

Yogacharya Oliver Black – Biography

A Humble Angel Among Us



The hidden disciple of high realization

John Oliver Black (1893-1989) is one of the most underrated and least known of all of Yogananda's advanced disciples. This is surprising because, spiritually speaking, he was a veritable giant, towering above all other disciples, except one, and yet relatively few know much about him. His own completely unimposing manner, together with a lack of "publicity" on the part of SRF – he wasn't much of a man for organizations – relegated him to the sidelines. Maybe that's how he preferred it.

Yogananda told the monks: "Of the disciples, the first in realization is Saint Lynn. Next comes Mr. Black, and then Sister [Gyanamata]." (*The New Path*, Swami Kriyananda)

Oliver Black, in other words, was a towering saint, more highly developed than all the other saintly disciples, with just one exception: Rajarshi Janakananda. He was a saint of the highest order, God-united, Self-realized, to a great degree in samadhi.

That is exactly the reason why he, as a married man, a father, and founder of his own spiritual community, was listed officially in the SRF Magazine among the few SRF ministers who were authorized to give Kriya Yoga initiation. SRF included him for decades in that 'exclusive club'. This is a highly revealing and significant fact, since SRF is adamant that nobody, who isn't an SRF monk or nun, can give the Kriya Yoga initiation. But in Oliver Black's case they bent the rule, knowing from Yogananda that he was an extremely advanced soul: more highly advanced, in fact, than they were themselves.

THIS is how it was stated in the SRF Magazine in 1988.

When Oliver Black passed away, he was honoured in the Winter 1989 issue of the SRF Magazine, but only slightly so. Nothing was written to reveal his extraordinary spiritual greatness. A soul-giant had just passed, the second highest of all disciples of an avatar, but he was simply described as "a follower of SRF" and "a beloved disciple"

who had a lifelong “dedication to the practice of yoga.” [HERE](#) you can read the article.

This kind but somewhat lukewarm description stands in stark contrast to how Satya Sai Baba described Oliver Black. A long-time follower of his, Evelyn “Betty” Howard, relates in her book *Angels Among Us* that Satya Sai Baba sent Americans to Oliver Black to study under him, stating that he “knows God and can teach others to know God” and that he is the “greatest master on the American continent.”

Spiritually speaking, Oliver Black was, as Yogananda put it, above Sister Gyanamata, and those who have studied her life know just how much that means.

His impact



Small wonder that there are countless reports from his students about their amazing and incredible experiences with him, such as the following one by Evelyn Betty Howard: “Shortly after I met him, as he came down the aisle, I saw him suddenly turn into dazzling light; at the same time, a strange force almost caused me to fall at his feet. Before it could actually happen, I saw him return to his normal appearance.”

She relates: “Miraculous things would happen around him. I realized I could feel his presence in Chicago, where I lived, even though he was in Detroit. So I was thinking to myself, he must be God, for he seems to have the power of God. Just at this point, my reverie was abruptly broken by his voice. I looked up. His piercing eyes were focused on me as he stopped right in the middle of his conversation with the people next to him and said, ‘Well, I’ll tell you one thing: God isn’t a man.’”

One student who was going through a depression, tells how he went to visit Oliver Black. As he shook hands with him, he felt, as he recounts: “an electrical spiritual current go up my spine.”

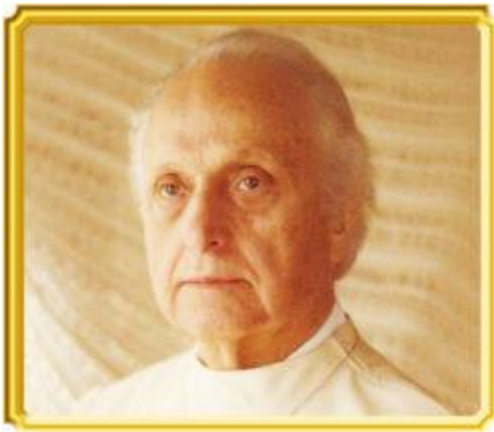
Another student, who was a devout Catholic, relates her own amazing experience. She had heard of Oliver Black’s immense inner greatness and decided that if he was indeed a man of God, she would feel great bliss just by being in his presence. So she attended a Sunday service with him. When it ended, everyone gathered around him. But, alas, she hadn’t felt any bliss at all and didn’t know what to think. As she was

standing there, suddenly she felt “a great, all-encompassing feeling of bliss dawning on me.” Oliver Black reached out his hand to her arm and asked: “how’s that?”

His consciousness, as he constantly demonstrated, was everywhere. Uncannily, he knew everyone to the bone: all their weaknesses, troubles, thoughts, ambitions, and inner states.

Oliver Black was a *siddha*, a perfected being, or very close to it. But he lived in that state without the slightest hint of self-importance, or sense of greatness or specialness. He was, as we said, extremely unimposing and humble.

Miracles, small and big



Many miraculous stories of his life have certainly never been told, as he preferred to hide his stature and consciousness. A few, however, were. Here is one of them, which he told personally to Swami Kriyananda (retold in *Paramhansa Yogananda – A Biography*):

“The Master told me that really great miracles are reserved for highly advanced disciples. He told us once that Oliver Black, in Detroit, was his second most advanced disciple, after St. Lynn. Mr. Black himself told me the following story.

“I was visiting Master in Encinitas,” he said. “It was raining heavily, and I was in my bedroom, glad to be out of the weather. Just then, a young monk knocked on the door, and told me that Master wanted me to go with him for a drive. I looked doubtfully out the window. The rain was falling, if anything, even harder than before. “Well,” I said to myself, “if he says so. But I wonder if we’ll even be able to see out the car window.”

“I put on some protective clothing, then went to the front door—only a few feet away, as you know. I went outdoors, then stopped in astonishment. The rain had ceased. The sky was blue. There was no sign even of dampness anywhere. The car and the ground around it were dry. I looked at Master in amazement.

““For you, Oliver!’ he said with a quiet smile.”

Even when sharing profound experiences like telepathy or levitation, Oliver Black did it in such an unassuming manner that the listener felt it to be nothing particular or special, as if everyone could do the same thing. Levitation, of course, is in truth a high yogic feat, reserved for a few extraordinary souls. Here is his story:

He was in the office and suddenly got an inner message from Yogananda to come to Indianapolis. So he immediately booked his flight and made the journey. When he got

off the plane he didn't know where to go, so he just went to the best hotel and asked if Yogananda happened to be a guest there. He wasn't. But that hotel was connected to another one down the road. He went there, inquired, and indeed Yogananda had a room in that hotel. Oliver Black knocked at his door. Yogananda was highly excited: "I *knew* you were coming, I *knew* you were coming." Mr. Black stayed with the Guru for a whole week.

When it was time to return he went to the airport. He was early for his flight, so he went some distance away to sit there, by himself. After that week with Yogananda, he was completely filled with bliss, transcendence, and elevation. Suddenly he saw that he was floating above the ground: he could walk, but he was walking on air.

Oliver Black's inner power and profound spirituality never went to his head. His Guru was far greater than he was, as he often pointed out. He described himself as "a little yogi", while Yogananda was "a big yogi", who was like a "giant cobra", able to swallow a frog – himself – in one gulp.

Let's turn now to look at his life.

Earlier incarnations

Yogananda told Oliver Black that in his last incarnation he had been a yogi in the Himalayas. Most probably, he had been such a yogi for many lifetimes. Now, in this life, so his Master told him, he was supposed to share what he had learned with others. That was his Guru-given *dharma*.

Parents, family, and early life

His parents, Jacent S. Black (1865-1950) and Ella Strader (1865-1930), had six sons. Oliver Black was their firstborn. His mother was only 18 at his birth. Her youngest son, Berton, was born 16 years after Oliver, in 1909. His mother passed away quite young, aged 55.

Oliver Black incarnated just eight months after Yogananda: on September 1, 1893, he was born in Scott, Ohio (see a [Registration Card](#), in his own handwriting). The family lived in a nearby little village, Grover Hill, Ohio. Today it still numbers only 400 residents.

At the age of seven, in 1900, his family moved to Jackson, Paulding, Ohio: a relatively small place too, back then numbering only 3,000 residents.

At the age of seventeen, in 1910, he moved to Washington, Darke, Ohio (not Washington DC): yet another small town, today numbering only 1,300 people.

Marriage

On April 2, 1916, aged 22, Oliver Black married Ethel M. Wood (1893-1977).

The couple was blessed with two children:

- Robert, born in 1917. Oliver Black had to deal with the grief of his son's early death, as he was killed as a pilot in World War II, when he was still in his twenties.
- Phyllis Arlene was born ten years later, on February 28, 1927. She died in 1987, one year before her father.

In 1917, he went to live in Rockford, Winnebago, Illinois, close to Chicago. There the young father found work at the IL Carriage Works Factory.

In 1918, he lost one of his brothers, Paul Jacob, who was only sixteen.

Detroit

In 1920, he and his wife Ethel moved to Detroit, Michigan, where they settled. That happened to be the exact year that Yogananda arrived on the shores of the USA.

Here Oliver Black founded his own business, *Peninsular Metal Products*, selling automobile parts. He started on a very small scale, in his garage, with an investment of only \$500. Like Rajarshi Janakananda, Oliver Black began with very little, but became a self-made millionaire. His company in the end made up to a \$35 million a year.

Here is a picture of one of his products.

The advertisement features a central illustration of a motorcycle with a large, rounded sidecar attached to the rear. A person is seated on the motorcycle. The background is dark with a spotlight effect on the vehicle. To the left of the illustration is an orange vertical banner with white text. Below the illustration is a white horizontal banner with black text. At the bottom of the advertisement are three white boxes containing text.

**YOU CAN HAVE THE
SPEED, EASE AND
ECONOMY OF A
MOTORCYCLE PLUS THE
CAPACITY OF A
1/2-TON TRUCK
ALL IN ONE**

**TRALETTE
MOTORCYCLE
UNIT**

Page 2

IT STANDS BY ITSELF—IT TURNS IN A 10-FOOT CIRCLE

TRALETTE DIVISION
PENINSULAR METAL PRODUCTS CO.

DETROIT

MICHIGAN

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LITING BY U. S. A.

His products can still be purchased even today, for example this same “[Tralette](#)“, on e-bay.

He and his wife grew rich, were part of the high society of Detroit, members of exclusive clubs, and had wealthy and well-known friends, among them Henry Ford.

Oliver Black was able to acquire large properties around Detroit. Among them were 800 acres northeast of Gaylord, Michigan, which, in 1970, became home to the Song of The Morning Ranch – A Yoga Retreat of Excellence.

On his various lands he drilled for gas and oil.

He also became what he called “a chequebook farmer”, owning thoroughbred horses and pedigree dogs.

In addition, he was an avid inventor and held patents on several items, among them a three-dimensional camera and a design for a vertical take-off/landing airplane.

The time just before meeting Yogananda

Yogananda came to lecture in Detroit twice in 1927, which was when Durga Mata (who also lived in Detroit) first met him. But Oliver Black's time had not yet come.

Brahmachari Nerode was the teacher in charge of the SRF Detroit center at that time. In May 1929 he moved to Mt. Washington. The SRF magazine states (see above) that it was Sri R.K. Das who introduced Oliver Black to the SRF teachings. He was an important minister for Yogananda at that time. You may read about his life [HERE](#).

In October 1929, the Master again visited Detroit. Still it wasn't Mr. Black's moment yet, though he lived in Detroit and was interested in yogic teachings.

His personal situation at that point appears to have been identical to that of Rajarshi Janakananda: his success was immense, but it came with at a huge price: it took its toll on his health and inner state. Oliver Black describes his condition during that time in these colorful words:

“When I first met Yogananda I was afraid to get half a mile away from a drug store. I was a regular hypochondriac. Took pills for laxatives, aspirins for headaches, and probably would have taken tranquilizers if they'd had them. In those days the automobile business was a fast track, and without realizing it I was digging my own grave. Many of us hit pay dirt, but they're all gone now, except for maybe two or three.”

Still Oliver Black's spiritual side, the yogi of incarnations, surfaced, albeit shyly. He “haphazardly” studied Hatha Yoga from an Indian Yogi named Rishi Singh Gherwal, in Santa Barbara. After some time, without any proper training, he began to teach yoga himself, at the home of Mrs. Maude Emerson.

He also relates: “Besides running a successful company, I studied and taught a small philosophy class. We were trying to find an answer to man's existence.”

He became acquainted with Hamid Bey, a famous Egyptian Coptic, whom Yogananda had met in 1927, becoming his friend. In the *East-West* magazine in 1933, Hamid Bey was even listed as an “Honorary Vice-President” of SRF. [HERE](#) is an article Yogananda wrote about him.

Meeting Yogananda

It's not altogether clear when exactly Mr. Black first met Yogananda. However, in an article published in July 1966 in the *Detroit Free Press*, Oliver Black relates: “I first met [Yogananda] 35 years ago.” That takes us to the year 1931, when he was 37 or 38 years old.

SRF writes that this meeting occurred during one of Yogananda's “campaigns”. The thing is, according to Oliver Black's story, Yogananda came to Detroit from Washington DC, but the Master isn't known to have been in that city in the early 1930s.

Let's look at his lecture schedule for 1931:

- February in Phoenix;
- May in Milwaukee;
- July in Denver;

- August in Colorado Springs;
- October in Salt Lake City, where Daya Mata first met him.

One can only guess when and why the Guru was in Washington DC. So let's pick Milwaukee, which is the closest to Washington DC. In that case the meeting with Oliver Black would have happened in May 1931.

(Just a possibility! Durga Mata writes: "At this time [1931, after Denver], some of the members helped Master buy a convertible four-seater Ford." Was it a loving gift from Oliver Black and his friends from Detroit?")

Meeting his Master, at any rate, was a truly amazing and extraordinary event, and is best told in Oliver Black's own words (from a recording):

"He was going back from Washington DC to California and the short way would have been through xy, Ohio. However, when he was ready to leave, the inner voice told him to come to Detroit. So he did, but when he got here, he didn't know what to do. So he went to a telephone book and started leafing the pages, running his finger down the pages. His finger stopped on a name – he looked at it and called that number. It happened to be a lady in Detroit, Maude Emerson. He told her who he was. She said she had somebody teaching a yoga class in her home. He answered, 'Well, I want to meet that man.' So she arranged our meeting.

After that he stayed at the *Book Cadillac Hotel* [see photo], and we were together for a whole week – continuously together. During that week he taught me many things about healing, as well as many other things. He taught me ten different healing methods. It was amazing what I learned from him. I don't know why he put his confidence in me."



This is the most important part: "The minute we met I knew that Yogananda was my Guru. It was a total 'collapse' for both of us. It was a recognition of the past. He said that I was a yogi in the Himalayan mountains and I had been there doing spiritual life to the point where I had to get out and share what I had already learned and realised, while I was in the mountains."

What was the "collapse" like? Mutual tears of joy and love?

At any rate, it was a soul reunion, an anciently blessed memory blossoming between Guru and disciple. Oliver Black remembers: “I instantly recognized him for the spiritual giant he was. Like many Americans I had been searching for the truth because I knew it was there. Yogananda taught where to find it. You might say he handed me a blueprint, and I’ve been following it ever since.”

Of course, Yogananda didn’t teach him only healing techniques, but also meditation, and above all the sacred technique of Kriya Yoga, taking Oliver Black straight into the kingdom of God within. The situation must have had a similar flavor to the moment when Mahavatar Babaji told Lahiri Mahasaya: “My son, arise. Receive your initiation into the kingdom of God through Kriya Yoga.”

Oliver Black explained: “He changed the whole direction of my life.” The yogi was re-born!

Ten years later

Perhaps the same is true of Mrs. Maude Emerson. She ended up leading the SRF center in Detroit, as Yogananda relates, ten years later, in *Inner Culture*, April 1942:

“I extremely enjoyed my visit to the Detroit S.R.F. Center. It is a little spiritual hive with lots of spiritual honey. The credit for the continuation of this beautiful Center belongs to Mrs. Maude Emerson, her daughter Mrs. Hall, and to Mr. J. Oliver Black. I was very happy to meet Mr. Black and to find him living the life of a Hindu yogi.”

What did he mean by “the life of a Hindu yogi”? Probably in those ten years Oliver Black rose early, meditated for long hours, lived outwardly according to the ancient yogic precepts, and put God first in his life and consciousness: so his spirit expanded into God.

Yogananda describes the Detroit center as “a little spiritual hive”. It must have been little indeed, as in those years it wasn’t even listed in the *Directory of SRF Centers* in the *Inner Culture* magazine.

At that meeting Yogananda asked Oliver Black to become actively involved with the SRF cause. It seems that from then on he established the SRF center in Detroit, becoming its leader.

When exactly the Guru authorized Oliver Black to give Kriya initiation is unknown. It might have been at that time.

The SRF Detroit center, at any rate, began to flourish increasingly.

The elevated yogi

Spiritually, Oliver Black’s stature was extremely high. He relates that there was a period of about three years when Yogananda and other masters would appear astrally in his meditation room nearly every night to teach him and help him in his meditations. Such experiences with Masters are rare and are reserved for exalted souls.

Paramhansa Yogananda once asked him, ‘Oliver, do you pray?’ He answered ‘Yes, Master, I think I pray nearly all the time.’ (This answer alone is very revealing about

his inner state!). Yogananda replied: “The next time you pray, pray *in* God, not *to* God.” This advice had a profound effect on Oliver Black’s prayers.

He described an experience he had at Mt Washington, during an eight hour Christmas meditation. Yogananda was leading it, sitting on a platform. He invited Oliver Black up to sit close-by at his side: his arm could touch him. After some hours the chair had become hard and Oliver wanted to stand up for a while. But his Guru pushed him down again. Every now and then the same thing happened again. Finally Mr. Black gave up and focused hard. At that point, concentrating on the third eye, he saw the most glorious scenery, indescribably beautiful. Suddenly the inner voice said: “Look up”. There he saw the Infinite Light and merged into it: “That’s what the Master wanted me to do.” From that Light, he later taught, we have all come, and into that Light we shall all merge.

Here is another amusing Guru-disciple story. Once he was visiting his Master at the Encinitas retreat. Yogananda put him up in Rajarsi’s room and Oliver was walking around the room admiring everything, looking out at the ocean, when the Master called him on the intercom phone, scolding him: “I put you in there to meditate”. Immediately Oliver Black sat down. While he was in meditation, Yogananda slipped into the room unnoticed and sat down right beside him, touching his side against Oliver’s. All at once Oliver felt an electric shock between the lowest chakras. Then Yogananda “zapped” his second chakra, and so on, going up and down, “electrocuting my chakras”.

Attunement



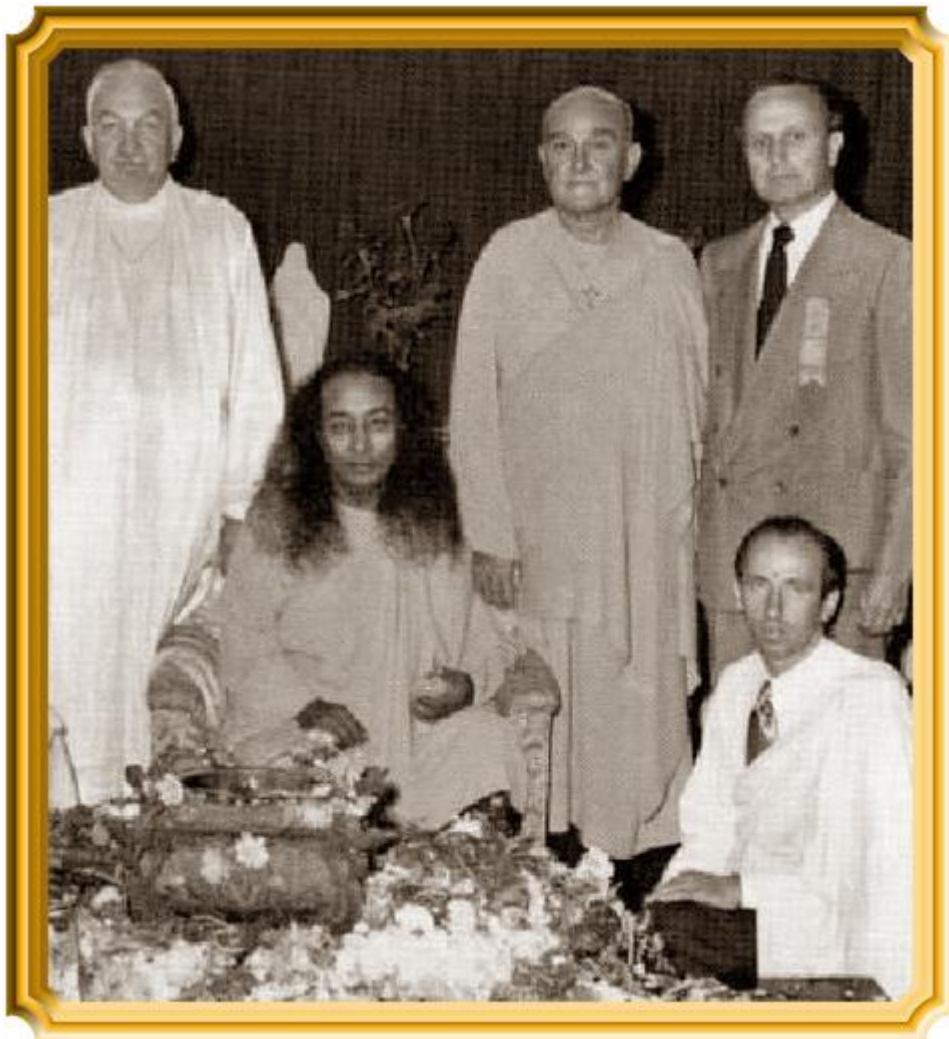
Yogananda asked Oliver Black to keep in frequent contact with him, to write or telephone often. But for some reason he didn't: only rarely did he communicate with his great Guru. He must have felt that such superficial contact is hardly necessary, as he felt Yogananda's astral presence and his omnipresent Spirit deep in meditation.

Yogananda however was not all too happy about it.

After a few years of this lack of communication, one morning as Oliver Black sat to meditate, he opened his eyes and saw Yogananda sitting right in front of him. It was not a vision, but an actual physical materialization. His Master, however, was sitting with his back turned to Mr. Black. His long hair was in a kind of bun at the back of his neck and he was wearing a torn old bathrobe. Oliver Black waited for the Master to speak or do something, but intuitively he understood that his Guru was displeased

with his non-communication, which is why he kept his back turned to him. After looking at the guru's back for a while, he closed his eyes and entered the inner world.

After his meditation, he called Daya Mata (then Faye Wright): "Tell me," he asked her, "does Master ever put his hair in a kind of bun on the back of his neck?" "Yes, he does it sometimes in his room, when nobody is around," she told him. "Well, then, tell me this: does he ever wear an old, beat-up bathrobe?" "Oh! That old thing," she exclaimed. "He has been wearing that in meditation for years. It is so awful that we keep threatening to take it and burn it. Why are you asking?" Oliver Black told her what had just happened. From then on he kept more frequently in contact with his Master.



But was that external contact enough? Not for Yogananda, it seems.

Swami Kriyananda recounts (*The New Path*): "Referring to the need for attunement with the Guru, Master said to me one day, 'Look at Mr. Black, and then look at Saint Lynn. I asked both of them to come and visit our colonies whenever they could, so as to maintain that spiritual contact. Saint Lynn has come out every opportunity he could get, and has spent hours in meditation on the lawn in Encinitas. But Mr. Black never came. He could easily have done so, had he wanted to. He thinks he can get there by himself. But he will find out. Spiritually he is very advanced, but he is bogging down. He knows there is something the matter, but doesn't know what it is."

Attunement with Guru, you see, is essential, and it must be on all levels [not only on the subtle inner level].”

Oliver Black inwardly soared blissfully in God, yet something was still missing, since outwardly he kept himself too much apart from his Master and from his outer mission.

And concerning Yogananda’s mission at SRF, there is another surprising fact: Oliver Black didn’t follow what his Guru asked him to do. His dharma was obviously different to that of Rajarshi, whose God-given duty it was to help his Master financially. But that was the opposite of what Yogananda guided Oliver Black to do. For many years Yogananda had been quietly encouraging Mr. Black to withdraw from the pursuit of business and take on the work of teaching and training devotees and truth-seekers full-time.

Oliver Black himself recounts: “Yogananda kept telling me to get out of business, but I just wouldn’t listen.”

True, he was the leader of the SRF center in Detroit, but his guru had much greater plans for him. In May 1951, he wrote to him: “Detroit, being in the center of the United States, has a great opportunity to draw true seekers, both from the East and West. I would like nothing better than for you to establish a sub-headquarters there. With your organizational power you can do something much greater, much more lasting, much easier, and much more secure than present-day business organizations in which one works to pay taxes, ruining his health and happiness.” (This is the full [letter of Yogananda](#))

This request is nothing short of amazing. Yogananda wanted him to start a second SRF headquarters. Oliver Black, however, again declined and didn’t act upon his Master’s wish. Instead he held on to his businesses.

The Guru, in the same letter, also asked Oliver Black to form ministers: “Please make more ministers like yourself. They will come; and we will build a new world, even though its growth may be slow.” [HERE](#) is a letter the Master wrote to the SRF Detroit center, expressing his wish.

In late August, 1951, in a special ceremony, Yogananda gave Oliver Black the spiritual title of “Yogacharya,” together with a few others (see Dr. Lewis’ biography).

He stayed a little longer with his Master at that time. Here is a photo from September 1, 1951.



Oliver Black's consciousness was transcendent, rooted in the Infinite. After this last meeting with him, Yogananda lovingly remarked, "Did you see God in his eyes?" He was a God-filled saint.

The Guru, however, might have been slightly and silently disappointed. Swami Kriyananda tells us how he once expressed it: "One evening at Master's retreat, we were walking together outdoors, just the two of us, when he remarked as if out of the blue, very sternly, 'Apart from Saint Lynn, every man has disappointed me. And you MUSTN'T disappoint me!' His concluding words were spoken with great earnestness."

Swami Kriyananda immediately understood that these male disciples hadn't disappointed him spiritually. What was lacking was the "masculine" sense of his outer mission, of "campaigning", of conquering, of vigorously expanding SRF. Dr. Lewis, Oliver Black, Bhaktananda, Bimalananda, Bernard... all of them were greatly advanced spiritually, but were disappointing Yogananda in that outward sense. Men have a natural outward thrust, while women naturally tend to be more inward, receptive. That male energy was needed, but was lacking. Only "Saint Lynn" had a real sense of the importance of Yogananda's outer mission, pumping millions of dollars into it.

Oliver Black even revealed that Yogananda had asked him, not long before his *mahasamadhi*, to become the future President of SRF (as he knew that Rajarsi's life was in "grave danger"). Again, however, Oliver Black declined.

Why, one asks? And did he pay a spiritual price for repeatedly refusing his Guru? Who knows? The Master wrote (handwritten) in the letter mentioned above: "You

have much pleased me, and with me the Gurus, Christ, and God, who ever manifest through me.”

Yogananda passed on soon after that, in March 1952.

After Yogananda's passing



This was a year of dramatic change for Oliver Black. Yogananda had repeatedly told him that if he did not leave his business willingly, something would happen to force him towards the spiritual direction. And so it happened. In 1952, through a hostile stock-market takeover, Oliver Black lost his company *Peninsular Metal Products* and, with it, most of his riches. He still remained a moderately wealthy man. In Mr. Black's words: "Yogananda kept telling me to get out of business, but I just wouldn't listen; but that time it was all taken care of for me."

(As a matter of interest: the January 1967 edition of the SRF magazine reprinted an article, *SECRETS OF YOGA from Detroit's Mr. Black and India's Yogananda*, which was first published in 1966 in the *Detroit Free Press*. It contains, so Oliver Black's followers explain, several inaccuracies, for example that he "retired in 1951", and "stayed on the board of directors of his company for a while until Yogananda told him to give it up.")

Certainly the hidden hand of his Guru was behind the professional "disaster": he was forcefully pushed out of his business... finally!

A new phase

A new phase now started in his life: he became a soul-minister.

Apart from leading the SRF center in Detroit, he created a Yoga School: Yogacharya Oliver Black's *Self-Realization Yoga*, in which he taught Yoga asanas and trained other teachers – again with huge success.

By 1966, his weekly Sunday SRF meditation and lecture services were attended by 200-300 people. Imagine the crowd!

His hatha yoga teachers were by 1966 reaching thousands of students. And his yearly "Festival of Yoga" in Detroit was attended by over 3,000 seekers. His was actually the

most successful yoga and meditation activity in the United States at that time. Yoga back then was barely starting in the West.

Why did he focus on Hatha Yoga? It was simply an effective outreach to people, who would later learn how to meditate. Oliver Black's main focus, in fact, remained teaching meditation, and the deeper aspects of yoga. He therefore initiated all his yoga teachers in the highest techniques of meditation (presumably Kriya Yoga). Once a year, in fact, he gave a Kriya initiation.

But, for some reason, in the early 70s his success began to fade. Was Yogananda's hand involved again? Did Yogananda still have other plans for him? Was being a famous Hatha Yoga teacher not his true dharma and direction?

In 1970, he founded his full-time yoga retreat *Song of the Morning Ranch*. It was the only property – a most beautiful one – which he hadn't sold after his financial crash. There he lived and taught, and was later joined by Bob Raymer, another direct disciple of Yogananda.

He was able now to share with seekers and devotees the depth he had in his soul. That was exactly his dharma, as Yogananda had told him many years ago: the reason why he had incarnated in the West.

Oliver Black's greatness continued to shine: he was a natural lightbearer of God. The soul-transformation he brought about in his students was amazing. They were truly fortunate to be in touch with such an elevated soul.

His relations with SRF remained very good.

On this photo Oliver Black welcomes Swami Kriyananda, who visited his center in 1955, as the director of the SRF center department.



Here we see Daya Mata meeting with Oliver Black, united in God and Guru, in 1956.



In 1970 Oliver Black was a guest of honour at the SRF convocation. At the table we see from left to right): Achalananda; Dharmananda; **Oliver Black**; Bhaktananda; Mokshananda; Mrs. Weaver; Premamoy; Anandamoy; Binay Narayan; Daya Mata; Dennis Weaver; Mrinalini Mata; Durga Mata; Ananda Mata; Sraddha Mata; Mrs.Lewis; Sahaja Mata; Uma Mata; Meera Mata.



SRF monks from time to time honoured the *Song of the Morning Ranch* with visits.

Still Yogacharya Oliver Black was kept somewhat at a distance, as he never became a fully-fledged SRF-representative. He ran his own retreat center and made his own decisions, remaining independent. He was also seen in a slightly suspicious light, as some of his students regarded him as their “guru”, something SRF disapproves of: “Yogananda is the last in the line of Gurus.”

Oliver Black, at any rate, was a saint, a great one, known for his radiant face, his infectious laughter, and for his immense divine love which he shared with all.

He rose each day at 3AM to meditate, for long hours. Was he a yoga fanatic? Hardly. He related that each day he practiced six or seven exercises (asanas), always including the headstand (“better than a cocktail”), which kept him amazingly healthy. That was “his lifetime dedication to the practice of yoga”, nothing more. Six or seven asanas take 20-30 minutes if they are held for some time. That’s all.

Health, he explained, is important. As long as we are not yet Self-realized, all of us should have “common sense” and take proper care of our body, he taught. Yoga is a supreme tool for this. Often spiritually-bent devotees neglect the body.

His final years

His Master’s words must have always stayed with him, like a constant silent call. Finally, at the age of 90, he took a big step to complete his Guru-given life dharma:

In 1983 he wrote a letter to Daya Mata, asking her to join *Song of the Morning Ranch* with SRF, finally creating the SRF “sub-headquarters”, which his Guru had asked him to build. Daya Mata and he had talked about it often, his letter states. [HERE](#) you can read it. Daya Mata’s answer must have been a “no”, as this union never happened. Back in 1952, it would have certainly worked, under Rajarsi. Even in 1955 it might have worked, when Daya Mata had become the new president. But now it was too late. SRF monks every now and then visited the *Song of the Morning Ranch*, but that was all the union offered.

As that door closed, he opened another. In 1987, at the age of 94(!), Yogacharya Oliver Black decided to build a world-brotherhood community, according to his Master’s ideals. So he contacted Swami Kriyananda, asking how to go about it. Kriyananda’s answer from January 1988 can be read [HERE](#). Oliver Black soon set the wheels in motion.

His community, however, was started only after his passing. Bob Raymer was Oliver Black’s successor and headed up his project, until his own death in 2008. (His story, how he met Yogananda, in his own words, can be read [HERE](#).)

At any rate, this beautiful and dedicated community can be visited [HERE](#). It is based on Yogananda’s teachings. Jai Guru.

A moral

Can we draw a moral from Oliver Black’s life? Most of all, we should certainly deeply bow to him as he is an angelic being. His light and inner greatness are immense.

If there remained a little gravel in his spiritual engine, we may want to avoid it for ourselves, personally. How? Today the Guru is no longer in the body for us to visit him frequently. There is, however, another way: outward contact with his advanced devotees will certainly help us a great deal, spiritually. Swami Kriyananda found that those devotees who feel it unnecessary to maintain contact with advanced disciples of Yogananda – with those who are in tune with him – receive much less, spiritually speaking, than those who do maintain that contact.

The same holds true for outward service: if you actively give, contribute, or serve your Guru's cause in some concrete way, you will receive much more than if you only think of receiving the inward blessings from the Master.

His amazing passing: a conscious exit

Yogacharya Oliver Black lived 96 years, remaining ever young, healthy and active.

His passing was divinely inspiring. It happened on September 16, 1989. He died as only an advanced yogi can. Throughout his last day, he went into meditation. Then came the time for his final exit: just before midnight he sat up, arranging himself in the lotus posture, and sat quietly. His gaze was turned upward, fixing the point between the eyebrows. His soul at that moment left the body gloriously. His physical frame gently fell backward, remaining in the perfect lotus pose, while his soul was freely flowing upwards.

Oliver Black had consciously entered the realm of Bliss.

