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Paramahansa Yogananda
(January 5, 1893 – March 7, 1952)
God Talks With Arjuna

THE

BHGAVAD

GITA

Royal Science of God-Realization

The immortal dialogue between soul and Spirit
A new translation and commentary

Paramahansa Yogananda

Self-Realization Fellowship

FOUNDED 1920

Paramahansa Yogananda
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THE SPIRITUAL LEGACY OF PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

His Complete Writings, Lectures, and Informal Talks

Paramahansa Yogananda founded Self-Realization Fellowship in 1920 to disseminate his teachings worldwide and to preserve their purity and integrity for generations to come. A prolific writer and lecturer from his earliest years in America, he created a renowned and voluminous body of works on the yoga science of meditation, the art of balanced living, and the underlying unity of all great religions. Today this unique and far-reaching spiritual legacy lives on, inspiring millions of truth-seekers all over the world.

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Paramahansa Yogananda, 1950
INTRODUCTION

The Bhagavad Gita is the most beloved scripture of India, a scripture of scriptures. It is the Hindu’s Holy Testament, or Bible, the one book that all masters depend upon as a supreme source of scriptural authority. Bhagavad Gita means “Song of the Spirit,” the divine communion of truth-realization between man and his Creator, the teachings of Spirit through the soul, that should be sung unceasingly.

The pantheistic doctrine of the Gita is that God is everything. Its verses celebrate the discovery of the Absolute, Spirit beyond creation, as being also the hidden Essence of all manifestation. Nature, with her infinite variety and inexorable laws, is an evolute of the Singular Reality through a cosmic delusion: maya, the “Magical Measurer” that makes the One appear as many embracing their own individuality—forms and intelligences existing in apparent separation from their Creator. Just as a dreamer differentiates his one consciousness into many dream beings in a dream world, so God, the Cosmic Dreamer, has separated His consciousness into all the cosmic manifestations, with souls individualized from His own One Being endowed with the egoity to dream their personalized existences within the Nature-ordained drama of the Universal Dream.

The main theme throughout the Gita is that one should be an adherent of sannyasa, a renouncer of this egoity ingrained through avidya, ignorance, within the physical self of man. By renunciation of all desires springing from the ego and its environments, which cause separateness between ego and Spirit; and by reunion with the Cosmic Dreamer through ecstatic yoga meditation, samadhi, man detaches himself from and ultimately dissolves the compellent forces of Nature that perpetuate the delusive dichotomy of the Self and Spirit. In samadhi, the cosmic dream delusion terminates and the ecstatic dream being awakens in oneness with the pure cosmic consciousness of the Supreme Being—ever-existing, ever-conscious, ever-new Bliss.

This God-realization cannot be attained merely by reading a book, but only by dwelling every day on the above truth that life is a variety enter-
tainment of dream movies full of the hazards of duality—villains of evil and heroic adventures with goodness; and by deep yoga meditation, uniting human consciousness with God’s cosmic consciousness. Thus does the Gita exhort the seeker to right action—physical, mental, and spiritual—toward this goal. We came from God and our ultimate destiny is to return to Him. The end and the means to the end is yoga, the timeless science of God-union.

So comprehensive as a spiritual guide is the Gita that it is declared to be the essence of the ponderous four Vedas, 108 Upanishads, and the six systems of Hindu philosophy. Only by intuitive study and understanding of these tomes, or else by contacting Cosmic Consciousness, can one fully comprehend the Bhagavad Gita. Indeed, the underlying essential truths of all great world scriptures can find common amity in the infinite wisdom of the Gita’s mere 700 concise verses.

The entire knowledge of the cosmos is packed into the Gita. Supremely profound, yet couched in revelatory language of solacing beauty and simplicity, the Gita has been understood and applied on all levels of human endeavor and spiritual striving—sheltering a vast spectrum of human beings with their disparate natures and needs. Wherever one is on the way back to God, the Gita will shed its light on that segment of the journey.

**ART REVEALS THE MIND** of a people—a crude arrow drawing suggests a crude mind—but the literature of a civilization is a much finer indication of a culture. Literature is the index of the mind of a nation. India has preserved in her literature her highly evolved civilization dating back to a glorious golden age. From the undated antiquity in which the Vedas first emerged, through a grand unfoldment of subsequent exalted verse and prose, the Hindus have left their civilization not in stone monoliths or crumbling edifices, but in architecture of ornamental writing sculpted in the euphonious language of Sanskrit. The very composition of the Bhagavad Gita—its rhetoric, alliteration, diction, style, and harmony—shows that India had long since passed through states of material and intellectual growth and had arrived at a lofty peak of spirituality.¹

The age and authorship of the Gita, as with so many of India’s ancient writings and scriptures, remains an engaging subject of intellectual and
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scholarly research and dispute. Its verses are found in the sixth of eighteen books that constitute India’s great epic poem, the Mahabharata, in the Bhishma Parva, sections 23–40. In 100,000 couplets this hoary epic—perhaps the longest poem in world literature—recounts the history of the descendants of King Bharata, the Pandavas and Kauravas, cousins whose dispute over a kingdom was the cause of the cataclysmic war of Kurukshetra. The Bhagavad Gita, a sacred dialogue on yoga between Bhagavan Krishna—who was at once an earthly king and a divine incarnation—and his chief disciple, the Pandava prince Arjuna, purportedly takes place on the eve of this fearsome war.

The authorship of the Mahabharata, including the Gita portion, is traditionally assigned to the illumined sage Vyasa, whose date is not definitely known. It is said that the Vedic rishis manifested their immortality by appearing before mankind in different ages to play some role for man’s spiritual upliftment. Thus they appeared and reappeared at various times throughout the extensive period of time encompassed by the revelation of the scriptures of India, a phenomenon confounding to any scholar who relies on facts rather than faith in an unenlightened age in which man has learned to use hardly ten percent of his brain capacity, and that quite awkwardly for the most part. Whether these immortals retain their physical forms like Mahavatar Babaji (as recounted in Autobiography of a Yogi), or remain immersed in Spirit, they emerge from time to time in some tangible expression to man.

So long as divine beings are in a state of absolute oneness with Spirit, as was Sage Vyasa, they cannot record in writing their indescribable spiritual perceptions. Such Self-realized souls have to come down from the state of Spirit-oneness, which is unalloyed by duality, to the state of human consciousness, which is governed by the law of relativity, in order to bring truth to mankind. When the little soul is blessed to merge with the vast ocean of blissful Spirit, it takes care not to lose its identity if it wants to come back and chronicle its experiences of the Infinite for the enlightenment of the world.

Tradition involves Vyasa in many literary works, primarily as an arranger of the four Vedas, for which he is referred to as Vedavyasa; compiler of Puranas, sacred books illustrating Vedic knowledge through histor-
ical and legendary tales of ancient India’s avatars, saints and sages, kings and heroes; and author of the epic Mahabharata, which purportedly was accomplished nonstop in two and a half of his latter years spent in secluded retirement in the Himalayas. He not only authored the Mahabharata and its sacred Gita discourse, but showed himself throughout playing a significant role of involvement in the events and affairs of the Pandavas and Kauravas. Indeed, he is the paternal origin of these chief characters through the two sons he sired, Pandu and Dhritarashtra.

The Gita is generally conceded to predate the Christian era. The testimony of the Mahabharata itself is that the Kurukshetra war took place toward the end of Dwapara Yuga, when the world was on the verge of descending into the Dark Age or Kali Yuga. (The yugas, or world cycles, are explained in the commentary on IV:1.) Traditionally, many Hindus have fixed the beginning of the last descending Kali Yuga at 3102 B.C., thus placing the Kurukshetra war described in the Mahabharata a few decades prior to this. Scholars of East and West have advanced various dates for the Mahabharata events—some basing their estimates on archaeological evidence and others on references in the poem to specific astronomical phenomena such as eclipses, solstices, positions of stars, and planetary conjunctions. By these means, the dates proposed for the Kurukshetra war range from as early as 6000 B.C. to as recently as 500 B.C.—hardly a definite consensus!

There is no effort or presumption in this publication to add to the work of scholarly researchers and commentators who have labored long and studiously to label and categorize such data dear to historians as authorship, time frames, and factuality of names, places, and events. These have their necessary place in the world library of knowledge, whether speculative or proven. My only purpose is to speak of the exoteric and esoteric—material and spiritual—message of the Bhagavad Gita based on the form and tradition in which it has been handed down to us from the archives of timeless truth by God-knowing sages. What may defy definitive scrutiny in one generation may prove to be quite commonplace in higher ages that mirror those more enlightened times in which such scriptures originated.

The ancient sacred writings do not clearly distinguish history from symbology; rather, they often intermix the two in the tradition of scriptural
revelation. Prophets would pick up instances of the everyday life and events of their times and from them draw similes to express subtle spiritual truths. Divine profundities would not otherwise be conceivable by the ordinary man unless defined in common terms. When, as they often did, scriptural prophets wrote in more recondite metaphors and allegories, it was to conceal from ignorant, spiritually unprepared minds the deepest revelations of Spirit. Thus, in a language of simile, metaphor, and allegory, the Bhagavad Gita was very cleverly written by Sage Vyasa by interweaving historical facts with psychological and spiritual truths, presenting a word-painting of the tumultuous inner battles that must be waged by both the material and the spiritual man. In the hard shell of symbology, he hid the deepest spiritual meanings to protect them from the devastation of the ignorance of the Dark Ages toward which civilization was descending concurrent with the end of Sri Krishna’s incarnation on earth.

Historically, on the brink of such a horrendous war as that related in the Mahabharata, it is most unlikely that, as the Gita depicts, Krishna and Arjuna would draw their chariot into the open field between the two opposing armies at Kurukshetra and there engage in an extensive discourse on yoga. While many of the chief events and persons in the compendious Mahabharata indeed have their basis in historical fact, their poetic presentation in the epic has been arranged conveniently and meaningfully (and wonderfully condensed in the Bhagavad Gita portion) for the primary purpose of setting forth the essence of India’s Sanatana Dharma, Eternal Religion.

In interpreting scripture, one must not, therefore, ignore the factual and historical elements in which the truth was couched. One must distinguish between an ordinary illustration of a moral doctrine or recounting of a spiritual phenomenon and that of a deeper esoteric intent. One has to know how to recognize the signs of the convergence of material illustrations with spiritual doctrines without trying to drag a hidden meaning out of everything. One must know how to intuit the cues and express declarations of the author and never fetch out meanings not intended, misled by enthusiasm and the imaginative habit of trying to squeeze spiritual signifi-
cance from every word or statement.

The true way to understand scripture is through intuition, attuning oneself to the inner realization of truth.

My Guru and Paramgurus—Swami Sri Yukteswar, Lahiri Mahasaya, and Mahavatar Babaji—are rishis of this present age, masters who themselves are God-realized living scriptures. They have bequeathed to the world—along with the long-lost scientific technique of Kriya Yoga—a new revelation of the holy Bhagavad Gita, relevant primarily to the science of yoga and to Kriya Yoga in particular.5

Mahavatar Babaji, at one with Krishna in Spirit, through his grace intuitively transferred the true knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita to his disciple Lahiri Mahasaya—a Yogavatar, “Incarnation of Yoga”—through whom he revived for mankind the Kriya Yoga science as the technique of salvation for this age. Lahiri Mahasaya himself never wrote any books, but his divine expositions of the scriptures were expressed through the writings of various of his advanced disciples. Among his greatest disciples, Swami Sri Yukteswar, Swami Pranabananda, and Panchanon Bhattacharya recorded his Gita explanations. The earliest small edition of the Bhagavad Gita with Lahiri Mahasaya’s interpretation was brought out by Panchanon Bhattacharya, founder of the Arya Mission Institution, Calcutta. Later, my guru Sri Yukteswarji—a Jnanavatar, “Incarnation of Wisdom”—in his elaborate unrivaled way, explained the most significant first nine chapters of the Gita according to Lahiri Mahasaya’s interpretation.

After that, the great Swami Pranabananda, “the saint with two bodies” (about whom I have written in my Autobiography of a Yogi), brought forth an amazing interpretation of Lahiri Mahasaya’s interpretation of the entire Gita. The eminent yogi, Bhupendra Nath Sanyal, whom I personally highly regard, also brought out a remarkable edition of Lahiri Mahasaya’s interpretation of the Gita. I have had the blessing to be inspired in the greatest way about Lahiri Mahasaya’s divine insight and perceptive method of explaining the Gita, which I learned first from my Master.

Through the help of a God-realized guru, one learns how to use the nutcracker of intuitive perception to crack open the hard shell of language
and ambiguity to get at the kernels of truth in scriptural sayings. My guru, Swami Sri Yukteswar, never permitted me to read with mere theoretical interest any stanza of the Bhagavad Gita (or the aphorisms of Patanjali, India’s greatest exponent of Yoga). Master made me meditate on the scriptural truths until I became one with them; then he would discuss them with me. Once when in my enthusiasm I hurried Master to teach me faster, he sharply rebuked me: “Go and finish reading the Gita; why come to study it with me?” When I became calm, having stilled my intellectual eagerness, he told me to put myself in rapport with God as manifested in Krishna, Arjuna, and Vyasa when the message of the Gita was revealed through them.

In this way, during those precious years in the blessed company of Master, he gave to me the key to unlock the mystery of scripture. (It was from him I also learned how to put myself in tune with Christ to interpret his sayings as he wanted them to be understood.) Master’s example was his guru, Lahiri Mahasaya. When disciples and students sought instruction from the Yogavatar, he used to close his eyes and read aloud from the book of his soul-realization. Sri Yukteswar did the same; and that method is what he taught to me. I am grateful to Master for this, for within the soul is a source of infinite realization, which I could not have gleaned in all my life from intellectual study. Now when I touch my pen, or look within and speak, it comes in boundless waves.

Master also taught me the specific symbology in just the first few verses of Chapter I of the Gita and a few related aphorisms of Patanjali. When he saw that I had mastered these through his instruction and my unfolding intuitive perception born of meditation, he declined to teach me further. Early on, he had foretold my work to interpret the Gita. Master said to me: “You don’t want to understand and explain the Gita according to your own concepts or with the twistings of the intellect. You want to interpret to the world the actual dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna as perceived by Vyasa and revealed to you.”

This Bhagavad Gita that I offer to the world, God Talks With Arjuna, is a spiritual commentary of the communion that takes place between the omnipresent Spirit (symbolized by Krishna) and the soul of the ideal devotee (represented by Arjuna). I arrived at the spiritual understanding
Their thoughts fully on Me, their beings surrendered to Me, enlightening one another, proclaiming Me always, My devotees are contented and joyful.

—Bhagavad Gita X:9

“As often as virtue declines, a God-illumined soul comes on earth to draw virtue again to the fore....

“As a child in Brindaban, Krishna amazed all with his precocious wisdom and display of incredible powers....Beautiful in form and feature, irresistible in charm and demeanor, an embodiment of divine love, giving joy to all, the young boy Krishna was beloved of everyone in the community, and an entrancing leader and friend to his childhood companions, the gopas and gopis, who with him tended the village herds of cows in the sylvan environs....Sri Krishna, with the enchanting melodies of his heavenly flute, is calling all devotees to the bower of divine union in samadhi meditation, there to bask in the blissful love of God.”
CHAPTER I

THE DEPENDENCY OF ARJUNA

The Significance of Chapter I

“What Did They?”—Survey of the Inner Psychological and Spiritual Battlefield

The Opposing Armies of the Spiritual and Materialistic Forces

The Conch Shells: Inner Vibratory Battle in Meditation

The Devotee Observes the Enemies to Be Destroyed

Arjuna’s Refusal to Fight

“The timeless message of the Bhagavad Gita does not refer only to one historical battle, but to the cosmic conflict between good and evil: life as a series of battles between Spirit and matter, soul and body, life and death, knowledge and ignorance, health and disease, changelessness and transitoriness, self-control and temptations, discrimination and the blind sense-mind.”
CHAPTER I

THE DESPONDENCY OF ARJUNA

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHAPTER I

As a preeminent treatise on Yoga, the renowned Bhagavad Gita speaks both pragmatically and esoterically to embrace the broad spectrum of human seeking that has for generations sheltered itself in the counsel and solace found in the verses of this beloved scripture. It cites not only the practical application of spiritual principles required of the aspirant, but also the consummate expression of those principles as realized by the advanced yogi.

In modern books, the Introduction usually gives the reader a general idea of the contents; but the Hindu scriptural writers of ancient India often used the first chapter instead to indicate their purpose. Thus the opening chapter of the Bhagavad Gita serves as an introduction to the holy discourse that follows. But it does not merely set the scene and provide a backdrop, to be lightly perused as insubstantial. When read as the allegory intended by its author, the great sage Vyasa, it introduces the basic principles of the science of Yoga and describes the initial spiritual struggles of the yogi who sets out on the path to kaivalya, liberation, oneness with God: the goal of Yoga. To understand the implied truths in the first chapter is to begin the yoga journey with a clearly charted course.

My revered guru, Swami Sri Yukteswar—himself a Jnanavatar, incarnation of wisdom—taught me the hidden meaning in just a few significant verses from the first Gita chapter. “You now have the key,” he said. “With calm inner perception, you will be able to open this scripture to any passage and understand both its substance and its essence.” It is with his encouragement and by his grace that I offer this work.

“What Did They?”—Survey of the Psychological and Spiritual Battlefield
Verse 1

dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca
dharmakṣetrē kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavah
māmakāḥ pāṇḍavās caiva kim akurvata sanijaya

Dhritarashtra said:
On the holy plain of Kurukshetra (dharmakṣetra kurukṣetra),
when my offspring and the sons of Pandu had gathered together,
eager for battle, what did they, O Sanjaya?

The Blind King Dhritarashtra (the blind mind) enquired through the honest Sanjaya (impartial introspection): “When my offspring, the Kurus (the wicked impulsive mental and sense tendencies), and the sons of the virtuous Pandu (the pure discriminative tendencies) gathered together on the dharmakṣetra (holy plain) of Kurukshetra (the bodily field of activity), eager to do battle for supremacy, what was the outcome?”

The earnest enquiry by the blind King Dhritarashtra, seeking an unbiased report from the impartial Sanjaya as to how fared the battle between the Kurus and the Pandavas (sons of Pandu) at Kurukshetra, is metaphorically the question to be asked by the spiritual aspirant as he reviews daily the events of his own righteous battle from which he seeks the victory of Self-realization. Through honest introspection he analyses the deeds and assesses the strengths of the opposing armies of his good and bad tendencies: self-control versus sense indulgence, discriminative intelligence opposed by mental sense inclinations, spiritual resolve in meditation contested by mental resistance and physical restlessness, and divine soul-consciousness against the ignorance and magnetic attraction of the lower ego-nature.

The battlefield of these contending forces is Kurukshetra (Kuru, from the Sanskrit root kṛi, “work, material action”; and kṣetra, “field”). This “field of action” is the human body with its physical, mental, and soul faculties, the field on which all activities of one’s life take place. It is referred to in this Gita stanza as Dharmaśvetra (dharma, i.e., righteousness, virtue, holiness; thus, holy plain or field), for on this field the righteous battle is
waged between the virtues of the soul’s discriminative intelligence (sons of Pandu) and the ignoble, uncontrolled activities of the blind mind (the Kurus, or offspring of the blind King Dhritarashtra).

Dharmakshetra Kurukshtera refers also, respectively, to religious and spiritual duties and activities (those of the yogi in meditation) as contrasted with mundane responsibilities and activities. Thus, in this deeper metaphysical interpretation, Dharmakshetra Kurukshtera signifies the inner bodily field on which the spiritual action of yoga meditation takes place for the attainment of Self-realization: the plain of the cerebrospinal axis and its seven subtle centers of life and divine consciousness.

Competing on this field are two opposing forces or magnetic poles: discriminative intelligence (buddhi) and the sense-conscious mind (manas). Buddhi, the pure discriminating intellect, is allegorically represented as Pandu, husband of Kunti (the mother of Arjuna and the other Pandava princes who uphold the righteous principles of nivritti, renunciation of worldliness). The name Pandu derives from pand, “white”—a metaphorical implication of the clarity of a pure discriminating intellect. Manas is allegorically represented as the blind King Dhritarashtra, sire of the one hundred Kurus, or sensory impressions and inclinations, which are all bent toward pravritti, worldly enjoyment. Buddhi draws its right discernment from the superconsciousness of the soul manifesting in the causal seats of consciousness in the spiritual cerebrospinal centers. Manas, the sense mind, the subtle magnetic pole turned outward toward the world of matter, is in the pons Varolii, which physiologically is ever busy with sensory coordination. Thus, buddhi intelligence draws the consciousness toward truth or the eternal realities, soul consciousness or Self-realization. Manas or sense mind repels the consciousness from truth and engages it in the external sensory activities of the body, and thus with the world of delusive relativities, maya.

The name Dhritarashtra derives from dhṛta, “held, supported, drawn tight (reins),” and rāṣṭra, “kingdom,” from rāj, “to rule.” By implication, we have the symbolic meaning, dhṛtam rāṣṭram yena, “who upholds the kingdom (of the senses),” or “who rules by holding tightly the reins (of the senses).”
The mind (manas, or sense consciousness) gives coordination to the senses as the reins keep together the several horses of a chariot. The body is the chariot; the soul is the owner of the chariot; intelligence is the charioteer; the senses are the horses. The mind is said to be blind because it cannot see without the help of the senses and intelligence. The reins of a chariot receive and relay the impulses from the steeds and the guidance of the charioteer. Similarly, the blind mind on its own neither cognizes nor exerts guidance, but merely receives the impressions from the senses and relays the conclusions and instructions of the intelligence. If the intelligence is governed by buddhi, the pure discriminative power, the senses are controlled; if the intelligence is ruled by material desires, the senses are wild and unruly.

Sanjaya means, literally, completely victorious; “one who has conquered himself.” He alone who is not self-centered has the ability to see clearly and to be impartial. Thus, in the Gita, Sanjaya is divine insight; for the aspiring devotee, Sanjaya represents the power of impartial intuitive self-analysis, discerning introspection. It is the ability to stand aside, observe oneself without any prejudice, and judge accurately. Thoughts may be present without one’s conscious awareness. Introspection is that power of intuition by which the consciousness can watch its thoughts. It does not reason, it feels—not with biased emotion, but with clear, calm intuition.

In the Mahabharata, of which the Bhagavad Gita is a part, the text of the Gita is introduced by the great rishi (sage) Vyasa bestowing on Sanjaya the spiritual power of being able to see from a distance everything taking place over the entire battlefield, so that he could give an account to the blind King Dhritarashtra as the events unfold. Therefore, one would expect the king’s enquiry in the first verse to be in the present tense. Author Vyasa purposely had Sanjaya narrate the Gita dialogue retrospectively, and used a past tense of the verb (“What did they?”), as a clear hint to discerning students that the Gita is referring only incidentally to a historical battle on the plain of Kurukshetra in northern India. Primarily, Vyasa is describing a universal battle—the one that rages daily in man’s life. Had Vyasa wished merely to report the progress of an actual battle
that was taking place at the moment on the field of Kurukshetra, he would have had Dhritarashtra speak to the messenger Sanjaya in the present tense: “My children and the sons of Pandu—what are they doing now?”

This is an important point. The timeless message of the Bhagavad Gita does not refer only to one historical battle, but to the cosmic conflict between good and evil: life as a series of battles between Spirit and matter, soul and body, life and death, knowledge and ignorance, health and disease, changelessness and transitoriness, self-control and temptations, discrimination and the blind sense-mind. The past tense of the verb in the first stanza is therefore employed by Vyasa to indicate that the power of one’s introspection is being invoked to review the conflicts of the day in one’s mind in order to determine the favorable or unfavorable outcome.²

**Expanded Commentary: The Battle of Life**

From the moment of conception to the surrender of the last breath, man has to fight in each incarnation innumerable battles—biological, hereditary, bacteriological, physiological, climatic, social, ethical, political, sociological, psychological, metaphysical—so many varieties of inner and outer conflicts. Competing for victory in every encounter are the forces of good and evil. The whole intent of the Gita is to align man’s efforts on the side of dharma, or righteousness. The ultimate aim is Self-realization, the realization of man’s true Self, the soul, as made in the image of God, one with the ever-existing, ever-conscious, ever-new bliss of Spirit.

The first contest of the soul in each incarnation is with other souls seeking rebirth. With the union of sperm and ovum to begin the formation of a new human body, a flash of light appears in the astral world, the heavenly home of souls between incarnations. That light transmits a pattern which attracts a soul according to that soul’s karma—the self-created influences from actions of past lives. In each incarnation, karma works itself out partly through hereditary forces; the soul of a child is attracted into a family in which heredity is in conformance with the child’s past karma. Many souls vie to enter this new cell of life; only one will be victorious. (In the case of a multiple conception, more than one primal cell is present.)

Within the mother’s body, the unborn child struggles against disease,
darkness, and periodic feelings of limitation and frustration as the soul consciousness in the unborn child remembers and then gradually forgets its greater freedom of expression during its astral sojourn. The soul within the embryo also has to contend with karma, which is influencing for good or ill the formation of the body in which it is now a resident. Additionally, it encounters the vibratory influences that reach it from outside—the environment and actions of the mother; external sounds and sensations; vibrations of love and hate, peace and anger.

After birth, the struggles of the infant are between its instincts to seek comfort and survival and the opposing relative helplessness of its immature bodily instrument.

A child begins his first conscious struggle when he has to choose between his desires to play aimlessly and his desire to learn, study, and pursue some course of systematic training. Gradually, more serious battles arise, forced upon him by karmic instincts from within or by bad company and environment from without.

The youth finds himself confronted suddenly with a host of problems that often he has been ill-prepared to meet: temptations of sex, greed, prevarication, money-making by easy but questionable means, pressure from the company he keeps, and social influences. The youth usually discovers he possesses no sword of wisdom with which to fight the invading armies of worldly experiences.

The adult who lives without cultivating and employing his innate powers of wisdom and spiritual discrimination finds inexorably that the kingdom of his body and mind is being overrun by the insurgents of misery-making wrong desires, destructive habits, failure, ignorance, disease, and unhappiness.

Few men are even aware that a state of constant warfare exists in their kingdom. Usually, it is only when the devastation is nearly complete that men helplessly realize the sad ruin of their lives. The psychological conflict for health, prosperity, self-control, and wisdom has to be started anew each day in order for man to advance toward victory, reclaiming inch by inch the territories of the soul occupied by the rebels of ignorance.

The yogi, the awakening man, is confronted not only with the external battles fought by all men, but also with the internal clash between the neg-
God Talks With Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita
Then also, Madhava (Krishna) and Pandava (Arjuna), seated in their grand chariot with its yoke of white horses, splendidly blew their celestial conch shells.

—Bhagavad Gita I:14

“Arjuna, seated in the chariot of meditative intuition, with his attention focused on the Spirit as Krishna or divine Christ Consciousness at the Kutastha center between the eyebrows, beholds the light of the spiritual eye and hears the sacred sound of Pranava, the creative Aum vibration with its different cosmic sounds [“conch shells”] vibrating from the spinal centers in the astral body....

“Behold the chariot of intuition drawn by stallions of white lights racing in all directions from a dark blue center (soul’s abode)!!...

“Surrounding this blue light is the brilliant white or golden light—the telescopic astral eye through which all Nature is perceived. In the center of the blue light is a white starlike light, doorway to the Infinite Spirit, or Cosmic Consciousness.”

“Pranava, the sound of the creative Aum vibration, is the mother of all sounds. The intelligent cosmic energy of Aum that issues forth from God, and is the manifestation of God, is the creator and substance of all matter. This holy vibration is the link between matter and Spirit. Meditation on Aum is the way to realize the true Spirit-essence of all creation. By inwardly following the sound of Pranava to its source, the yogi’s consciousness is carried aloft to God.”

—Paramahansa Yogananda

**Verses 15–18**

pāṇcajanyāṁ hṛṣīkeśo devadattam dhanamijayaḥ
pauṇḍram dadhmāu mahāśaṅkham bhīmakarmaḥ vṛkodaraḥ (15)
anantavijayam rājā kuntīputro yudhiṣṭhirah
nakulaḥ sahadevaḥ ca sughoṣamaṇipuspakau (16)

kāṣyaś ca parameśvāsaḥ śikhaṇḍī ca mahārathah
dhṛṣṭadyumno virāṭaś ca sātvyakiś cāparājitah (17)

drupade draupadeyāś ca sarvasaḥ pṛthivipate
sahihūḥ sa mahābhāhuḥ ṣaṅkhāṇaḥ dadhwuḥ pṛthakpṛthak (18)

(15) Hrishikesha (Krishna) blew his Panchajanya; Dhananjaya (Arjuna), his Devadatta; and Vrikodara (Bhima), of terrible deeds, blew his great conch Paundra.

(16) King Yudhisthira, the son of Kunti, blew his Anantavijaya; Nakula and Sahadeva blew, respectively, their Sughosha and Manipushpaka.

(17) The King of Kashi, excellent archer; Sikhandi, the great warrior; Dhrishtadyumna, Virata, the invincible Satyaki,

(18) Drupada, the sons of Draupadi, and the mighty-armed son of Subhadra, all blew their own conches, O Lord of Earth.

In these verses reference is made to the specific vibratory sounds (the conch shells of the various Pandavas) the meditating devotee hears emanating from the astral centers in the spine and medulla. Pranava, the sound of the creative Aum vibration, is the mother of all sounds. The intelligent cosmic energy of Aum that issues forth from God, and is the manifestation of God, is the creator and substance of all matter. This holy vibration is the link between matter and Spirit. Meditation on Aum is the way to realize the true Spirit-essence of all creation. By inwardly following the sound of Pranava to its source, the yogi’s consciousness is carried aloft to God.

In the microcosmic universe of the body of man, the Aum vibration works through the vital activities in the astral spinal centers of life with their creative vibratory elements (tattvas) of earth, water, fire, air, and ether. Through these, man’s body is created, enlivened, and sustained.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“As a bright light shining in the midst of darkness, so was Yogananda’s presence in this world. Such a great soul comes on earth only rarely, when there is a real need among men.”

— His Holiness the Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram (1894–1994), revered spiritual leader of millions in India

Paramahansa Yogananda was born Mukunda Lal Ghosh on January 5, 1893, in the north Indian city of Gorakhpur, near the Himalaya mountains. From his earliest years, it was clear that his life was marked for a divine destiny. According to those closest to him, even as a child the depth of his awareness and experience of the spiritual was far beyond the ordinary. In his youth he sought out many of India’s sages and saints, hoping to find an illumined teacher to guide him in his spiritual quest.

It was in 1910, at the age of seventeen, that he met and became a disciple of the revered Swami Sri Yukteswar. In the hermitage of this great master of yoga he spent the better part of the next ten years, receiving Sri Yukteswar’s strict but loving spiritual discipline. After he graduated from Calcutta University in 1915, his Guru bestowed on him the formal vows of a monk of India’s venerable monastic Swami Order, at which time he received the name Yogananda (signifying bliss, ananda, through divine union, yoga).

In 1917, Sri Yogananda began his life’s work with the founding of a “how-to-live” school for boys, where modern educational methods were combined with yoga training and instruction in spiritual ideals. Three years later he was invited to serve as India’s delegate to an International Congress of Religious Liberals convening in Boston. His address to the Congress, on “The Science of Religion,” was enthusiastically received.

For the next several years, he lectured and taught on the East Coast and in 1924 embarked on a cross-continental speaking tour. To the tens of thousands of Westerners who attended his talks during the decade
that followed, his words on India’s timeless wisdom were a revelation. He emphasized the means to attain direct personal experience of God, and taught the underlying unity of the world’s great religions—in particular that of “the original teachings of Jesus Christ and the original Yoga taught by Bhagavan Krishna.” In Los Angeles, he began a two-month series of lectures and classes in January of 1925. As elsewhere, his talks were greeted with interest and acclaim. The Los Angeles Times reported: “The Philharmonic Auditorium presents the extraordinary spectacle of thousands...being turned away an hour before the advertised opening of a lecture with the 3000-seat hall filled to its utmost capacity.”

Later that year, Sri Yogananda established in Los Angeles the international headquarters of Self-Realization Fellowship, the society he had founded in 1920 to disseminate his teachings on the ancient science and philosophy of Yoga and its time-honored Raja Yoga methods of meditation.3

Over the next decade, he traveled extensively, speaking in major cities throughout the country. Among those who became his students were many prominent figures in science, business, and the arts, including horticulturist Luther Burbank, operatic soprano Amelita Galli-Curci, George Eastman (inventor of the Kodak camera), poet Edwin Markham, and symphony conductor Leopold Stokowski. In 1927, he was officially received at the White House by President Calvin Coolidge, who had become interested in the newspaper reports of his activities.

Paramahansaji returned to India in 1935 for a long-awaited reunion with his guru, Sri Yukteswar. During this eighteen-month trip, he also traveled through Europe and gave classes and lectures in London, as well as all over India. While in his native land, he enjoyed meetings with Mahatma Gandhi (who requested initiation in Kriya Yoga from him), Nobel physicist Sir C. V. Raman, and some of India’s renowned saints, including Sri Ramana Maharshi and Anandamoyi Ma.
After returning to America from India at the end of 1936, he began to withdraw somewhat from his nationwide public lecturing so as to devote himself to building an enduring foundation for his worldwide work and to the writings that would carry his message to future generations. His life story, Autobiography of a Yogi, was published in 1946 and substantially expanded by him in 1951. Recognized from the beginning as a landmark work in its field, the book has been in print continuously through Self-Realization Fellowship since its publication more than seventy years ago.

On March 7, 1952, Paramahansa Yogananda entered mahasamadhi, a God-illuminated master’s conscious exit from the body at the time of physical death. His passing occasioned an outpouring of reverent appreciation from spiritual leaders, dignitaries, friends, and disciples all over the world. The eminent Swami Sivananda, founder of the Divine Life Society, wrote: “A rare gem of inestimable value, the like of whom the world is yet to witness, Paramahansa Yogananda has been an ideal representative of the ancient sages and seers, the glory of India.” American author and educator Dr. Wendell Thomas related: “I came to [Paramahansa] Yogananda many years ago, not as a seeker or devotee, but as a writer with a sympathetic yet analytic and critical approach. Happily, I found in Yoganandaji a rare combination. While steadfast in the ancient principles of his profound faith, he had the gift of generous adaptability....With his quick wit and great spirit he was well fitted to promote reconciliation and truth among the religious seekers of the world. He brought peace and joy to multitudes.”

Today, the spiritual and humanitarian work begun by Paramahansa Yogananda is being carried on under the direction of Brother Chidananda, current president of Self-Realization Fellowship/Yogoda Satsanga Society of India. In addition to publishing Paramahansa Yogananda’s lectures, writings, and informal talks—including his Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons, a comprehensive series for home study; and a quarterly magazine, Self-Realization—the society guides members
in their practice of Sri Yogananda’s teachings; oversees temples, retreats, and meditation centers around the world, as well as the Self-Realization Fellowship monastic communities; and coordinates the Worldwide Prayer Circle, which serves as an instrument to help bring healing to those in physical, mental, or spiritual need and greater harmony among the nations.

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Paramahansa Yogananda’s passing, his far-reaching contributions to the spiritual upliftment of humanity were given formal recognition by the Government of India. A special commemorative stamp was issued in his honor, together with a tribute that read, in part:

“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.”
PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA
At Self-Realization Fellowship Lake Shrine, 1950