

The Yoga of Jesus

Class 1 - Introduction and Overview: Jesus, Vedism and India

I. WELCOME AND CLASS OVERVIEW

A. Welcome

B. Four-week mini-class focused on the many connections that have been identified between the teachings and practices of Jesus and the Vedic tradition that is at the root of Hinduism

1. This week sets a framework for the remaining three weeks and focuses much of its attention on my belief -- which I believe is increasingly well-documented -- that Jesus spent his so-called "lost years" as a student and teacher on the Indus sub-continent.
2. Next week, we'll begin our focus on the main book for this class, *The Yoga of Jesus* by Paramahansa Yogananda. We'll take a close look at how Jesus embodied the Universal Christ Consciousness and how that fact led to his most important teachings.
3. In week 3, we'll compare and contrast three of Jesus' more interesting teachings -- second birth, lifting up the Son of Man, and the connection between belief in Jesus' name and salvation -- with Vedic/Hindu teachings and scholarship.
4. We'll wrap things up in the fourth and final class with an examination of the highest universal principles found in Jesus' teachings, first by looking at the Beatitudes, then by taking a look at the concepts of Divine Love and the location of the Kingdom

within.

C. Source materials

1. Most of the content and structure of the next 3 weeks is based in large part on the book I mentioned.

a) Available at smile.amazon.com (\$12 for paperback, \$8 for eBook)

b) Excerpts from the much larger work by Yogananda called *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You, A revelatory commentary on the original teachings of Jesus.*

c) Arranged topically

D. I'll be recording each class and posting them on the UMB website along with my lecture notes.

II. WHAT IS YOGA?

A. In the West, we have a tendency to think of yoga primarily as a fitness and/or relaxation discipline involving bodily contortion and balance exercises designed primarily to enhance our physical side.

B. While the Eastern understanding of the term yoga certainly includes the idea of physical improvement, that is a small aspect of the practice.

C. We can think of yoga as an umbrella term for any set of practices and disciplines that is designed to provide a framework within which individual meditation and worship takes place for spiritual and physical enhancement.

D. Many Eastern philosophers and writers use the term to mean essentially "science of religion."

E. The word comes from the Sanskrit word that means "union". For me, the highest connotation of the word in Vedic philosophy is union of the individual soul with Spirit through scientific

methods of meditation.

F. There are many types and schools of yoga and yogic thought. You are probably most familiar with Hatha, but at least two other schools of yogic thought are popular in the United States as well: Bhakti and Bikram.

G. So in studying the yoga of Jesus, we will be looking at the underlying systematic theology and the characteristics it shares with Vedism and Hinduism.

III. INTRODUCING PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

Since Yogananda's work will be such an important part of this class, I thought it would be helpful for you to get a bit of a glimpse into his life and teachings so you would have a better understanding of why I'm relying so heavily on his work.

A. My Personal Connection

1. "Discovered" him first about 25 years ago
2. Read *Autobiography of a Yogi* and found it at once intriguing and unbelievable, so I set it aside.
3. Re-discovered him and the institution he founded, the Self-Realization Fellowship, about 10 or 12 years ago.
4. Re-read *Autobiography* and it was like reading an entirely new book.
5. About 11 or 12 years ago, Vicky, her late husband Ro, my wife and I along with Michael and Kay went to Southern California and on the way back we stopped at his Lake Shrine in Pacific Palisades.
6. Adopted him as one of my main spiritual teachers

7. Began taking the first series of SRF correspondence classes, in which I am continuing to be engaged.
 8. So I don't claim objectivity here. I revere Yogananda deeply and I honor and respect his scholarship, his teachings and his many insights into Inner Christ Consciousness.
- B. He was born in 1893 and died in 1952. The *Autobiography* was published in 1946 and fairly quickly became an acknowledged spiritual classic.
- C. It takes the reader on a journey into Yogananda's spiritual adventures. The book begins by describing Yogananda's childhood family life to his search for his guru, Yukteswar Giri, to the establishment of his first school, to his journey to America where he lectured to thousands, established Self-Realization Fellowship and visited with Luther Burbank, a renowned botanist to whom this book is dedicated. The book then takes you on Yogananda's return visit to India in 1935 where he encountered leading spiritual figures such as Therese Neumann in Bavaria, the Hindu saint Ananda Moyi Ma, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Sir C. V. Raman, and Giri Bala, "the woman yogi who never eats." The story then returns to the West with Yogananda where he continues to establish his teachings in America including writing this book.
- D. Along the way we have encounters with a number of yogis with remarkable powers including a personal encounter with the legendary Mahavatar Babaji, who is thought to be thousands of years old.
1. Mahavatar Babaji who revived in this age the

lost scientific meditation technique of Kriya Yoga. In bestowing Kriya initiation on his disciple Lahiri Mahasaya, Babaji said, "The Kriya Yoga that I am giving to the world through you in this nineteenth century is a revival of the same science that Krishna gave millenniums ago to Arjuna; and that was later known to Patanjali and Christ, and to St. John, St. Paul, and other disciples."

2. Paramahansa Yogananda, in his *Autobiography*, described Mahavatar Babaji's role on earth: [He] is in constant communion with Christ; together they send out vibrations of redemption, and have planned the spiritual technique of salvation for this age. The work of these two fully-illuminated masters—one with the body, and one without it—is to inspire the nations to forsake suicidal wars, race hatreds, religious sectarianism, and the boomerang-evils of materialism. Babaji is well aware of the trend of modern times, especially of the influence and complexities of Western civilization, and realizes the necessity of spreading the self-liberations of yoga equally in the West and in the East.
- E. His guru tasked him with coming to the United States to spread his teachings of Kriya Yoga to the West. He drew large audiences for his many talks and lessons and was something of a celebrity, particularly in the Los Angeles area.
- F. The SRF has a broad vision of its role in the world
(read p. 126 of *Yoga*)
- G. *Autobiography* available free online from several sources: Google title
- H. SRF website is at <https://www.yogananda-srf.org/>

- I. In *Yoga of Jesus*, Yogananda clearly states the purpose of his work on page 14 when he says: “That his teaching, born internally from his God-realization and nurtured externally by his studies with the Masters, expresses the universality of Christ Consciousness that knows no boundary of race or creed, is what I shall endeavor to make evident throughout the pages of this book.”

IV. FOUNDATION: SHARED TEACHINGS AND MEDITATION

Even though we will be spending the bulk of this four-week class delving more deeply into specific teachings of Jesus and their connections to the Hindu tradition, I'd like to begin with a quick overview of basic parallels that will be a framework on which we can hang our more detailed discussions in the remaining classes.

- A. Jesus was a Jewish rabbi who taught in the Jewish tradition according to the Hebrew Scriptures for the most part.
- B. But he brought to bear some Universal Principles which transcended Jewish teaching and thought of his era. It is in the content of these teachings, many of which were thought to be revolutionary at the time, that we find the most overlap with the Vedic/Hindu traditions.
 1. Concept of a personal relationship with God when Israel was all about community/tribal connections to YHWH. Calling God “abba” was blasphemous to Jews.
 2. In the series of statements in which Jesus says, in the Scholar's Version translation, “As you know, we were once told,” and which you

are probably more familiar with reading, “You have heard it said.”

- a) Each of these statement groups is a direct expansion of traditional Hebrew teaching that moves beyond external behavior and carries us inward to our individual responsibility.
- b) This material is preceded immediately by the Beatitudes and a brief interlude in which Jesus says, “Don’t imagine that I have come to annul the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to annul but to fulfill.”
- c) These, then, are deeper insights into the ancient tradition which do not contradict but certainly appear to expand upon and replace the narrow original teachings.
 - (1) So “you must not kill” becomes a prohibition against being angry;
 - (2) And “You are not to commit adultery” becomes “Those who leer at a woman and desire her have already committed adultery with her.”
 - (3) He changes, “You must not break an oath” to “Don’t swear an oath at all.”
 - (4) And, importantly, “We were once told, ‘An eye for an eye’ and ‘A tooth for a tooth’” into the famous admonition about turning the other cheek.
 - (5) The final of this set of teachings changes “You are to love

your neighbor and You are to hate your enemy” to “Love your enemies.”

3. Broadly speaking, the idea of a theology based primarily in the question of how we treat others individually, one that demands unconditional Love and Compassion, was a pretty radical concept when Jesus was teaching.
4. But these principles were deeply embedded in Vedic and Hindu theology and practice.
5. As we'll see in Week 3, these teachings -- and many others -- which differ in one degree or another with the Hebraic tradition in which Jesus was a teacher -- can be found directly or by inference in key passages from the ancient Sacred Scriptures of Vedism and Hinduism, the *Vedas*.

C. Many of Jesus' parables, interpreted metaphysically and then overlaid on top of Vedic teachings and meditation techniques, reveal some interesting parallels.

1. John Ford, retired math prof in Santa Cruz and a 40-year student of the parables, sent me a paper he wrote called, “Keys to the Parables”
2. Attempts to answer the question, “Did Jesus teach Yogic meditation?”
3. Takes 22 of Jesus' parables and parable-like sayings and analyzes them with that viewpoint.
4. Example 1: Mustard Seed (Mark 4, Matthew 13, Luke 13)
5. He also said, “To what can we liken the realm of God? By what can we illustrate it? Perhaps

by the growth of a mustard seed. This seed, when sown in the ground, though it is smaller than all other seeds, yet when sown shoots up and becomes larger than any other herb and puts out great branches so that even the wild birds can nest in its shelter.” (OEB, Mark 4:30-32)

6. Ford suggests that the mustard seed in this parable is a direct parallel to the Vedic teaching that uses the exact same seed. In the Upanishads, the mustard seed is a metaphor for the Divine Spirit located in the center of the human heart. The birds of the air have long been seen by metaphysicians as symbolic of thoughts. Ford concludes, then, “During meditation when attention is focused steadily on the interior, central still point of the spiritual heart, the Divine Spirit manifests in the treelike subtle anatomy of the soul. Thinking is stilled and thoughts come to rest.”
7. That is, of course, a key aspect of yogic meditation.
8. Another great example from Ford’s work is his commentary on the so-called “Parable of the Talents”. (Talent was a denomination of currency.)
9. Ford: talents = spiritual life energy (chi)
10. In the parable, a master gives three of his servants some money to invest during his absence. He returns to find one had buried the money out of fear he’d be punished if he invested badly.
11. Points out this energy can be conveyed directly (as when the post-resurrection Jesus

breathes it into his disciples in John 20:22) or through interaction with a previously blessed/infused material object such as bread or wine.

12. Ford says in Vedic tradition, a guru conveyed this chi to disciples in the expectation they would take it into meditation and increase its presence in their lives.
13. When the guru (or landowner or Jesus) finds a disciple who didn't do as instructed (and therefore didn't increase his chi), he doesn't give him more chi, not for punishment but because he hasn't increased his capacity.
14. Contrast this interpretation with two popular ones in Christianity.
 - a) If this parable is about giving away money to help others (as it is usually interpreted) then the master upon returning would not have expected an increase in money.
 - b) Confusing the word "talent" with "gift" or "ability", a literal interpretation sees the purpose of this parable to implore us to use our gifts to help others. Noble as that is, Ford's interpretation says this was not the original intent of the parable.

15. Others if we have time.

D. Some representative common teachings of Jesus and his approximate Vedic/Hindu counterpart, Krishna.

1. "The Kingdom is not coming with signs to be observed. The Kingdom of God is within you."
- Jesus in canonicals. "Those who seek oneness ceaselessly find the Lord dwelling in

- their own hearts.” -- Gita
2. “Be aware of that which is right in front of you: then you will be able to grasp what is out of your sight. For there is nothing hidden that will not be known.” - Thomas. “The unreal never is. The Real never is not. Those possessed of this knowledge of Truth know both of these.” - Gita
 3. “I came from the great Power to those who meditate upon me. I have been found in those who seek me. See me. Consider me. Hear me.” -- The Thunder: Perfect Mind. “With a quiet mind, silence and self-harmony...with love in a heart that is pure, so is harmony of the mind.” -- Gita
 4. “Do not throw your pearls before swine, for they will only trample them underfoot.” -- Matthew & Thomas. “The wise man should not disturb those of little understanding, who are deluded by the phenomena of the material world.” -- Gita

V. JESUS’ “LOST” YEARS “FOUND” IN INDIA

As most of you know, I have for several years been an ardent student of the various accounts of what Jesus was doing during the so-called “lost years” and where he was doing it. I have come to the conclusion that there is significant evidence to support the notion that he spent the time between his last appearance in the canonical Gospels at the age of 12 in the Temple until his return at the age of approximately 30 to be baptized by John the Baptist and begin his earthly ministry, traveling around the Indian subcontinent, teaching and learning with the Vedic Rishis. I’ve taught an entire

class on this theme and we don't have time to go into detail here tonight, so I'm going to summarize the conclusions I reached and share some information that has come to my attention since the time that I taught that class.

- A. The original Western exploration of Jesus' lost years in India came at the hands of a Russian traveler named Nicholas Notovitch, while recovering from injuries sustained in the fall in the Himalayas at a small monastery, gained access to some ancient manuscripts which discussed a person named Issa, whose characteristics bore a strong resemblance to Jesus. The name "Issa" translates from Sanskrit (and, by the way, Arabic) into "Jesus."
- B. Notovitch self published his transcription of those manuscripts in 1894 under the title, "The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ."
- C. In 1922, a famed Indian swami visited the monastery and confirmed all of the salient details in Notovitch's book
- D. A fellow Russian, Nicholas Roerich, sometime in the mid-1920s copied verses from ancient manuscripts that were either the same or at least the same and content as those published by Notovitch. He reported encountering widespread awareness of the stories about Issa which convinced him that the manuscript could not be forgeries because, "in what possible way could a recent forgery penetrate into the consciousness of the whole East?"
- E. According to the manuscripts found by Notovitch, Jesus left Jerusalem in the Middle East shortly before his 13th birthday in order to avoid the

- wedding plans that would by then have been in process for him as a Jewish man of marriage age.
- F. Jesus knew his divine destiny and set out for India to prepare himself for its fulfillment.
 - G. He was familiar with the Eastern mystical tradition both through contact with travelers in the region where he lived and from contact with the Magi who appeared at his birth according to the mythology.
 - H. He would, of course, also have been familiar with the philosophers of the West: Greek and Roman teachers who have become major influences on Western culture from that time to today.
 - I. Even then, the Western philosophers were focused on what in that time lent itself best to scientific expiration rather than inner examination through meditation. Presumably, Jesus made the decision to go east to pursue the more spiritual paths then being taught and practiced there.
 - J. In addition — and this is some of the new material I referred to earlier — Gnosticism had its historical roots in India, and that is where Judaism picked it up as a minority school of thought. So Jesus could have been exposed to Eastern thought through that vehicle as well.
 - K. The manuscripts found at the monastery say that Jesus spent six years traveling among various holy cities, studying and teaching.
 - L. While Jesus apparently became learned in the Vedas and other sacred literature, he openly denounced their practices of caste bigotry, many of its priestly rituals, and the emphasis they placed on worship of many gods in idolatry as opposed to sole reverence for the one God of his Judaism.
 - M. As a result of those disagreements, Jesus apparently spent the next six years of his travels in

India with the Sakya Buddhist sect in the Himalayan Mountains of Nepal and Tibet. This group was a monotheistic movement which separated itself from traditional Hinduism over many the same concerns as Jesus expressed.

- N. Yogananda sees in the location of Jesus' birth an important message that we often overlook. He points out that Palestine was the hub linking the East with Europe and that eventually he acted as a divine liaison to unite God-loving peoples of East and West.
- O. Of course, Jesus was an Oriental. Yogananda suggests that because of the westward direction the early Christian church took for its growth, Jesus and his message have been overly Westernized, resulting in our inability to appreciate the deeper meanings behind his many lessons.
- P. Famed religious historian Elizabeth Pagels said, "The living Jesus of these texts speaks of illusion and enlightenment, not of sin and repentance like the Jesus of the New Testament. Instead of coming to save us from sin, he comes as a guide to open access to spiritual understanding."
- Q. Yogananda says, "in order to understand Christianity, one must first take away its Western crust, and then it's oriental crust. Behind them to opaque coverings lies the universality of true Christianity."
- R. One final aspect of this connection between Jesus and India that I'd like to explore for a few minutes is the vastly underappreciated role India plays on the world stage of religious and spiritual unfoldment.
- S. No less a luminary than historian Will Durant made this observation about the Scriptures of India:

“They are the oldest extant philosophy and psychology of our race.”

- T. While Western historians other than Durant have largely downplayed the importance of India, there are some known or strongly held views we need to take into account before judging it in historic context.
- U. For example, Michigan State University Historian D. P. Singhal, an eminent expert on Indian history, has concluded that by the middle of the third millennium BCE an Indian cult was already being practiced in Mesopotamia. That means that 2000 years before the earliest reference to cuneiform writing, India was sending manufactured goods to the land which is perceived as the root of Western civilization.
- V. Another example. Baron Alexander Von Humboldt, who is credited with developing the modern framework for studying ancient American cultures, concluded that the advanced pre-Colombian civilization in the New World could trace its origins to India.
- W. Dr. Singhal in fact said, “We have little doubt that a sober but unbiased comparative analysis of the Mexican religions will reveal many traces of the former influences of either Hinduism or Buddhism or of both.”

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. I have really only scratched the surface here in discussing some of the connections between Jesus and the Vedic/Hindu traditions that we’ll focus on in greater detail over the next three weeks.
- B. These connections can be traced, I believe, to the

principle of Universality of Truth, which, as Yogananda says, is all religion.

- C. In other words, I don't think it's necessary for us to conclude that Jesus learned most or all of what he taught from the sources he encountered during his 18-year sojourn in India. In fact, some of the evidence suggests that he was as instrumental in shaping the growth of those traditions as they were in shaping his teachings as evidenced in his work after his return to the Middle East.
- D. Truth is Truth. There is but one God. There is only one of us here. So to find these commonalities is not only not surprising, but should be expected under the heading of, "how usual!".
- E. Still, discovering these connections and further verifying the principle of One Truth promises to occupy most of my spiritual study and writing time for the rest of this lifetime. I hope I'll have the opportunity in the future to teach other classes on these fascinating topics.

VII. CLOSING MEDITATION

Now I'd like to close with a short meditation from Yogananda's book "metaphysical meditations."

It's called "The Trends Figuring Christ."

Please Get into Meditation Mode or Posture.

- A. Read p. 113 in Kindle version