omnipresence is our omnipresence; that we are just as much a part of Him now as we ever will be. All we have to do is improve our knowing."

**spiritual eye.** The single eye of intuition and spiritual perception at the Christ (*Kutastha*) center (*q.v.*) be-



tween the eyebrows; the entryway into higher states of consciousness. During deep meditation, the single or spiritual eye becomes visible as a bright star surrounded by a sphere of blue light that, in turn, is encircled by a brilliant halo of golden light. This omniscient eye is variously referred to in scriptures as the third eye, the star of the East, the inner eye, the dove descending from heaven, the eye of Shiva, and the eye of intuition. "If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matthew 6:22).

**Yoga.** The word *Yoga* (from the Sanskrit *yuj*, "union") means union of the individual soul with Spirit; also, the methods by which this goal is attained. There are various systems of Yoga. That taught by Paramahansa Yogananda is *Raja Yoga*, the "royal" or "complete" yoga, which centers around practice of scientific methods of meditation. The sage Patanjali, foremost ancient exponent of Yoga, has outlined eight definite steps by which the *Raja Yogi* attains *samadhi*, or union with God. These are (1) *yama*, moral conduct; (2) *niyama*, religious observances; (3) *asana*, right posture to still bodily restlessness; (4) *pranayama*, control of *prana*, subtle life currents; (5) *pratyahara*, interiorization; (6) *dharana*, concentration; (7) *dhyana*, meditation; and (8) *samadhi*, superconscious experience.

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