

Autobiography of a Yogi Study Guide

Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramahansa Yogananda

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Plot Summary

This astonishing autobiography details the life of a man who knew from childhood he would travel a mystic path, and would follow his dreams to be a devotee of God and an exemplary yogi. Paramahansa Yogananda, known in childhood as Mukunda Groh, was an adventurous, spirited boy. His family was of an upper caste in India, his father a railroad executive and fairly well-to-do. Young Mukunda seems to have full and clear recall of events and conversations of his childhood, particularly those that reveal the supernatural and at times, awesome experiences he has as a budding enlightened being. Young Mukunda, although mischievous, is extremely honest and maintains the highest level of integrity, especially for a child. He seems to have been born with a set of spiritual values that were reinforced by his parents, who were devotees of Lahiri Mahasaya, a celebrated saint and prophet.

As a young boy, Mukunda yearned to study in the Himalayas, and always knew that his first and true love was for God. Under the tutelage of the wise Sri Yukteswar, whose guru was also Lahiri Mahasaya, Mukunda finishes his schooling and delves with devotion into the world of Kriya Yoga. As his spiritual life grows, Mukunda experiences more and more unusual events that we would today, perhaps, be classified as paranormal. In the process of his spiritual development, he becomes a true swami and monk, and his name is changed to Yogananda, with the title of Paramahansa being added to him later, an honor bestowed by Yukteswar.

The gentle and kind-spirited Yogananda is destined to do many wonderful things, including establishing a progressive school for boys, and bringing eastern Indian spiritual teachings to the western world. Led by saints and prophets, he eventually takes on that status himself and develops a following that still exists today, as the Self-Realization Fellowship, which is now established globally. Yogananda is a kind, humorous and determined man who finally finds the God-consciousness he has sought from birth, and passes on his wisdom to others through his teachings and through his autobiography.

Paramahansa Yogananda's schools and worldwide centers for Self-Realization Fellowship activities have flourished, primarily due to the material he provided in this relatively small book. One can go to almost any major city and attend a meditation or worship session, conducted with his recommended methods. This is a book that has survived the test of time and continues to be a source of inspiration to thousands of people. Whether one is interested or not in Kriya Yoga, Yogananda's teachings are effective, memorable and ahead of their time.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Mukunda Lal Ghosh, later known as Paramahansa Yogananda, was born in northeastern India in 1893. His parents, although affluent, were "saintly" and quite spiritual. Due to a recurring memory of an earlier life, young Mukunda, the fourth child, longed to live in the Himalayas. His parents were initiated into Kriya Yoga by Lahiri Mahasaya, a revered master, whose teachings had a profound influence on Mukunda's entire life, as well as on the life of his own teacher, Yukteswar. Lahiri Mahasaya was pure spirit who could become invisible before a camera unless he chose not to. Mukunda claims that praying to his photo as a child healed him from cholera.

Mukunda was visited in meditation by Himalayan yogis, and learns the power of the spoken word by experimenting with deep concentration. He tests his psychic abilities with childhood games, such as willing two kites to come to him, frightening his sister. His quest for spiritual knowledge dominates his childhood in every respect.

Young Mukunda is fascinated by the unseen powers of universal energy. His parents are well-to-do, and as a boy, he may have had a lot of time on his hands. Meditating on the photograph of Mahasaya, he describes the master stepping out of the picture and becoming animated; he does not attribute this to his childhood imagination. His early knowledge of his former incarnation is a more common phenomenon in India. Whatever of his story is true, he certainly believes in the miracles he has witnessed and created, and his beliefs are valid to him.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

During the busy activities of coordinating her eldest son's large wedding, Mukunda's mother became ill, which he was foretold of by a visit from her spiritual body in the night. Grief-stricken, Mukunda was visited by the Holy Mother who offered him her blessing.

Mukunda's mother left a message telling him that he had been blessed as an infant by Mahayasa, who told her Mukunda would be a yogi. Two years prior to her death, she was told by a visiting sage that her death was near, and while in prayer, an astrally-produced silver amulet formed in her hands. When Mukunda held the talisman, which was covered in Sanskrit characters, he understood that it was from his teachers of past lives who were guiding his steps. It awakened dormant memories for him. Too young to get to the Himalayas, young Mukunda used the amulet for meditation for many years.

We must accept that Mukunda believes that the amulet was sourced from a divine realm. The amulet is destined to dissolve, since it is not made of earthly material.

Although he is looking back at his childhood, the author's perception and memory seem to be keenly accurate, to the point of being able to quote others' words. Already experiencing visions and messages from beyond, Mukunda seems to have known from a very young age that he was destined to become a yogi. He portrays his childhood as a normal, happy time of life with a close-knit, loving family. It is important to note that his parents were also spiritually inclined, which must have influenced him greatly, in addition to the inspiration of Mahayasa's teachings. The footnotes in this chapter go into greater detail about the Sanskrit language in history.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

At twelve, Mukunda takes a trip to Banaras; his father being a railroad executive makes it easy for him to travel. His father sends him to see Swami Pranabananda, who will locate a friend, Kedar Nath Babu. The swami explains the peace that he has gained from years of deep meditation, describing it as a second pension. The swami goes into a deep meditation, and soon their guest arrives. Babu tells Mukunda that while he was at the baths earlier, the swami visited him and told him Mukunda was waiting for him. Mukunda realizes that Pranabananda is able to be in two places at once, knowing that he had been in the room meditating the entire time. The swami explains that the subtle unity of the phenomenal world is clear to true yogis, who are able to transcend gross matter at will.

Pranabananda explains to Mukunda that he meditated every evening with great results, but was unable to break through the veil that shielded him from God. He appealed to Lahiri Mahasaya, who interceded for him. The swami became so melded with the divine, he applied for a pension from his company as he could not do his work without an overpowering energy rising up his spine.

Mukunda delivers the letter to Kedar Nath Babu from his father offering him a job in Calcutta, but Babu is not ready to have two bodies yet.

Mukunda continues to have experiences which, to some, might seem unexplainable. However, he understands the nature of energy and as a young boy, is receiving all the signals that he is destined to reach great spiritual heights. It is interesting how much of his description of energy and time coincides with the discoveries of modern-day quantum physics.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

Mukunda has engaged a friend, Amar Mittar, to leave school and go to the Himalayas with him. Mukunda's brother, Ananta, is determined to prevent him from escaping. Meeting up with Amar and Mukunda's cousin, Jatinda, the three don English clothing as a disguise and boarded a train. Mukunda is excited and thinks they will experience such cosmic consciousness that tigers could approach them, but this idea frightens Jatinda. Jatinda disappears at the train station, and Mukunda and Amar decide this is a test of their devotion, so they continue on. Mukunda, vowing not to lie to officials, tells an officer he is running away not in anger but in "divine melancholy."

Ananta has sent telegrams to officials along their route, and finally in Hardwar they are detained by officers, their money confiscated. One of the officers tells them a story of how he inadvertently severed the arm of a saint, and that it had miraculously grown back, the saint having fully forgiven him.

After three days of being held by authorities, the older brothers of the two young boys' arrive. Ananta takes Mukunda to Banaras where he introduces him to a man who tries to talk him out of his plan to give his life to God. A sadhu, who overhears the conversation, reassures Mukunda that his sole path is that of renunciation. Mukunda learns details about his brother's search for him, and that his frightened cousin, Jatinda, was also stopped by police.

When Mukunda returns home, his father asks him not to wander until he has finished high school. His father has assigned a Sanskrit tutor for Mukunda, named Kebalananda, who turns out to be a disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya. Kebalananda tells Mukunda of his ten years with Lahiri, and how the master had easy access to the "divine library" from which he was able to speak and teach at will without memorizing. The master prescribed Kriya Yoga for every problem. Kebalananda is certain that Kriya brings the divine into the flesh, and recalls a miracle experienced by a blind man who was directed by Lahiri to meditate. Kebalananda says that Lahiri never allowed the ego to consider itself a causative force, but was in perfect surrender.

Mukunda claims he never became a scholar of Sanskrit, but instead learned a more "divine syntax" from Kebalananda. Mukunda is increasingly devoted to kriya yoga, and the influence of Mahasaya Lahiri continues to affect his life, now through his Sanskrit teacher, Kebalananda, who studied under Mahasaya. In this chapter, Mukunda is still in high school. Fascinated by the thought of a life lived with God, Mukunda is not particularly interested in scholarly or worldly matters, but seeks only to connect with spiritual masters who can guide him and lead him to a higher consciousness. His devotion to meditation at this young age is extraordinary, and he has already experienced so many miraculous "coincidences" that he has no doubts about the nature of life and our ability to harness its energies.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Before meeting his guru, Yuketeswar, Mukunda meets a wandering sadhu (sage) who teaches him that God is simple; everything else is complex, and not to seek absolute values in the relative world of nature. We can only pluck the truth from the confusing "maya," or cosmic illusion. Therefore, we can only experience divinity when we are freed from pretensions and delusions. The sage further explains the personal confrontation with truth in ourselves is a more horrific battlefield than any we create in life.

Mukunda visits with the saint at the ornate Calcutta Kalighat Temple and, as they part, the saint tells Mukunda he would have an unusual experience. An old friend stops him in the street and he, also, tells Mukunda he will have an unusual experience. Arriving where the Perfume Saint is performing his aromatic miracles, Mukunda questions why he would spend so many years perfecting astral perfume when he could easily buy it. Mukunda does not understand why anyone needs to prove God in such a way. His friend Alakananda tells him that the Ghanda Baba is able to extract objects, including food, from thin air, but Mukunda understands the process only years later, and explains that Baba attunes himself with the "pranic force and rearranges the vibrational structure" of "lifetrans," or atoms. He realizes that this is different from the mere hypnotic trick that he thought Baba might have been performing, but he insists that ostentatious display of unusual powers is "decried" by masters. The meeting however, serves to confirm his joy later when he met his real guru.

Mukunda is leading his readers through the experiences he had as a young person so that we can observe how he unfolds and attains the level from which he currently writes. With each encounter of a holy person, he grows, whether by advice and wisdom or by understanding what he does not want in a teacher, such as the Perfume Saint. He seems to have many chance encounters with saints and swamis on the road to meeting his master, Yukteswar. It is a fascinating possibility that these early saints had already mastered the concept of quantum physics, being able to manifest objects from the ethers.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

Mukunda's friend Chandi suggests that he and Mukunda meet the Tiger Swami, a saint who fights tigers with his bare hands. They find him in Calcutta, where he makes them wait a long time, testing their patience. "Sohong," the tiger swami, wears only a tiger skin, is extremely strong, and perceives tigers as pussycats. He feels the tigers have converted man to such a fearful state that he is unable to dominate them. However, the swami's father warned him that he had created bad karma in the animal world by his treatment of the tigers.

Sohong tells the two that he traveled to Cooch Behar for a rest, and was summoned by the local Prince to the palace. Sohong was challenged by the skeptical prince to fight a vicious tiger named Raja Begum, before the masses and, if he were found to be a fraud, the Prince would ruin him. The tiger injures Sohong's hand and becomes thirsty for his blood. After a raging fight, Sohong chains him down, but the tiger escapes the chains. Finally dominating him, Sohong is richly rewarded, but develops blood poisoning from his wounds and almost dies. In this process, he tells them, a spiritual change entered his heart and he proceeded with his spiritual training, now "subduing the beasts of ignorance" rather than tigers.

Mukunda wants us to know that demonstrative shows of strength, domination and other powers are only superfluous in our search for the true strength, which comes through our spiritual growth. This experience is one he chose to colorfully relate as a building block in his teachings for westerners.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

Mukunda and his friend Upendra Mohun Chowdhury discuss Bhaduri Mahasaya, who is able to remain several feet in the air through his mastery of the "pranayamas," or methods of controlling life force. Mukunda explains to his friend how Bhaduri is able to perform such feats as causing a storm with his breath, and levitation. Mukunda mentions that he laughs, perhaps too much, at the wit in Bhaduri's wisdom.

Mukunda decides to pay another visit to Bhaduri, who always stays indoors and, in his seventies, is vibrant and shows no signs of aging. He reminds Mukunda not to love meditation more than God, and not to mistake the technique for the Goal. Bhaduri shows Mukunda a stack of letters from Americans who are interested in meditation and yoga, and implies to Mukunda that he will be one who will teach westerners. Bhaduri tells Mukunda the story of Mirabai, a woman who sought the company of saints and wrote ecstatic songs. Bhaduri, who has renounced riches in favor of God's kingdom, does not feel he has sacrificed, but says, ironically, that people who "sacrifice divine possessions for worldly toys" are true renunciants. Bhaduri tells Mukunda to go to America.

Levitation is explained in a matter-of-fact way by Mukunda in this chapter, implying that it was a known and accepted phenomenon in India. Although the followers revered anyone so highly developed, it was not particularly shocking or unusual for evolved beings to reach that state of spiritual maturity. Mukunda is knowing now, at an early age, that his destiny will be to teach in America and he is reassuring his readers that his goal has not been to attain riches or recognition, but to teach others the spiritual path.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Mukunda claims that J.C. Bose, a noted botanist, was the first to invent a wireless "coherer" and an instrument for indicating the refraction of electric waves. Bose, a Cambridge graduate, tells Mukunda that westerners are interested in his demonstrations of the "indivisible unity of all life." Bose's invention, the crescograph, detects the energy around plants and indicates a sensitive nervous system that registers love, hate, pleasure pain, joy fear and other appropriate response to stimuli.

Mukunda later attends the opening ceremonies of the Bose Institute, and listens to Bose refer to the center as not only a laboratory but also a temple. Bose explains how he saw the lack of boundaries between physics and physiology in his experiments, and how inorganic matter was anything but inert. Ultimately, what he realized is that everything is made of different arrangements of the same stuff, but he found that he had offended some educators by straying from the field of the physical into the volatile thinking about theology. Bose and Mukunda feel India has great contributions to make to the world in terms of knowledge and growth through struggle and striving. Bose feels that the work he has done on the response of matter and the revelations in plant life has opened up vast inquiries into physics and physiology and agriculture.

Bose demonstrates his discoveries to Mukunda, explaining that even trees have a circulatory system, and metals have their own life force. Bose also discovered that metals are subject to fatigue. Bose went on to invent the resonant cardiograph. J.C. Bose was close friends with Tagore, the famous Indian poet, who sang his praises and hailed India for her contributions to the world.

Research can trace much of our current technology back to the energy-sensitive inventions of J.C. Bose. Bose was a genius whose work was before his time, considering that the detection of energy in things animate and inanimate has been a huge technological breakthrough during the last fifty years. There is an interesting mention of the politics of education and discovery which resonates with other stories about political treachery and mistrust of anything that has the faintest tinge of theology attached to it.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Mukunda returns to his childhood house, and asks Master Mahasaya, who is in deep conversation with his Divine Mother, to intercede on his behalf, since Mukunda is unable to see the Divine Mother. Mukunda's deep grief over the loss of his own mother resurfaces with this visit, since Mahasaya now lives in his old house. Mukunda retires to the attic and meditates until he has a vision of the Divine Mother, who tells him she has always loved him and always will. Mukunda goes to the master again the next morning, who is aware of the vision and visitation of the Divine Mother the night before.

Mahasaya is conducting a school for boys in the Amherst Street house. He tells Mukunda that he is not his master, but that Mukunda's master will come later. The two make a four-mile journey by boat on the Ganges to the Temple of Kali in Dakshineswar. Mahasaya was completely devoted to the divine mother and Mukunda describes him as childlike.

Mahasaya has extra-sensory perception and helps Mukunda with his tendency to judge others. They try to attend a film screening at the university, but Mukunda does not like it so, strangely, the electricity goes out long enough for them to leave. Mahasaya taps Mukunda on the chest and he is transported to another dimension where he can blissfully see everything around him on all sides, as well as seeing through everything. With another tap, he is brought back to the pandemonium of the world.

Mukunda feels the saints' humility springs from recognition of their total dependence on god as the sole life and judge, and when we are attuned with the God, we experience bliss. Further, he states that in God's eyes nothing is large or small, important or unimportant. Devotion to the Divine Mother, or Shakti, is an interesting concept. She represents creation or power. That Mahasaya is so devoted to her is simply a reflection of who he is as he lives out this particular lifetime. Shakti is simply the personalization of love.

It is not clear at this point in Mukunda's story whether or how Master Mahasaya might be related to Lahiri Mahasaya, the guru of Mukunda's parents'.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

As Mukunda finds himself more involved with inspirational studies, he tends less to his high school studies that he has promised to pass at the Hindu High School. He feels sure that his faith would save him from failure. His friend, Nantu, offers to help him study for the final exams, and drills him on the questions that he expected might be raised in the tests, however, they forgot to study Sanskrit. The next morning, taking a different route to school, Mukunda happens to see some papers on the ground that contain Sanskrit verses. He finds someone to interpret them and is able to pass the Sanskrit exam, as well as getting minimum passing grades in his other subjects.

Although he is now free to leave home and join a hermitage in Banaras, Mukunda realizes how close he has grown to his two younger brothers and sister. After crying for two hours, he feels cleansed of his sadness, but his father asks him not to forsake the family. He tells his father how much he loves him, and promises to return with an even more divine understanding. Mukunda and his friend, Jitendra arrive at the ashram, and Mukunda begins to meditate in the attic. The other residents are not so familiar with meditation. The disciplines required at the ashram, including hunger and poverty, are not pleasing to Mukunda. Starving after a long fast and delays, he thoroughly enjoys his meal with the newly arrived Swami Dayananda, who has not eaten for days. The swami tells him never to believe that he lives alone from the power of food, or that rice or money sustains him. Mukunda carries this wisdom with him throughout the rest of his life.

Mukunda opens the locked box containing the amulet his mother gave him, but finds it vanished into the ethers, in accordance with the sadhu's prediction.

Mukunda is criticized for his devotion to meditation and is in spiritual anguish, but is told by a divine voice that his master will come today. A young priest named Habu asks him to go with him to run an errand at the market. Mukunda is magnetically drawn to a man in a narrow street and sees the gurudeva he has seen in a thousand visions. The guru is overjoyed that Mukunda has come to him, saying he has waited for years. Mukunda has memories of other lifetimes with this guru, who is strong and gentle, and who promises Mukunda all of his hermitages, all he possesses and his unconditional love. Mukunda promises him his own divine love and listens to the Master describe his own life, about which he is clairvoyantly aware. The Master suggests Mukunda return to his family in Calcutta, which he does not want to do. Yukteswar Giri lives close to Calcutta, and tells Mukunda to come to him in four weeks. Mukunda refuses to do as Yukteswar advises, and Yukteswar informs him it won't be so easy to get in his good graces next time.

Mukunda is increasingly ostracized at the ashram and accused of not pulling his weight. Mukunda and Jitendra leave the ashram to go to Yukteswar.



Mukunda's faith is still not strong enough for him to unquestioningly obey his Master. He does not want his family to judge him or consider him a failure at the thing he most insistently wanted, and he is loathe to return home. Yukteswar lives uncomfortably close to Mukunda's family, and we can assume that he will be meeting up with them again soon.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

Mukunda's elder brother, Ananta, lectures him about throwing away his life, and feels that Mukunda should put money first. Mukunda intends to see the Taj Mahal with Jitendra, then go on to see Yukteswar in nearby Serampore. Ananta proposes that Mukunda and Jitendra go to the city of Brindiban and, without taking a single rupee, without begging or revealing their predicament, find a way to eat and get back home. He gives them each a one-way ticket and sends them off on a train, promising that if they make it back by midnight and follow all his rules, he will become Mukunda's disciple. An elder brother rarely bows before his juniors in India, so it seems Ananta is sure they will fail.

On the train, Jitendra is hungry. Two strangers, thinking the two are runaways, offer to feed them, but Mukunda declines the invitation. The strangers continue with them to the hermitage. It turns out that the two strangers had planned to escort two princes, who were unable to come. The matron of the hermitage offers Mukunda and Jitendra the food she has prepared for the princes, and they feast on delicacies. Jitendra is doubtful that they will see the city without any money, but as they take shade under a tree, a man named Pratap Chatterji, who has seen them in his meditations and visions, comes to them. He feels Mukunda is his guru. He wants to show the boys the city. Afterward, he purchases train tickets for them to return home, and gives them money. In exchange, Mukunda initiates Pratap into Kriya Yoga. Jitendra, sad about his own lack of faith, tells Ananta of their successful journey. Mukunda initiates Ananta into Kriya Yoga and leaves. Jitendra decides to go home, and Mukunda goes on to see Yukteswar, otherwise known as Jnanavatar, the incarnation of wisdom.

Mukunda is growing more confident about his faith and knowledge and is willing now to test himself. He portrays his young-man attitude as one that borders on smugness, but it is likely that we will see this disappear, as well, as Mukunda grows spiritually.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

Sri Yukteswar greets Mukunda without emotion. Mukunda vows that he will allow Yukteswar to assume responsibility for his life. Yukteswar tells him he must get a university degree because he will be better received in the west. After some arguing, Yukteswar agrees to reveal God to Mukunda.

Mukunda learns that Lahiri Mahasaya is Sri Yukteswar's divine guru, who had also influenced Mukunda's entire childhood. The hermitage is Yukteswar's ancestral mansion, which is now simple, clean and utilitarian. Yukteswar reveals that he once had a wife and has a daughter. The three stories he agrees to tell of his earlier life each have a moral. He remembers his mother trying to scare him with a ghost story, but he confronted it and was disappointed. The moral to this story is to face your fears. As a child, Yukteswar coveted an ugly dog that belonged to a neighbor, and teaches from this that attachment is blinding and deceiving. Finally, he relates that his mother said all men who work for other men are slaves, and he patterned his life accordingly, with the lesson being that we should impart positive messages to the ears of sensitive children.

Although Mukunda was already initiated into Kriya Yoga, Yukteswar's initiation transformed him with a great light and bliss. Returning home, Mukunda's family did not make the dreaded remarks he expected, and he retired to his attic to meditate, now having found his divine teacher. He is happy and his father is happy to have him back. He enrolls in the Scottish Church College, but spends most of his time at the hermitage in Serampore, maintaining only minimum grades. Each morning there is meditation and a walk by the Ganges River. They eat simple vegetarian foods and receive visitors with impartiality, courtesy and kindness, often feeding them, but avoiding extravagance.

Many evenings are spent by Mukunda listening to Yukteswar's words of wisdom. Mukunda becomes plagued by mosquitoes and his master allows him to buy them each a mosquito net. One night, his master doesn't request that he pull the net around him, and Mukunda thinks he is dead, since he appears not to be breathing. Yukteswar then tells Mukunda to rid himself of the mosquito consciousness. He teaches Mukunda that the saint who uncovers the secret of creation will be in harmony with nature's expressions, and that can be understood by overcoming the passion for destruction. However, wanton loss of the human body is a serious transgression due to its high evolutionary value. Prafulla, one of Yukteswar's disciples, tells of a time when a cobra charged at the Master, and he simply clapped his hands and entertained the snake, his love and faith protecting him. This is Mukunda's lesson about being in tune with nature and all of her challenges.

Yukteswar tells Mukunda that Lahiri taught him to heal himself through his thinking that thought is a force like electricity or gravity. Yukteswar picks up on Mukunda's visions of three buildings, which will later become reality in Ranchi, Los Angeles and Encinitas,



California. Mukunda tells of Yukteswar's calm and unspectacular nature, and that Master felt god does not wish the secrets of His creation revealed "promiscuously." Yukteswar's effect on Mukunda is a healing calm, and reverent contact with him makes his body respond with bliss and a subtle lifting of the veil of maya. Encouraging his disciples to practice Kriya Yoga, Yukteswar tells them to forget their past.

Mukunda describes Yukteswar's consistent teaching of discipline and responsibility, and describes him as rather abrupt and severe, but the wiser students loved and respect him. Yukteswar once derided Mukunda to his parents, and apologized.

Yukteswar teaches that sex is for procreation, and that "sense yearnings" sap inner peace.

This is an unusually long chapter, in which Mukunda describes in great detail the integrity, poise and composure of his Master, whose teachings guide his life and growth.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary and Analysis

Mukunda requests a trip to the Himalayas to get away from his academic and hermitage duties, and proceeds without master's permission. Mukunda asks his professor for the address of Ram Gopal Muzumdar, the sleepless saint, who stays awake in ecstatic consciousness in Ranbajpur. On his way, Mukunda ignores the large sacred stone in Tarekeswar, where many people have been healed. Traveling on foot, Mukunda takes a wrong turn, going far out of his way. His destination seems no closer as he walks in the hot sun through paddy fields.

He finally meets Ram Gopal, who explains that some holy shrines are nuclear centers of spiritual power, noting that he knows Mukunda ignored the stone. Gopal tells Mukunda that the little room where he meditates at Yukteswar's hermitage serves as his meditation cave, and he does not need the mountains to find the kingdom of God. These words instantly banish Mukunda's obsession for the Himalayas.

Mukunda then goes as a visitor to Ram Gopal's home in a jungle village where they meditate and eat a good meal. When Mukunda asks Gopal to grant him a Samadhi, Gopal tells him his body is not yet ready for the cosmic current. Gopal explains that he has meditated for so many hours and years that his body goes into a suspended state in which his organs are not required to function, allowing him to totally dispense with sleep. Gopal does not believe that one may fully know god even in forty-five years of meditation. He tells Mukunda about meeting Babaji, and they both go into a meditative state. He is invited to go to sleep, but Mukunda is unable to sleep due to the blazing light around him, even with his eyes shut.

When Mukunda goes to leave, Gopal floods him with peace and heals a long-time back pain. On his way back, Mukunda stops and meditate at the sacred stone in Tarekeswar, and later boards a train to Calcutta. He realizes that his travels did not end in the mountains, but in the "Himalayan" presence of his master.

Although Mukunda is still too young to stay true to the promise he made to Yukteswar, he receive intensive training even during his mistakes or misjudgments. Although he does not say so directly, Mukunda is surprisingly welcome and accepted by many saints with whom most people would find it difficult to get an audience. It seems that they all know he is destined to evolve into a yogi.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary and Analysis

Mukunda returns to his guru, who is not angry about his abrupt departure and abandonment of his duties at the hermitage. Yukteswar tells him that since he expects nothing from others, their "actions cannot be in opposition" to his wishes. Mukunda experiences a cosmic love for his master.

Mukunda is sitting in meditation, but is having trouble focusing when Yukteswar loudly calls out to him. He knows that Mukunda is meditating haphazardly with his mind distributed "like leaves in a storm," and seems to pity Mukunda for not having found what he was looking for in the mountains.

Yukteswar strikes Mukunda on the chest and Mukunda's spiritual body escapes into an intense awareness of everything around him, including the atomic structures, roots of plants, and an all-perceptive, simultaneous vision of what we ordinarily are not able to see with our eyes. He experiences the nature of solid matter as energy and is able to see through everything, perceiving that all is light, energy, cause and effect. He observes rhythmic patterns of the universe and galaxies, watching creation take form and dissolve, and hears the sound of the universal "Aum."

Returning to his body, his master warns him not to get too drunk with ecstasy, asking him to sweep the floor before their walk. Mukunda sees the importance of doing the earthly work, as well, but never forgets what he learned about the true nature of form and matter. Mukunda feels this experience will come naturally to sincere devotees, and he writes a poem to try to put into words this astonishing experience. Still wondering, however, when he will find God, Yukteswar explains that Kriya Yoga can clear the sensory obstacles and later, teaches Mukunda to call this experience up at will.

Mukunda realizes that when he experiences the joy of meditation, he is subtly directed to adopt the right course. This could be called being in the universal flow, since everything seems to go right and one can experience perfection once this experience becomes part of our lives. As Mukunda's writing becomes more flowery and devotional, he is changing and transforming in his spiritual life. He now not only perceives the message of God and the path to God, but now actually has an understanding of bliss, as well. Yukteswar tells Mukunda that God is seductive, and we can see that Mukunda, at this age, is hooked on his chosen path.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

Mukunda has presented his master with six huge cauliflowers that he planted and nurtured with his own hands. Yukteswar asks him to keep them in his own room for a special dinner. They are at the seaside resort of Puri, and go for a walk on the beach. Master asks whether Mukunda has neglected to lock the back door of the hermitage, and notes that he will be punished for his neglect. A disoriented peasant enters the ashram by the back door and takes one of the cauliflowers, and Yukteswar implies that he directed the peasant to Mukunda's cauliflowers to teach Mukunda a lesson.

When the radio became known years later, Mukunda realizes that his master was a perfect human radio, and this incident reminds him that thoughts are simply vibrations being picked up at different frequencies. Master had picked up on the peasant's desire for a cauliflower and had directed him to Mukunda's room through intuition, or soul guidance. When the mind is free from interference and restless static, one is able to send and receive thoughts. The goal of yoga is to "silence the mind so that one may hear the counsel of the Inner voice." Yukteswar knows that technological phenomenon is due in the future, and mentions it often to Mukunda.

When Mukunda is directed to lead the disciples over burning hot sand for a religious procession, a cooling rain poured down for the duration of the parade in response to Yukteswar's plea. Mukunda describes the four yearly festivals sponsored by Yukteswar, with singing, chanting, flutes, drums and cymbals, and flowers honoring the master. The devotees cook and supply food and services. In India music, painting and drama are considered divine arts. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva were the first musicians. Saraswati, goddess of wisdom, plays the vina, Krishna plays flute to call souls to their true home from the maya-delusion. Mukunda explains the technicalities of the Indian raga, and how they are connected with different concepts through the laws of sound between nature and man. He claims man can obtain "control over all natural manifestations through the use of certain mantras or chants and that nature is simply an objectification of aum". The tones of Indian music correspond to colors and sounds from nature. Mukunda notes that Bach understood the "charm and power of repetitious sounds slightly differentiated in a hundred complex ways." Music is described as causing a "temporary vibratory awakening in a spinal center" of humans, and the Indian Sankirtans, or musical gatherings, are an effective form of yoga. Yukteswar is pleased with Mukunda's hard work during the festival, and asks him to sleep in his bed with him, which is a high honor.

This chapter begins with another story of amazing clairvoyance, but goes on to explain the technical aspects of Indian music and how sound is related to and intertwined with spirituality. Mukunda's growing wisdom is beginning to take a more sophisticated and mature form, as he learns how to work hard and participate with others.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary and Analysis

Yukteswar explains astrology to Mukunda, who has avoided it since he declined three arranged marriages based on astrological readings. Master tells him that only charlatans have brought ancient disciplines into ill repute, explaining that a child is born "under celestial rays in certain mathematical harmony with his individual karma". Metals and jewels emit astral light that can counteract negative pulls of the planets; Yukteswar is concerned about Mukunda's liver and wants him to wear an astrological bangle. Astrology is only another way the universe tries to encourage us to overcome our limitations and we need all of the tools along the way as we work toward our goal of eliminating the effects of past wrongs.

Yukteswar discovered the mathematical application of a 24,000-year equinoctial cycle to our present age. He determined that around 1700 AD a period of electrical and atomic energy developments would ensue, and then in 4100 AD another age will be marked by human development, including telepathic communications and time-annihilators. He has predicted a slump for humanity that will begin around 12,500 AD, illustrating the continuing cycle of maya.

Mukunda's master also explains much of the Christian Bible, pointing out similarities with other holy texts. He explains that the concept of Adam and Eve represents reason and feeling. When humans were created with the potential to reach God Consciousness, they were given all of the other sensibilities to enjoy, and there was no need to resort to the inferior form of procreation. However, once they succumbed to sex, reviving "subconsciously present bestial memories," they lost their consciousness of their immortality and placed themselves under the "physical law by which bodily birth must be followed by bodily death," plunging humanity into the "duality and oppositional forces of maya." It is now our responsibility to individually restore our dual nature to a unified harmony, or Eden.

Mukunda experiences a sense of filial obligation to Adam and Eve for the first time when he understands his master's explanation of the symbolic stories of Genesis. This is a fascinating explanation of the story of Adam and Eve, and the footnotes are worth reading, if one has even a passing interest in theology. To imagine that there were and are people who perfectly understand what has been so distorted over time is invigorating, which is Mukunda's goal in writing this book.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary and Analysis

The father of Mukunda's friend, Santosh, is a confirmed agnostic who wants to take a cynical look at Yukteswar. Yukteswar tells Mukunda later that Dr. Roy is a "dead man," and has only six weeks to live, but he extends his life for another six months, saying if the doctor wears an astrological bangle and stops eating meat, his life may continue. The doctor, a veterinarian, refuses to wear the bracelet and after falling ill and recovering, refuses to stop eating meat, as well. He dies suddenly, as Yukteswar predicted.

Yukteswar tells a devotee named Sasi to obtain a two-carat sapphire to help himself overcome his wild and undisciplined lifestyle. Sasi did not heed his advice, but a year later appeared with three sapphires as the master had predicted, as well as pulmonary tuberculosis. He sends Sasi away and tells him to wear an astrological bangle, and assures him he will recover. On the edge of death, Sasi is visited astrally by Yukteswar and is miraculously healed.

Mukunda's college studies have suffered in deference to his spiritual work, since he has had to take trains back and forth from Calcutta to Serampore. When final exams come, he opens each book at random, studies the opened pages, and astonishingly, passes his exams. Yukteswar manages to get the president of Serampore College to raise sufficient funds for a four-year course, and Mukunda is enrolled to finish his degree there, geographically closer to his master.

Although Mukunda goes through some trying situations, his writing tone is always positive and light. His readers do not get a sense that he is going to dip too far into tragedy at any time, even when his life events are difficult. His comical tone about his own poor scholarship is amusing, since he seems to get through school haphazardly and only through sheer luck. Education is highly important for Indian males, but Mukunda's spiritual quest takes priority in his life.



Chapters 18-19

Chapters 18-19 Summary and Analysis

Yukteswar tells a story of a wonder worker who was present many years ago in the dorm where Mukunda is now living. A young man named Afzal brought water to a yogi who taught him how to take command over one of the invisible realms. The yogi warns him not to perpetuate any negative karma. Afzal perfects his yogic exercise for twenty years, working miracles by making things vanish and reappear. He began to use his powers for his own gain and employed an unseen helper named Hazrat to steal jewels and train tickets. Yukteswar was young at the time, and watched the "fakir" call on the invisible Hazrat to amaze and astonish people, as their belongings appeared and disappeared. Because much of his desire was manifested astrally, they were structurally evanescent and could not stay physical for long. Afzal was spiritually unevolved. When he finally, inadvertently, stole his guru's ball of gold, he begged for penance and admitted his egotism. His ability to call on Hazrat vanished, and his life was then spent seeking forgiveness and divine understanding in the mountains.

This is another seemingly far-fetched tale, this time delivered by Yukteswar. Its intent and meaning are obvious, but the reader must question whether Mukunda took the lesson to heart so fully that he believed the story, or perhaps only presents it as truth for the sake of his readers.

In Chapter 19, Mukunda recalls the doubting remarks of Dijen Babu, his roommate at the college boardinghouse. Mukunda introduced Dijen to Yukteswar, who initiated him into Kriya Yoga, providing him with peace and inspiration to discover his true self. One afternoon they learn that their master has gone to Calcutta, and a note instructs Mukunda and Dijen to meet the 9 a.m. train in Serampore. Mukunda receives a telepathic message around 8:30 a.m. on that morning telling him the train is delayed. Yukteswar later appears to him in the flesh, saying he has been divinely commanded to give Mukunda this experience, and that he will now arrive on the 10:00 train. His physical body then melted away and vanished. As promised, the master was on the 10:00 train, appearing as he had said he would. He tells Dijen that he sent him a message, as well, but Dijen was unable to receive it. Dijen realizes that, spiritually, he is only in kindergarten.

Bi-location is a well-known phenomenon in India and can be accomplished only by those who are so attuned with universal energy that they have the ability to manifest their atoms in two places at once. Yukteswar's powers over energy are astounding and Mukunda still, in his college years, is in awe of them.



Chapters 20-21

Chapters 20-21 Summary and Analysis

Mukunda has asked his father several times for rail passes and money to go the Himalayas with Yukteswar, but each time Yukteswar has chosen not to go. Feeling sure he will go this time, Mukunda convinces his father to go along. After gathering a small group for the trip, Yukteswar refuses to go. Having lost the company of the master as well as his servant, Mukunda tries to get another servant named Behari to go, but Behari disappears, confirming the master's prediction that he would not go either. Now Mukunda goes to his uncle to employ the services of his servant, Lal Dhari, but his uncle explodes in anger over his selfish wish to take the servant on a pleasure trip and deny his uncle of the servant's help.

Mukunda knows he is working against his master's will. His friends depart on the trip, but he stays behind at Yukteswar's feet. Suddenly Mukunda falls violently ill with Asiatic cholera, explaining Yukteswar's subtle intervention in the plan. Having come close to death, Mukunda recovers, and his friends return, initially angry that he did not meet them at the Calcutta train station. Mukunda realizes that he has been trying to get to the Himalayas since he was twelve, but he will never be received there without his master's blessing.

Too many unexplained events occurred in this chapter for Mukunda to believe in coincidence. Yukteswar seems to be looking out for him on an astral level at all times. Again, Mukunda's tone is upbeat and lively as he describes a painful brush with death.

In Chapter 21, Yukteswar feels Mukunda is well enough to travel and now agrees to go with him and a small group of friends to Kashmir. This trip is riddled with comments and experiences that Mukunda will remember in later life as Yukteswar's clairvoyance. A beautiful trip through panoramic scenery and fresh air is healing for Mukunda, and Kashmir seems like a summer paradise. The group goes to the ancient Srinagar temple dedicated to Swami Shankara, where Mukunda goes into an "ecstatic" trance and sees his future headquarters in Los Angeles. This chapter includes photos and information about two people in Los Angeles who reached yogi status through his later teachings.

Riding horses up steep paths, the young men finally view and play on the layers of snowcapped Himalayas. Mukunda still fondly remembers the beauty of scenic Kashmir and its lakes; he also reminisces about the beauty of Xochimilco, Mexico, Yellowstone in California, the Grand Canyon and Alaska, giving special attention to the uniqueness of Yellowstone's geysers. He also goes on to discuss Yosemite's majesty, Niagara Falls, mammoth Cave in Kentucky and Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. Mukunda describes the people of Kashmir, who are white as Europeans with similar features, blue eyes and blond hair, dressed in Western clothes. He finds the people's complexion grows darker as one travels south.



Yukteswar grows dangerously ill in Kashmir after Mukunda has returned to Serampore. Mukunda attributes his illness to the burning of others' karma as part of his work on earth, alleviating the sorrows of mankind by transferring disease to himself, a process only a self-realized master can do. Mukunda recalls historical healing incidences wherein a master takes on the illnesses of others, sometimes sacrificing his own "temple." Mukunda explains that a true master is one who can enter Samadhi at will and attain "immutable bliss." Mukunda is sad over the emaciated condition of Yukteswar's body, but the master happily notes that he can now fit into smaller undershirts that he has not worn for years.



Chapters 22-23

Chapters 22-23 Summary and Analysis

At a shrine in Dakshineswar, Mukunda is transported into divine consciousness as he tries to help his unbelieving brother-in-law, Satish. The stone statute of Kali comes to life and speaks to him, and upon rejoining his sister, Roma, and Satish, they are miraculously served a feast, much to the cynical Satish's surprise. Satish is transformed by the experience and goes deeply into the study of self-realization.

Years later, although Satish is suffering from a serious illness, Roma decides to die at his feet as a devoted Hindu wife. Although Satish becomes completely healed from his own illness, he decides to join her, dying from unknown causes. Mukunda is obviously now having some of the effects on people that earlier characters had on his younger life. He has had the experience now of ecstatic transformation several times, and seems to be mastering the technique.

As Mukunda's college graduation approaches, he outwits his doubting professors by passing his final exams without putting his name on his papers. Because of his devotion to spiritual matters in lieu of studies, he has earned the title of mad monk by his schoolmates. Yukteswar asks Mukunda when he plans to sit for the AB exam, and Mukunda is upset that his master would ask this of him when so much of his time has been spent learning at the hermitage rather than studying. Yukteswar tells him to ask his busy roommate, Romesh, for guidance. For days, Romesh miraculously teaches him the exact information that the exams require him to know. Even when he has made a tactical error that should cause him to fail, he finds the university has lowered the requirements and he still passes easily. The one area in which Romesh did not help him was philosophy, but Mukunda filled the pages with his master's teachings, disregarding textbooks. Mukunda feels thoroughly guided in this process by spirit through Romesh. Mukunda feels the degree was a divine gift, given his academic deficiencies.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary and Analysis

His father wants him to become a railroad executive, but Mukunda asks his master if he will make him a monk. Mukunda reflects that his married friends always lose sight of their meditation and spiritual quests, and he cannot put the Lord in second place in terms of his love. He feels it is God's intention for man to seek Him through our free will only.

Yuktswar makes Mukunda a swami in a non-ceremonious procedure, and Mukunda chooses the name Yogananda, meaning bliss through divine yoga. Indian monks take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to a spiritual authority, and his name indicates his "formal connection with one of the ten subdivisions of the Swami Order in India". A swami's life is one of selfless, unbiased service to humanity. The title of swami means "one who seeks to achieve union with the Swa, or Self". Yuktswar was both a swami and a yogi, yoga being the science of mind control and the ability to neutralize the alternating waves of consciousness. Yoga provides the "most efficacious methods for achieving the direct perception of truth."

Paramahansa explains the steps of the Eightfold path, and describes a number of ways in which one may lead a yogic life. Carl Jung endorsed Yoga's ability to satisfy the west's requirement for scientific proof, as well as the religious requirement of a psychological discipline. He feels Yoga is the perfect method to fuse mind and body for transcending consciousness, and foresees its discovery in the western world. Speaking long before his time, Yogananda recognizes that humans must liberate our mind energies, lest the atomic giant turn on us in mindless destruction.



Chapters 25-26

Chapters 25-26 Summary and Analysis

Hearing a clairvoyant message that his brother Ananta will die, Mukunda's grief takes him on a short trip to Japan. When he arrives back in India, he learns that his brother has, indeed, died.

Mukunda's sister Nalini was unusually thin, and he and Nalini's husband joked over her skeletal appearance. However, she wished to be healthy and, although she and Mukunda had not been close as children, she asks for his blessing and healing, which he gives. Within a month, she has reached the same weight as Mukunda and her husband falls in love with her again.

Upon his return from Japan, Mukunda also finds Nalini gravely ill with typhoid, and not expected to live. Mukunda declares that in seven days her fever will be gone, however, her legs were paralyzed. Mukunda seeks help from Yukteswar, who says she should wear a pearl next to her skin. Within a month, Nalini was no longer paralyzed and, although she was told by doctors that she would never bear children, she went on to have two daughters, as predicted by Yukteswar.

Although Mukunda's spiritual power is growing, he still depends on Yukteswar for healings as grave and important as his sister's paralysis. It is also interesting that such an evolved person would have a petty, negative relationship with his own sister until adulthood, but Mukunda does not try to make us think he is anything but human.

The science of Kriya Yoga becomes known in India due to Lahiri Mahayasa's influence. A yogi who practices this technique is freed from karma or the lawful chain of cause-effect relationships. A brief description of the process is that the human blood is decarbonated and oxygenated, and the extra oxygen is transformed into energy, which prevents the decay of tissues. Lahiri Mahasaya was given the ancient method by Babaji and Mukunda states that the method has been used by saints throughout history, including Jesus. By offering one breath into the other, the yogi brings his life force under control. In addition, meditation helps the yogi bring the mind under control. Thus, Kriya yoga is mind and body discipline and control that allows the yogi to commune with the universal force. St. Paul was able to switch life current to and from his senses daily. The devotee, by merging his consciousness into spirit, can appear to be dead but is fully aware of his body.

Yukteswar felt the human condition could be quickened through Kriya Yoga, which mentally directs one's life energy up and down and around the six spinal centers. Mukunda states that a half-minute of Kriya Yoga is equal to a year of natural spiritual growth. Mukunda notes that Kriya Yoga is not simply a breathing exercise, but is mathematically related to consciousness. We are yogis when we sleep, releasing ourselves from bodily identification. He emphasizes that Kriya yoga can speed up the



human evolutionary process of attaining cosmic consciousness, freeing us from the ego-prison and allowing us to live in the soul.

In a sense, Yogananda is suggesting that we are God and that, whether we evolve by centuries of rebirth or through Kriya Yoga, we will eventually claim our status and realize that we truly do have control over life, death and rebirth. It also seems safe to surmise that Kriya Yoga involves an extreme level of oxygenating the body so that it can remain breathless while we soar at the soul level.



Chapters 26-27

Chapters 26-27 Summary and Analysis

Yuktswar suggests that Mukunda should share his knowledge in a structured way, even though he has been opposed to organizational work. Yogananda founds a boys' school in Bihar called Yogoda Satsanga Brahmacharya Vidyalaya, structured to follow the ideals of the Indian rishis, with most instruction delivered outdoors. Much of his teaching involves mind over body exercises in which his students, including his brother, excel. Yogananda's father blesses his school and approves his son's life choices.

He learns a lesson about attachment by trying to save a young deer that was overfed by his students. The deer appeared to him and asked that he let him go so he could go on to his next life. The school at Ranchi grows into a huge institution and includes a medical department. Swami Pranabananda expresses his joy that the school is being conducted under Lahiri Mahayasa's ideals.

Pranabananda, whose health is failing, is heading for the Himalayas where he will grow vegetables at his ashram and "kick the frame," or, throw off his mortal body. One of his students recounts how he fed a mass of people and then chose to die dramatically. Yogananda's friends and teachers seem to intertwine and intermingle throughout the story. Pranabananda was the bi-locating saint earlier in the story, and after his death, Yogananda hears that he has taken another body and joined Babaji in the Himalayas.

Yogananda's great love for education has led him to establish a school that honors all of his beliefs. He does not mention why the school is only for boys, but it is a remarkable accomplishment, regardless.



Chapters 28-29

Chapters 28-29 Summary and Analysis

As a way to illustrate his developing psychic powers, Yogananda describes himself making predictions that amaze his students. He tells a favorite student named Kashi that he will soon be dead, and promises that he will try to find Kashi after he dies. For safety, he advised Kashi to stay at the school while he was gone, but Kashi's father forced him to go to Calcutta to visit his mother, and Kashi dies from cholera. Yogananda begins to search for Kashi in the astral realm and finally locates him in-utero in a mother who is six months pregnant. He described Kashi to the young couple. When their son is born, he is instantly attracted to Yogananda and his teachings, and as a teenager is sent by Yogananda to a Himalayan master to study.

Tagore, a famous Indian poet and musician, was criticized for his unusual, mixed style of poetry, but eloquently stood up to his critics. Yogananda meets Rabindrinath and is invited to his school to discuss education. They discover many similarities in their pedagogy, including the belief that children learn better in the outdoors by bringing their knowledge to the surface. Rabindrinath won the Nobel Prize and put that money toward his school. Yogananda considers Tagore's family to be one of geniuses. Yogananda enjoys spending time at Tagore's school, listening to him sing his poetry, surrounded by disciples. The little school is now a great university, Visva Bahrati.

Although Yogananda's school seems more focused on yoga and subjects such as mathematics, Tagore was more passionate about history and art. Their relationship was close because of their mutual respect and shared ideals surrounding education. Tagore poetry remains famous.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary and Analysis

Yogananda compares Newton's law of motion to the eastern philosophy that all is "maya," and cause and effect in the physical world. To surmount maya, or to rise above the duality of creation, is the task given to humans. Whoever is able to lift the veil of maya uncovers the secret of creation. Light waves make up the reality of creation, and remain the freest from material dependence of any material manifestation. Time is a simple essence of ambiguity, and is dependent upon the absolute of light velocity. Time and space are not abstractly eternal, but are measured only in reference to light velocity. Yogananda feels Einstein's theory of relativity is equivalent to the rishi's teaching of a sole fabric of creation - a protean maya.

Yogananda is obviously a physicist and, in this chapter, jumps into some fairly in-depth explanations of the universe that may seem confusing to the average reader. However, his basic premise is that everything we perceive to be solid or material is actually made up of energy and information. The "stuff" of the world is mind-stuff, the universe appearing to be more a great thought than a great machine. Again, Yogananda compares scientific progress to the early teachings of the Vedas, who tell us that the world is only an illusion. Thus, a miracle of materialization or dematerialization is possible through the knowledge that mass equals infinite energy, or a consciousness that everything is simply created from light. The reason man is to dominate and subdue the earth is that we have the ability to attain masterhood over maya.

Yogananda relates his experience of being in the consciousness of a soldier who dies in the war, and living through his death. He feels that scientists discover what is meant for us to know at any given time, helping us to come to the spiritual revelations we are seeking. He compares cinematic images to God's staging of human life using light and shadows, using us as both actors and audience. Thus, he learns that war and suffering are only part of the cosmic "motion picture."

After writing this chapter of the book, Yogananda has the experience of being a cosmic motion picture himself, made up only of light. This is the true crux of Yogananda's learning and teaching, and it is the basis for the long life of his Self-Realization Fellowship. Knowledge of the true nature of life is what eventually will lead humanity to oneness with our creator and whether we learn it through divine intervention or dry science, the truth is the same.



Chapters 31-32

Chapters 31-32 Summary and Analysis

Yogananda visits the life-companion of Lahiri Mahasaya, Srimati Kashi Moni who, although elderly, appears young and fresh. She recalls awaking to see Lahiri levitating surrounded by angels. He initiated her into Kriya yoga and never slept again, remaining in his holy state. She remembers that he cautioned her not to seek worldly wealth but the wealth of the divine. Yogananda speaks with Lahiri's sons and other disciples, learning of some of Lahiri's miracles.

Yogananda discusses Trailanga Swami, a friend of Lahiri's and a perfected being who was reputed to be over three hundred years old. Trailanga performed miracles to teach that one does not need a body to exist, such as sitting on water, drinking poison and weighing over three hundred pounds. He also taught the omnipotence of spiritual law, of cause and effect, pointing out the "automatic adjustments of righteousness." Yogananda compares Trailanga to Jesus in terms of his awareness of cosmic law. Of Trailanga's many disciples, only one is alive at the time of this writing, a woman named Shankari Mai Jiew, who was one hundred twelve years old in 1938. If one has gotten this far in Yogananda's story, these astonishing tales of longevity and miracles are not that surprising, and do not seem to lack credibility.

In Chapter 32, Yukteswar recalls that Lahiri Mahasaya resurrected Yukteswar's friend Rama, who had died of cholera. Yukteswar was told to give Rama seven drops of castor oil; Rama awakened. Yukteswar tells Yogananda that he will write a book due to a growing interest in meditation in the western world. Fifty years later, Yogananda is writing his autobiography, commenting on the potential for atomic destruction and how man's works pass away, but universal law remains constant. Yogananda foresees a league of nations that will work toward healing the earth and extols, again, India's contributions to the world by her peoples' "devotions to the eternal." Lahiri Mahasaya teachings, in particular, are still revered. Lahiri was born in 1828 in Ghurni, and meditated from the time he was three. He was a married father of two and an accountant for the British government and met his guru, Babaji, when he was thirty-three, bringing the long-vanished art of yoga back into the light.

Yogananda and his characters make many references to the Christian bible, and compare Lahiri's deed with Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus. It is difficult to imagine that these old Indian saints would refer to the Bible, but the educated Yogananda, who is hoping to reach his reading audience in the West, makes great use of Christianity to support his beliefs.



Chapters 33-34

Chapters 33-34 Summary and Analysis

Yogananda claims that the avatar saint Babaji has lived, and still lives in the Himalayan crags for many centuries. His state of existence is "beyond human comprehension," since he is completely free of death and reincarnation, having no debt to nature. Babaji is considered a master avatar whose job it is to help and guide Indian prophets in their particular works, and he is in constant communion with Christ, who works with him in the plan for salvation of humanity. Babaji has never appeared openly, but works in obscurity. Fluent in any language, we have no knowledge of his earthly origins. His body is that of a young man and he requires no food; he travels with his group of disciples from one place to another. When a man climbed a cliff and approached Babaji uninvited, Babaji told him he could not accept the man a disciple in his current state. The man threatened to jump from the cliff, and Babaji told him to go ahead. When his body was brought back up, Babaji brought him back to life and made him a disciple, since he was now sufficiently developed spiritually. Yogananda's most astonishing stories are told to him by others, leaving his readers to speculate how much of the stories are symbolic.

Ram Gopal relates a story to Yogananda of a witnessed encounter with Babaji's sister, who summons Babaji to ask him not to relinquish his physical body. Babaji agreed to stay in his body for the duration of this world cycle. Lahiri Mahasaya was also present at the meeting, but was bi-located.

Swami Kebalananda's story of Babaji's first meeting with Lahiri Mahasaya, who was summoned to Babaji's cave where he had spent an earlier lifetime with him, learning and meditating. Babaji explains to him that it was all arranged that he should be there at that time, and that his life had been perfectly planned for him to return. Babaji materialized an elaborate palace in Lahiri's honor, and teaches him that all things are materialized in a cosmic dream universe through thought projected by the creator. He is forever changed by his experience, and is given instructions regarding his own disciples. As he leaves, Babaji reminds him that there is no separation between them and that only calling for him will bring him instantly to Lahiri's side. Lahiri calls him to prove to his friends that Babaji is real. He departs by disintegrating before them. He reappears to Lahiri at a celebration, where Babaji washes the feet of a poor ascetic, emphasizing the lesson of humility and equality.

Again, a piece of Yogananda's story is actually someone else's experience as related to him, and this time even that is second-hand, which is how this wisdom was passed down through the generations.. In his way, he attempts to make his autobiography a textbook for spiritual seekers, not necessarily documenting his own life, but the experiences of others, as well.



Chapter 35

Chapter 35 Summary and Analysis

Yogananda is convinced that Jesus and John the Baptist were reincarnations of earlier Biblical figures, and offers evidence from the Bible. Likewise, Babaji and Lahiri are linked as guru and student. In Banaras, Lahiri's presence had the effect of spreading enlightenment all around him as he initiated others into kriya. He did not recommend discussing theory and dogma, but only realizing truths. He initiated many well-known saints, as well as the Maharaja. He felt the science of religion has been cloaked in symbolism and imagery and that without raising the consciousness, moral maxims are useless. When the self communes with a higher power, nature obeys man's will effortlessly. Although Lahiri did not want the subtleties of natural law flouted, he brought the information out through people such as Yogananda. He believed in earning a living and demonstrated how to work and live among people, and still be a saint and prophet. Yogananda tells us that he did not expose all of the miraculous details in this book, but was given permission by Lahiri to divulge some of what he knows.

Yuktswar talks to Yogananda of his meetings with Babaji, who tells him that he will be "instrumental in bringing the knowledge of eastern enlightenment" to the people in the west and will teach a "disciple who will disseminate yoga." Babaji also asks Yuktswar to write a book comparing Biblical scripture to Hindu scripture. He instructs him to tell Lahiri that the stored up power for his life is running low. When Lahiri gave up his body, at least three of his disciples were visited by him and he appeared to be in the flesh, although transfigured. He has promised to always be with them. Again, Yogananda uses this example to compare the Indian saints with the saints of the Bible in an effort to reach his goal of uniting east with west.

Yogananda finds himself being called to America by Babaji. He delivers his first speech in Boston in 1920 at the International Congress of Religious Liberals. He has no preparation for the speech and allows it to take form, and is told his English is impeccable. With funds from his father, he stays on in America and eventually, with the help of students, establishes a temple on Mt. Washington in Los Angeles. He lectures all over the country and offers classes in yoga, as well as writing a book for Americans called "Whispers From Eternity." He was received at the White House by President Calvin Coolidge and becomes well-known. At this point in the book, Yogananda quotes George Washington and Walt Whitman, proving himself an acclimated American.



Chapters 38-39

Chapters 38-39 Summary and Analysis

Yogananda is impressed by Luther Burbank who believes that vibrational love is the key to all evolution, human and plants alike. Burbank, in addition to being a famous horticulturist, was an initiated practice of kriya and has visions of his departed mother. He assisted Yogananda in naming his new magazine "East-West," and endorsed Yogananda's Yogoda system of education through scientific methods of concentration and meditation, and appealed for international schools on the art of living. Yogananda considers him an American saint, and grows to love Burbank very much, conducting a large memorial after his death.

Yogananda has now spent fifteen years in America and is psychically called home by Yukteswar. His friend, James Lynn who is a master of kriya yoga and considered a saint by Yogananda, funds his voyage to India. Accompanied by his secretary, Dick Wright, he visits London and Scotland, and then goes to Bavaria to meet Therese Neumann, who was injured at twenty. Blind and paralyzed, through prayer she was healed and has ever since abstained from food and drink. Stigmata appear on many of her body parts and every Friday she suffers Christ's experience, uttering in ancient Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek, her wounds opening and bleeding. She eats only a thin wafer each morning, the size of a small coin, living only on light. Yogananda and Dick Wright are allowed to observe the trance and they are able to experience it with her, as she bleeds from her orifices. Traveling through Greece, they visit the Holy Land and all of its points of interest and then proceed to India.



Chapters 40-41

Chapters 40-41 Summary and Analysis

Overjoyed to return to India, Yogananda is met by swarms of people. He reunites with his father and later in the hermitage rejoins Sri Yukteswar in an intense meeting. The meeting is described by Dick Wright in his journal, as well as Yukteswar himself. A picture of Yogananda in Boston hangs on his wall, but his room is sparse and worn. Yogananda is chastised when he offers to provide a new rug for Yukteswar, reminding him of his youthful days with the master. Yogananda, while he is there, has the Ranchi school legally incorporated, as it is now permanently funded by his American students and his father. The school has developed into a well-equipped establishment with several branches of high school in different areas. The ashram, Dagoda Math, and the school at Ranchi are now affiliated with the Self-Realization Fellowship, offering education, religious and humanitarian activities. Dick Wright describes India as having the racial aura of peace.

Dick Wright is having experiences in India where most westerners are not allowed, visiting temples, universities and other events with Yogananda, and even riding elephants. His journal reflects a beautiful and colorful description of Mysore, and of the gorgeous scenery, architecture and art that is present throughout India. He is fascinated with the history of India and goes into some detail, which is the material for much of this chapter of Yogananda's book. Yogananda cites the history of the caste system and India's government. Yogananda tells the story of Sadasiva, a saint who took to silence and danced in the streets. Yogananda and Dick Wright visit Sri Ramana Maharishi, who reads the East-West magazines. Ramana teaches that one should constantly ask himself, "Who am I?"

Yogananda is clearly delighted to be back in India and happy to have his close friend and companion see India through his eyes and ears. They are touring and relaxing, and making important visits, as well.



Chapters 42-43

Chapters 42-43 Summary and Analysis

Yukteswar finally tells Yogananda that he loves him as a son, assuaging Yogananda's insecurities about whether he had pleased his Guru. After a solstice festival, Yukteswar asks him to return soon, as he has things to tell him. At this time, he bestowed the title of Paramahansa on Yogananda. Yukteswar leaves everything to Yogananda, knowing he will be dying soon. Yogananda leaves for a celebration where two million people have gathered. Yogananda feels the spiritual ardor in India is how the country has survived. He describes the huge celebration and all of its huts and swamis and beggars and saints, including Krishnananda whose tame, vegetarian lion is trained to growl "aum."

Dick Wright's diary entry describes their visit to Kara Patri, who wears no clothing and has no possessions. They leave for a visit to the Taj Mahal and then to see Swami Keshabananda to secure information for the biography Yogananda intends to write about Lahiri Mahasaya. Keshabananda has spent most of his life in Himalayan caves and tells of Babaji's visit to him with a message from Yogananda. Keshabananda tells Yogananda that Babaji wants him to know he will see him later.

The two head for Calcutta and Yogananda discusses Lord Krishna. Upon his arrival in Calcutta, he is summoned to Puri where Yukteswar has died at the age of eighty-one. Yogananda experiences profound grief over the loss of his beloved master. When they try to board a ship for the west, they are turned back because there is no room for their car, and Yogananda goes once more to Puri to his master's grave.

Yogananda has a vision of Lord Krishna while he is in his hotel room in Bombay. He has been visited by the astrally-reconstituted body of Yukteswar, who explains to him that he has created this body from cosmic atoms and is resurrected on an astral plane. He tells him that he has been assigned to serve as a savor on an astral planet called Hiranyaloka, where the dwellers are highly developed spiritually but have some karma left to burn away after having become nearly perfected on earth. Yukteswar says the astral universe, made of light and color, is "hundreds of times larger than the material cosmos, and is clean, pure, harmonious and orderly without terrestrial blemishes." Different species and types of beings are assigned to different levels of astral vibrations, and this one is heavenly and operates on intuition and recognition of indestructible love. Yukteswar explains rebirth and the different planes of existence in the causal and astral realms in great detail in this chapter, as well as soul-life and karma. This chapter, in fact, is the basis for the belief system of the self-realization movement and is so intricate that it its readers must determine for themselves how much of it they are ready to absorb.



Chapters 44-45

Chapters 44-45 Summary and Analysis

Yogananda visits Gandhi on a Monday, his day of silence, which lasts until 8:00 p.m. In mutual admiration, they eat lunch together and Gandhi asks him to initiate him into kriya yoga. Yogananda reviews Gandhi's attitudes toward ahimsa, or non-violence, and discusses Gandhi's daily rituals in this chapter. Gandhi lives in stark renunciation, and Yogananda recalls Yukteswar saying that "a beggar cannot renounce anything." Yogananda prints a letter in this chapter that Kasturbai Gandhi wrote to her husband in honor of their relationship, which is that of guru and disciple. Yogananda introduces Gandhi to the idea of avocados as a source of physical energy. Gandhi says that unfertilized eggs are appropriate, since no killing is involved. A small group comes to learn the techniques of kriya yoga from Yogananda.

Yogananda pays tribute to Gandhi in this chapter by reprinting some of Gandhi's doctrines and philosophies of non-violence and he, himself, agrees that it is the voice of man's highest consciousness. He feels Gandhi has dramatically portrayed through his teachings the practical nature of nonviolence, its "solemn power to settle disputes without war". Although Gandhi was educated, the illiterate masses bestowed on him the title of Mahatma. In this chapter, Yogananda reprints the memoriam that is on the granite wall of Gandhi's grave.

Yogananda pays a visit to Ananadaoyi Ma, a female saint who stays in extended states of trance and has hundreds of disciples. She recognizes him as her "father," and he takes her to his school at Ranchi where she is greeted by festivities. Tiny and childlike, she has always been the same and appears to be a young girl. She is fed by her disciples like a baby. She spends much of her time in the astral world and does not refer to herself in first person. She is the essence of mother love.



Chapters 46-47

Chapters 46-47 Summary and Analysis

Yogananda and his companions pay a visit to a woman who lives on air alone, by the name of Giri Bala. The woman has been investigated and tested, and lives without any food. She does not feel it is her place to teach people how to do the yogic exercise she performs in order to not require food, since it would interfere with the flow of farming and consuming. She is nourished from the finer energies of air and sunlight, and from the cosmic powers that recharge her through the medulla oblongata. She tells them she was a greedy eater as a child, and was so shamed by her mother and her husband that she was given a method of kriya yoga, a mantra and breathing exercise, that ended her dependence upon food. Her goal is to prove that man is spirit and can learn to live by light instead of food.

By 1936, Yogananda is in demand in London and the SRF there stayed with their meditation meetings throughout the war. Later that year, he returns to Los Angeles bringing presents from around the world to his friends and followers. He tells of a Mr. Dickensen who was told he would know his guru when he was given a silver cup; predictably, Yogananda has brought one for him.

James J. Lynn, a devotee, has donated the land and money for a new ashram that is built next to the ocean at Encinitas, California without Yogananda's knowledge. In this beautiful setting, Yogananda translated Indian songs and chants into English. An SRF colony was established in Encinitas, and Yogananda has brought world brotherhood to his American home.



Chapter 49

Chapter 49 Summary and Analysis

Yogananda expounds on the peace and serene beauty of his home while war is raging in other parts of the world. He describes the growth of his following and the erection of monuments and shrines to those he respects and loves. He does not see the need for each person to have his own guru, but does see the need for classes to be taught in kriya yoga so that the average person can be enlightened. He notes the imbalance of the conditions in various nations of the world and feels a well-rounded civilization is not a commercial one. We are here to learn how to dominate the material life with spirit. Yogananda is civic-minded and global-minded as far as human evolution goes.

In his hermitage in Encinitas, Yogananda is visited by Jesus and comes to an understanding of the power that upholds myriad worlds. In 1950 and 1955, he translated the Bhagavad Gita into English with commentary about kriya yoga. He realizes that the mystery of the breath has occasionally been solved through means other than kriya yoga and he acknowledges saints from every religion. It is his opinion that humans falsely identify with the physical form because the life currents from the soul are breath conveyed into the flesh with such intense power that man mistakes the effect for a cause and "imagines the body to have a life of its own." The cells do not carry on life without the breath, but with kriya, the source of life is managed consciously and scientifically with the knowledge that the body is not to be relied on for life.

There are certain secrets to life that saints do not discuss, and Yogananda is no exception. He does feel that we cannot know God's essential nature because cosmic creation is only his sport. He feels he was put here to live a life that would set an example for those who seek truth, which is the exact correspondent with reality and implies the unshakeable knowledge of our own nature, or soul. He reiterates that God is love and that the "Lord" has given him "a very large family."



Characters

Paramahansa Yogananda, Mukunda Lal Ghosh

The author of his autobiography, Paramahansa Yogananda was born in 1893 in Gorakhpur in northeastern India near the Himalaya Mountains, the fourth child of Bengali parents of the Kshatriya caste, originally that of rulers and warriors. He was one of eight children, and describes his parents as saintly and peaceful. Because his father was well-to-do as a railroad executive, young Mukunda had the privilege of traveling and plentiful spending money compared to most. From the time he was small, Mukunda longed to go the Himalayas, where he felt he could focus on meditation and reach an ascended level of spirituality. His parents were followers of Lahiri Mahasaya, a well-known and well-loved saint whose miracles and clairvoyant abilities were known to Mukunda throughout childhood, even though Lahiri died before Mukunda was born. Mukunda was not a good student of academics, according to his own account, but skated by with his psychic powers and a lot of help from his friends and his teacher, Yukteswar.

Both Yukteswar and Mukunda's father insisted that Mukunda finish his university studies. Although he spent every day with Yukteswar meditating and learning, he miraculously passed his final exams, as well as successfully sitting for his college degree. Always hoping to know God, and dedicated to spending his life in search of God, Mukunda spent many hours practicing Kriya Yoga. He learned the nature of life and creation, and came to understand how to control energy in his lifetime, although never attaining the level of his teachers and masters.

As an initiated monk, Mukunda's name was changed to Yogananda, and he continued his studies with Yukteswar, as well as establishing a school for boys that was designed in accord with his beliefs and ideals regarding education. Classes were held outdoors under the trees, and students learned Kriya Yoga, with academic attention to mathematics and science. His school eventually grew and became a university, well-known in India.

However, Yogananda's calling was to bring Kriya Yoga to the west, as instructed by his teachers. He eventually had a headquarters office built in Los Angeles, as well as a hermitage in Encinitas, California, where he taught many people the values of Kriya Yoga, and practiced himself through his organization, the Self-Realization Fellowship, which still exists today.

Sri Yukteswar

Sri Yukteswar's importance in Paramahansa's life cannot be overstated. A disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya only later in his life, Yukteswar lived a normal householder's life as a family man and engineer, until he was transferred to an area near the Himalayas at the



age of 33. He was summoned by Lahiri Mahasaya, and joined him in his cave where he remembered his former life of living there, meditating and practicing kriya yoga. His life was forever changed, having remembered his true identity and finding his master. Since his wife had died and his two children were grown, he went on to devote his life to spirituality, developing his spiritual prowess, eventually becoming extremely clairvoyant and performing miraculous feats. Although Yukteswar possessed a strong sense of humor, he could be stern as a master. He insisted that young Mukunda finish high school, attend university, and eventually sit for his AB degree, none of which Mukunda was prepared for, academically or psychologically. He allowed Yogananda to learn his lessons, at times the hard way, but was always prepared to ultimately save him from his own foolishness. Yukteswar pulled many strings clairvoyantly to help his disciples to learn what they needed, as well as to heal them from their earthly illnesses. He was responsible for healing many people and even brought some back from death, according to Yogananda, but put many people off by being "censorious" and abrupt, always stating the truth in no uncertain terms. He felt that those who could not take his directness and admonishment were weak, like a diseased part of the body.

Yukteswar spent many years with Yogananda and was the one who informed him that his task would be to bring the teachings of Kriya Yoga to the western masses. An important figure in his time, Yukteswar was well respected in India where he remained Yogananda's teacher even after Yogananda had established his own schools. Yukteswar had an affinity for the teachings of the Christian bible, and was able to draw parallels between the Indian rishis and biblical teachings. His master, Mahasaya, is said to be partnered with Christ as they plan for the salvation of humanity.

Lahiri Mahasaya

Lahiri Mahasaya was a supreme master who studied under the avatar, Babaji. Lahiri was the teacher of Yogananda's parents, as well as the master of Sri Yukteswar, who eventually became Yogananda's teacher. Mahasaya was (and is) a well-known and respected saint in India, who rediscovered the art of kriya yoga and brought it back into the world through teaching his disciples. Kriya yoga involves a method of meditation that controls the in and out breath, linking them and eventually removing the need for breathing for a period of time. In that state, a person in meditation is able to experience the oneness of the universe and the nature of God.

It is said that Lahiri's eyes were always half-closed as he peered into eternal bliss. He seemed to have direct access to divine knowledge and was able to call forth information rather than simply memorizing scripture. He was able to guide others' thoughts so that they could arrive at the right answers for themselves. Lahiri was considered a perfected soul, who was able to direct healing energy powerful enough to give vision to the blind and raise the dead.



Ananta Ghosh

In India, an older brother has nearly the same authority over the family as the father. Ananta Ghosh is Mukunda's older brother, who is adamant that young Mukunda should not try to visit the Himalayas. When Mukunda and his friend sneak away and take the train to the mountains, Ananta has them trailed by the police and eventually catches up with them, bringing Mukunda home.

Mahatavar Babaji

Babaji is the supreme guru in the Indian line of masters who practice Kriya Yoga. He will remain incarnate on the earth until this particular world cycle has ended.

Richard (Dick) Wright

Dick Wright was Yogananda's personal secretary and American devotee who accompanied him to India and kept a journal of their experiences.

Rabindinath Tagore

Tagore is the famous Indian poet who was a close friend of Yogananda's in India. He has written many inspirational songs and poems and is considered an enlightened being.

Swami Kebalanda

Swami Kebalananda was young Mukunda's Sanskrit teacher, who had been a disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya. He taught Yogananda much more than Sanskrit, being the first to introduce him to kriya yoga. His influence on Yogananda was partially responsible for Yogananda's determination to seek God through spiritual practice. Kebalananda spent ten years with Lahiri Mahasaya. He promised Mukunda he would see him years later with his father, a prediction which came true.

J. J. Lynn

Lynn is a wealthy American and devotee of Yogananda and kriya yoga. He gave and built, as a gift, the ashram at Encinitas to Yogananda and the Self-Realization Fellowship.



Luther Burbank

Burbank was a close friend of Yogananda who developed a science of horticulture based on the concept of love.

Jagadis Chandra Bose

Bose was a great botanist and scientist in India who made breakthrough discoveries in wireless technology.



Objects/Places

Gorakhpur appears in non-fiction

Gorakhpur is a district of north eastern India near the Himalayas where Yogananda was born in 1893.

Himalayas appears in non-fiction

The Himalayas are the rugged, craggy mountains in India where many saints and sages have dwelled in caves for centuries, meditating and seeking God.

Kashmir appears in non-fiction

Kashmir is a beautiful city near the Himalayas in India that is visited by Yogananda, Yuktswar and a small group of disciples.

Serampore College appears in non-fiction

Serampore College is the university in Calcutta where Yogananda received his education and AB degree.

Brindiban appears in non-fiction

Brindiban is the busy Indian city where Mukunda and his friend, Jitendra, purposely spent the day with no money or food, and were able to eat lavishly and had their train fare paid for.

Ranchi School appears in non-fiction

Yogananda founded the Ranchi school for boys, which had a focus on kriya yoga, math and spirituality.

Self-Realization Fellowship appears in non-fiction

SRF is the organization based on Yogananda's teachings which is a global organization with its headquarters in San Rafael, California.



Encinitas Hermitage appears in non-fiction

Built by his disciples, the Encinitas Hermitage is a beautiful ashram overlooking the ocean in Encinitas, California. It is where Yogananda was visited by Christ. The hermitage and its surrounding meditation gardens are still open to the public.

Kriya Yoga appears in non-fiction

Kriya yoga is the technique of meditation lost in antiquity that was practiced by Lahiri Mahasaya and his disciples. The method employs certain breathing techniques and results in a state of motionlessness and breathlessness, the only stage in which one can begin to meet God.

Aum appears in non-fiction

Aum is the cosmic, creative vibration or universal cosmic sound.

Yogi and Yogini appears in non-fiction

Yogi and Yogini are the male and female practitioners of yoga, the practice of union between the individual and the soul.

Ahimsa appears in non-fiction

Mathatma Ghandi defined ahimsa as the avoidance of harm to any living creature.

Vedas appears in non-fiction

The Vedas are sacred Indian scriptures describing the four-fold plan for man's life.

Sanskrit appears in non-fiction

Sanskrit is an ancient language of symbols

Swami appears in non-fiction

A swami is a member of an ancient order of monks in India



Themes

Know Thyself

The Self-realization Fellowship is Yogananda's offering to humanity in the hope that we may all know ourselves as clearly and deeply as he did. He felt that when we understand the true nature of our existence, we will no longer make war among ourselves, but will live in the peace that was intended for us. Self-knowledge, in this respect, comes from understanding the scientific fact that there is no such thing as material stuff, and that everything is made up of energy and light. All of the limitations that we perceive are merely illusions, including that of the physical body. Once we are able to take control of the energy that makes up our selves and our lives, we will be aware of our true nature, which is God-like and ultimately, just as powerful. Kriya Yoga allows us to take control over our bodies and ultimately, our awareness. With years of practice, Kriya Yoga can help us consciously make the connection to what we are instead of living in the dream state that we are currently in. Beginning as a personal effort but ultimately affecting the mass of humanity, we will come to know ourselves as pure love.

Perseverance Pays

Mukunda was a determined child, whose goal of following his God never left him. Efforts to thwart his path, including arranged marriages and formal education, simply fed his resolve to become enlightened through kriya yoga. He shows us throughout his autobiography that all hurdles that appear before us are part of our learning process. When Mukunda's trip to the Himalayas is brought to an abrupt end by his brother, we learn later that his real reasons for wanting to go there were resolved through understanding that the saints were all around him. A person does not need to hide in a cave to attain enlightenment, but only needs a quiet place to meditate. In Yogananda's case, he needed to walk among people, teaching and learning, and having the experiences that brought him to what he ultimately was. He meditated many hours and longed for the state of knowing God, and eventually attained it, though not in the way he expected. If we persevere, all things will work out exactly as they should. When we try to force our will, we simply block the flow that is already taking place in the universe. Therefore, perseverance, in Yogananda's case, should be connected to our spiritual quest, and everything else will fall into place.

Humanity is Evolving

Yogananda had grand ideas about the human race. He believed that when enough people reach a state of enlightenment, or in other words, grow spiritually enough to contact the true nature of God, that we will no longer create war and conflict among ourselves and will be gentle enough to co-exist with everything and everyone. Further, it

was his belief that we are headed in that direction, regardless of how it looks now; it is our destiny, perhaps through millions of lifetimes, to finally evolve out of the cycle of death and rebirth, and eventually find our oneness with the creator.



Style

Perspective

Paramahansa Yogananda's autobiography is written strictly from his own perspective, although at times he presumes to speak for others. He often uses lengthy quotes that are obviously taken only from his own memory, but cannot possibly be perfectly accurate. For example, many of the stories he quotes are "told" by people who related them so many years ago, he would have to have taped them to accurately quote them. Thus, even his telling of other peoples' stories is from his own perspective and his own memory. Moreover, Yogananda describes other peoples' experiences as though he personally experienced them, too. In his case, it may be possible that he clairvoyantly experienced moments with others. However, it is more likely that it was just his writing style.

Yogananda was trained in English and his own native Indian languages. His English vocabulary is quite extensive and eloquent, and he often uses words not heard in our everyday language.

Tone

Always upbeat and positive, Yogananda has a clear perception of the negativity and evils of the world as simply being part of the "maya" that keeps us in the cycle of rebirth and death. Ultimately, he sees the large picture of life as something of a game that we will undoubtedly someday conquer and win. In the meantime, all the suffering, hardship and negativity in the world is here for us to learn from, and is karma intended for us to burn away by our good works and devotion to God. Yogananda learned how to experience bliss while he was alive, and that state permeates his stories. Clearly, by the time he wrote his book in 1945, hindsight and age had softened his memories of the past. He writes with a clear, honest and self-effacing style. He talks of doing poorly in school and of getting into mischief as a child, but always with compassion for himself and for others. Yogananda seems to delight in telling stories that have a certain amount of shock value, such as the amazing clairvoyance of some of his teachers, the bi-locating saint, the perfume saint and others whose feats are amazing to the average reader. As the story progresses through his adulthood, his chapters take on a more serious, and at times, scientific tone. He consistently points out the similarities and cohesiveness between Indian spirituality and western Christianity.

Structure

This extremely packed 573-page book is surprisingly printed as a paperback. Containing 53 photos, and 49 chapters of uneven length, the book is an adventure in reading. In the early sections, Yogananda devotes entire chapters to stories about such odd figures as the Tiger Swami, the Perfume Saint, and other phenomenon that would



mystify and delight a child. As the chapters move chronologically into and through his adulthood, they become more factual and current and less based on memory and anecdote. Any symbolism and allegory are fully explained and analyzed, since Yogananda's purpose was to enlighten western man about the nature of our existence.

It is clear that it took several years to write this book of his life, since Yogananda's tone becomes more serious as he grows older, although not heavy-hearted. Some early chapters in the book are devoted solely to some singular experience or amazing person, while later in the book there are lengthy chapters that cover an extensive amount of material, time and detail. Some chapters are primarily written from the notes taken by others, such as his secretary, Dick. Yogananda often mentions his mediocre academic talents and, although this book is a gem in some respects, its organization and structure could have had a smoother flow.



Quotes

God's limit is nowhere! He who ignites the stars and the cells of flesh with mysterious life-effulgence can surely bring the luster of vision into your eyes." The master touched Ramu's forehead at the point between the eyebrows. "Keep your mind concentrated thee, an frequently chant the name of the prophet Rama for seven days. The splendor of the sun shall have a special dawn for you.' "Lo! In one week it was so. For the first time, Ramu beheld the fair face of nature." (47)

"By ignoble whips of pain man is driven at last into the Infinite Presence, whose beauty alone should lure him." (52)

"I have left a few paltry rupees, a few petty pleasures, for a cosmic empire of endless bliss. How then have I denied myself anything? I know the joy of sharing the treasure. Is tha a wacrifice? The shortsighted worldly folk are verily the real renunciants ! They relinquish an unparalleled divine possession for a poor handful of earthly toys!" (??)

The devotee's irrationality springs from a thousand inexplicable demonstrations of God's instance in trouble. (99)

"Die then!" This alarming counsel split the air. "Die if you must, Mukunda! Never believe that you live by the power of food and not by the power of God! He who has created every form of nourishment, He who has bestowed appetite, will inevitably see that His devotee is maintained. Do not imagine that rice sustains you nor that money or men support you. Could they aid if the Lord withdraws your life breath? They are His instruments merely. Is it by any skill of yours that food digests in your stomach? Use the sword of our discrimination, Mukunda! Cut through the chains of agency and perceive the Single Cause!" (104-105)

You have seen how your health has exactly followed your subconscious expectations. Thought is a force, even as electricity or gravitation. The humanmind is a spak of the almighty consciousness of God. I could show you that whatever your powerful mind believes very intensely would instantly come to pass." (133)

In conversation he avoided startling references; in action he was freely expressive. Many teachers talked of miracles but could manifest nothing; Sri Yukteswar seldom mentioned the subtle laws but secretly operated them at will. (136)

The starry inscription at one's birth, I cam to understand, is not that man is a puppet of his past. Its message is rather a prod to pride; the very heavens seek to arouse man's determination to be free from every limitation. (193)

Master enlarged my understanding not only of astrology but of the world's scriptures. Placing the holy texts on the spotless table of his mind, he was able to dissect them with



the scalpel of intuitive reasoning, and to separate errors and interpolations of scholars from the truths as originally expressed by the prophets. (194).

Although aged, she was blooming like a lotus, emanating a spiritual fragrance. She was of medium build, with fair skin, a slender neck and large lustrous eyes. (323)

It appears that misery, starvation and disease are whips of our karma that ultimately drive us to seek the true meaning of life.

One should forgive under any injury, says the Mahbharata. "It hath been said that the continuation of the species is due to man's being forgiving. Forgiveness is holiness; by forgiveness the universe is held together. Forgiveness is the might of the mighty; forgiveness is sacrifice; forgiveness is quiet of mind. Forgiveness and gentleness are the qualities of the Self-possessed. They represent eternal virtue." (512)



Topics for Discussion

What is Yogananda's role in the parade of saints that he describes throughout his autobiography? What contributions did he make?

Do you think Yogananda's status as a privileged youth in India was what helped him achieve all he did? Discuss his family's caste position.

Yogananda's discussion of the universal laws and the nature of existence were remarkably accurate when compared with the conclusions of modern science. Discuss his ideas about light and creation.

What kind of talisman did Yogananda's mother leave to him, and why? What happened to it?

What did Yogananda learn about his boyhood yearning to go to the Himalayas?

Yuktswar performed some remarkable feats. What level of saint was he? Do you think he was truly a master, or a learned psychic?

Discuss Yogananda's Lazarus experiences.

What significance did Lahiri Mahasaya play in Yogananda's life?

Do you feel Mukunda was an ordinary boy? If so, what differentiated him from other children?

Discuss Yogananda's feelings about India. Why did he build hermitages in California?