

The Yoga of Jesus

Class 2 - Jesus the Christ, Avatar and Yogi

I. OVERVIEW

- A. This week's focus: perceptions of Jesus from the perspective of Hinduism in general and Yogananda specifically
- B. Specifically, Jesus as an avatar and as a Yogi
- C. An avatar is a soul who has attained reunion with Spirit and then chosen to return to earth to help mankind spiritually. It comes from the Sanskrit "avatara", which means "to pass down."
- D. Of course, a Yogi is simply one who practices yoga. There is no implication of any official status, or priestly duties. Anyone can be a Yogi if they practice the scientific techniques of yoga for divine realization. Note that this excludes those in the West who engage in yoga primarily as a physical exercise.
- E. We will conclude this evening by taking a look at Jesus' inner teachings from the Eastern perspective.

II. JESUS THE AVATAR

A. Divine manifestations

1. Yogananda teaches, "For mere mortals to cope with a life of unsolved and unsolvable mysteries in an inscrutable universe would indeed be an overwhelming challenge were it not for divine emissaries who come on earth to speak with the voice and authority of God for the guidance of man."
2. This intermediary role is the key reason for avatars' existence.

3. Over the millennia, many avatars have appeared to help guide humanity in its path back to God. In fact, in the Bhagavad-Gita, Lord Krishna says, “Whenever virtue declines and vice predominates, I incarnate as an avatar. In visible form I appear from age to age to protect the virtuous and to destroy evil doing in order to reestablish righteousness.”
4. Hindus speak of the inner presence as their Krishna Consciousness, while Christians may think of that same presence as Christ Consciousness.
5. In point of fact, both Krishna and Christ Consciousness are universal and identical. Their physical manifestation and some of their practical or ethical teachings and practices differed because of the different times and cultures in which they came forth.
6. As an avatar, Jesus was preceded by, among others, Gautama Buddha, a.k.a. “Enlightened One”, whose incarnation reminded humanity of the ever-rotating wheel of karma — self-initiated action and its effects which make each person, rather than a “Cosmic Dictator”, responsible for his or her own present condition.
7. From one perspective, it was Buddha’s responsibility or calling to bring the heart back into what had become a dry theology of the Vedic tradition after millennia of calcification.
8. Jesus came to demonstrate the forgiveness and compassion of God, whose love is a shelter even from exacting law.
9. Using the principle of universal, unconditional love, Jesus invited the world to follow him on the path to reunion with the Divine through the example of his

spirit of sacrifice, renunciation, love for friend and enemy alike, and supreme love for God above all else.

10. As Yogananda says, “the Christ in Jesus lived among men as one of them so that they too might learn to live like gods.”

B. Universality of Christ Consciousness

1. We can think of Christ Consciousness as the understanding of our oneness with God’s infinite intelligence and bliss, pervading all of creation.
2. Jesus himself spoke of this consciousness when he proclaimed his oneness with the father, as in John 10:30 (“I and my father are one”) and John 14:11 (“I am in the father, and the father in me”).
3. If we unite our consciousness, through our inner Christ being, to God, we then can know the true nature of Spirit. As Yogananda put it, we then “know both the transcendent and the imminent nature of spirit — the singularity of the ever-existing, ever conscious Divine, as well as the myriad manifestations of His Being as the infinitude of forms into which He variegates Himself in the panorama of creation.”
4. Another way Yogananda suggests we can think of the vast Christ Consciousness is as, “the omniscient Intelligence of God omnipresent in every part and particle of creation.”
5. This notion leads us inevitably to a consideration of the nature and origin of the universe, which is the branch of physics known as cosmology.
6. Yogananda argues that the universe in which we find ourselves cannot be the result of a fortuitous combination of vibrating forces and subatomic particles, which is the thinking of most quantum

physicists today. He says, “Blind forces cannot organize themselves into intelligently structured objects.”

7. Prof. Paul Davies, a mathematical physicist and widely read popular author, in his book, “Evidence Of Purpose: Scientists Discover the Creator”, points out that if — as most of his colleagues maintain — cosmic evolution was governed only by the chance operation of strictly mechanical laws, “the time required to achieve the level of order we now meet in the universe. By random processes is that the order of at least 10 to the 10th to the 80th years, which is inconceivably longer than the current age of the universe.”
8. I’ve spoken before from the platform about the 200 or more constant values in the mathematics of physics which, if they were the slightest bit larger or smaller than they are, would render the original development of life on earth, or for that matter any other planet, unthinkable. It seems to me that to believe that all of that intricate order could come about randomly would strain credibility beyond the breaking point.
9. So Christ is God’s infinite Intelligence that is present in all creation. It is “the only begotten son” in the sense that it is the only pure reflection of spirit in the visible created realm.
10. And it can be manifested also in each of our individual consciousnesses.
11. Christ Consciousness is Omnipresence, the Divine spread over every speck of infinite space and permeating every atom. (I’ll have more to say about this later this evening when we look at inner teachings of Jesus.)
12. Yogananda sees the common thread through

all of this Divine Intelligence as evidence of one of his most important and original teachings, namely the conscious evolution of Spirit and, ultimately, humanity. He argues that at each evolutionary phase — of which there are five — more of Spirit is manifested.

13. At the first phase of this evolutionary process, we find minerals. These entities are characterized principally by their inertia; in other words, they are not mobile.
14. As minerals evolved to plants, they remain immobile in terms of their ability to move around, but they develop roots which cause more rapid change in the outer appearance as well as increasing the size of the plant, something minerals are unable to do.
15. Animals, in their turn, are freed from the fixity of minerals and plants and develop a sentient consciousness which enables them to experience a greater portion of creation.
16. Man, by his self-consciousness, additionally can understand his fellow beings' thoughts and can share his own. He can also project his sensory mind into the far reaches of the universe, if only through the power of his imagination.
17. In Hindu thought, the fifth stage of evolution is called "Superman". At this stage, Spirit as manifested expands its life energy and consciousness from its body into all of space, thus regaining the omnipresence of Spirit which was lost at the first stage of evolution.
18. According to this view, at least as interpreted by Yogananda, God's intent and purpose in creation is to draw all beings back to conscious oneness with himself, through evolutionary

promptings of the Christ Intelligence.

19. In that context, Jesus' principal teaching can be seen as helping human beings learn to become a Christ. This process is generally referred to, particularly in Christianity, as "receiving" him. As John teaches, "As many as received him (by which he means the Christ Consciousness), to them he gave power to become the sons of God."
20. (Quick side note on plural "sons")
21. Yogananda argues that to **receive** Christ means to **know** Christ. And, he argues, we know Christ through the process of scientific yogic meditation. When we close our eyes, expand our consciousness, and thus deepen our concentration, the inner light of soul intuition enables us to partake of the same consciousness that Jesus had.
22. He goes on to say, "A true Christian is he who frees his soul from the consciousness of the body and unites it with the Christ intelligence pervading all creation." By the definite science of meditation, anyone who seeks God can enlarge the scope of their consciousness to omniscience.
23. In particular, Yogananda tells us we do not need churches outer rituals or priests to guide us, because the divine power of Christ realization is an entirely internal experience. I like the way he summarizes this, "Those who meditate devoutly will receive Christ on the altar of calmness in their own consciousness."

C. True meaning of the "Second Coming"

1. This reunion with Christ Consciousness is what Yogananda means when he refers to the Second Coming of Christ. That, as you'll recall from last

week, is the name of the two-volume collection of inspired commentary on Jesus' teachings from which the book "The Yoga of Jesus" is taken.

2. Yogananda teaches that Jesus' reappearance to the masses now is not necessary for the fulfillment of his teachings
3. But what is necessary is for the cosmic wisdom and divine perception of Jesus to speak again through each of our own experience and understanding of the infinite Christ Consciousness that was incarnate in Jesus.
4. Yogananda says these teachings which he brought forth from his deep inner communion with his Christ Consciousness are designed to provide instruction in how to become like Christ, which will resurrect the Eternal Christ within our individual selves.

III. JESUS AND YOGA

A. Defining Yoga

1. From the Sanskrit word "yuj" meaning union.
2. Same root word as "yoke" - thus being united, connected
3. Many, many yogic paths. Principally:
 - a) Hatha Yoga - physical postures aimed at purifying the body, increasing awareness and control over internal bodily states and preparing for meditation
 - b) Karma Yoga - selfless service to others
 - c) Mantra Yoga - Entering consciousness through repetition of certain universal root-word sounds (e.g., Aum)
 - d) Bhakti Yoga - All-surrendering devotion and commitment to see and love the divinity in every creature and in everything

- e) Jnana Yoga - Path of wisdom
 - f) Raja Yoga - (aka Royal Yoga) - combines all the other paths. Defined in second century BCE by Patanjali, author of the Yoga Sutra
 - g) Kriya Yoga - taught by Yogananda. Patterned on Raja Yoga. "Quickest and most effective approach to the goal of yoga." Deals directly with energy and consciousness.
4. Patanjali identifies eight steps in Raja Yoga to attaining *samadhi*: moral conduct; religious observance; right posture; control of *prana* (breath and subtle life currents); withdrawal of senses from external objects; concentration; meditation; and finally *samadhi*, union with God.
 5. In Unity we are fond of describing religion as "One mountaintop, many paths." Hinduism teaches, essentially, that all of these paths converge **near** the mountaintop in the act of reunification with the Divine, which they **define** as yoga.
 6. So a Hindu devotee might well imagine that the Vedic path is the fastest and most direct route since it **begins** with the principle of reunion with God and Oneness.

B. Lost teachings of the Gospels

1. Yogananda makes two important, powerful, and often-overlooked points about Jesus' teachings that act as background for the rest of his commentary.
2. First, he points out that the geographic region where Jesus was born and raised until the age of maturity (12) is Oriental (Eastern), not Occidental (Western).
3. **Second, he reminds us that the early (1st Century CE to mid-4th Century, beyond that in Syria) Christian movement was split into two nearly equal**

camps: what became orthodoxy and what is referred to, not completely accurately, as gnosticism.

4. And gnosticism, in turn, is far more Eastern in its teachings than it is Western.
5. One of the foremost interspiritual scholars and writers of our time, Elaine Pagels, agrees. She begins by quoting the famous passage from the Gospel of Thomas in which Jesus has said to Thomas, “He who will drink from my mouth [i.e., hear and internalize my teachings] will become as I am: I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him.”
6. Then she asks rhetorically, “Does not such teaching — the identity of the divine and human, the concern with illusion and enlightenment, the founder who is presented not as Lord, but as spiritual guide — sound more Eastern than Western? Could the Hindu or Buddhist traditions have influenced Gnosticism? Ideas that we associate with Eastern religions emerged in the first century through the Gnostic movement in the West, but they were suppressed by polemicists [hostile critics] like Irenaeus.”
7. As Yogananda says, the realization of those two important observations has resulted in widespread misinterpretation of Jesus and his teachings. In fact he says, “Even the most elementary principles of his teachings have been desecrated and their esoteric depths have been forgotten.”
8. Given that Jesus was an Oriental, it certainly seems likely that his teachings have to be interpreted in view of the background of that nationality and culture if they’re going to be truly understood in all their dimensions.

9. At least, one must be sympathetically open to the Oriental point of view. In Jesus' case, this means paying particular attention to India's ancient civilization, religious scriptures, traditions, philosophies, spiritual beliefs, and intuitive metaphysical experiences.
10. In several of our previous classes together, we have pursued teachings of Jesus that were contained in the so-called Gnostic Gospels and yet were completely missing from the canonical Gospels on which mainstream Christianity today relies for its beliefs about Jesus, his teachings and his nature.
11. So I don't have time to go into those topics in great detail tonight. Just know that there are many, many such teachings that are keeping today's **Christian scholars busy all over the world.**

C. Yoga as the universal "Science of Religion"
or Sanatana Dharma

1. If you think about the idea of a "science of religion", you may come to the conclusion I have: that the personal realization of truth is the science behind all science. In other words, whether we are talking about religious truth, psychological truth, scientific truth, or any other kind of truth, what makes the concept of truth stick with us and become part of our nature and experience is our own personal realization.
2. What is needed, it seems to me, is a reunion of the **science** of religion with the **spirit** of religion.
3. From that perspective, we can see the practical principles of yogic science taught in Hinduism as a way to transcend mere belief and the spirit of Christ love and brotherhood preached by Jesus as one and the same universal truth.

4. The universality of this science of religion is often overlooked by adherents of specific religious teachings who have their own sacred texts which they believe contain the entirety of Truth.
5. But in reality, avatars do not appear among us to foster doctrinal division. As I said earlier, any differences in their various teachings and scriptures are a function of the differences in culture and geography that provide the context in which they teach.
6. It is, for example, a bit of a misnomer to refer to the New Testament, as we do in Unity, as the “Christian Scriptures.” Like the Hebrew Scriptures and the Bhagavad-Gita, the New Testament does not belong exclusively to anyone sect or denomination.
7. Truth, then, is universal. It is in this sense that Yogananda is speaking of the universal science of religion and relating it to the teachings of Jesus the Christ.
8. One of my favorite quotations from Yogananda is, “Truth, in and of itself, is the ultimate religion.”
9. The essence of truth is within us. That is the clearly revealed teaching of the Vedic tradition, including Hinduism and Buddhism.
10. In Judaism, this was historically not the case. But after the destruction of the Temple, later Hebrew prophets began to speak of the Truth — or what they called the Ark of the Covenant — was “written on the hearts of Israel.”
11. Just as a final way of making this point, it is worth remembering that Jesus himself is reported in John 10:34 as saying, “Isn’t it written in your law: I said, You are gods? The Scripture can’t be wrong.”

IV. INNER TEACHINGS OF JESUS THE YOGI

A. Everyone can attain Christ Consciousness

1. The first of these inner teachings is that Christ Consciousness is attainable by anyone who:
 - a) Loves Christ
 - b) Follows his instructions
 - c) John 14:15, Scholar's Version
2. The word translated "instructions" here has commonly been translated as "commandments." But notice that Jesus is referring **not** to the Ten Commandments or to the Commandments of the Father. This is a specific reference to **his** commandments.
3. In metaphysical Christianity, we have understood those commandments to consist of two specific instructions: love God first and foremost, and love all of humanity as we love ourselves.
4. Yogananda expands on those instructions and suggests that they include laws of bodily and mental discipline as well as meditation.
5. In one of many cases where Yogananda gained additional insight into the true meaning of passages from the canonical Gospels, he expands on the meaning of John 14:19 – 22.
 - a) In the Scholar's Version: "In a little while the world won't see me any longer, but you'll see me because I'm alive as you will be alive."
 - b) Yogananda's extension: "Yet a little while my body will be present in the world, and then the world shall lose sight of this body and the Christ Consciousness in it. But those of you who are advanced, contact Christ Consciousness; in it you will find my life and

your life and know that Infinite Intelligence to be the condition of all life existing in the cosmos and in the hereafter.”

6. In his time, this lesson applied principally to Jesus' direct disciples. But today, it is a universal message for all of humanity. If we love Jesus and follow his instructions, we will live lives of fulfillment, atonement and salvation.

B. Role of the “Holy Ghost”

1. The vehicle or mechanism by which we are able to contact Christ Consciousness is referred to by Jesus as the Holy Ghost. He also refers to this force as the Great Comforter.
2. Yogananda defines the Holy Ghost as “the sacred, invisible vibratory power of God that actively sustains the universe.”
3. This Spirit — which later generations of Christians corrupted into a third person of the Trinity — is, as Jesus taught in John 14:16 – 17, inside each of us. To contact it, then, requires that we go within (i.e. meditate) and then counter it in the silence.
4. Yogananda further expands on this contacting of that Cosmic Consciousness by pointing out that we first have moments of intuitive perceptions of it dwelling in our soul before, in time and with meditational practice, we learn to become constantly aware of it.
5. So the reason the concept of the Holy Ghost is important to us as practicing metaphysical and mystical Christians is that it is the power associated with the indwelling Christ Consciousness. It is the vehicle, if you will, through which we gain direct contact with the Divine.

6. As a point of interest, let's take a quick look at the Christian concept of the Trinity, which grows out of the idea of the Holy Ghost and attempts to answer questions about Jesus' nature.
7. Father, Son, Holy Spirit (more archaically, Ghost)
8. Teaching of the Trinity as doctrine began only in the early Fourth Century and was more or less settled at the Council of Nicea **even though it was a minority position.**
9. Yogananda suggests that Jesus clearly understood the dichotomy of his nature, which would become a point of contention in the early church, as we've learned in previous classes. He says that when Jesus referred to himself as the "Son of Man", he was referring to his physical body, and when he meant his spiritual self, his soul if you will, he use the words "son of God".
10. I find that a remarkable teaching that makes eminent sense, but I haven't had the opportunity yet to track down every reference where Jesus use those terms to see if they match up with the theology embodied in the Gospels.
11. In any case, this concept of the Trinity does not have an equivalent in Hindu thought. But the idea that God, or the divine, can and does have many individual aspects is a very Eastern idea. And, it is one with which Judaism and even Greek and Roman thought would have had no familiarity. So it is further evidence of Eastern influence on Jesus' teachings.

C. The Word of John and God's Intelligent Vibration

1. As most of you know, I have been embarked for several years on a new inspired commentary of the Gospel of John. So you've heard me say many

times that the translation and subsequent Christian misinterpretation of the opening verses of that gospel have led to significant inaccurate teachings about Jesus.

2. More and more, modern translations of this account, which is sometimes referred to as John's Creation Gospel, have come to understand that when it says, "in the beginning was the Word," it is not referring to Jesus.
3. Most modern scholarship is now concluding that that use of the word "Word" should be translated as either wisdom or God's wisdom.
4. Traditionally, the opening verses of John are translated something like this: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men."
5. Note this switch from the genderless noun "Word" to the masculine pronoun "him", for which there is no grammatical justification in the original Greek.
6. The Scholar's Version of the Gospels issued by the Jesus Seminar translates these first verses as follows: "In the beginning there was the divine word and wisdom. The divine word and wisdom was there with God, and it was what God was. It was there with God from the beginning. Everything came to be by means of it; nothing that exists came to be without its agency. And it was life, and this life was the light of humanity."
7. This translation does away with the use of the masculine pronoun "he" in favor of the gender-neutral pronoun "it". That is, by all accounts and

the study I've engaged in, a proper rendering of this passage.

8. Now if we take this notion that the spirit of Divine Wisdom, or what we sometimes referred to in Unity as Spirit, is the sum and substance and source of all creation, then we can conclude that creation is by nature vibratory. We can do this for two reasons.
 - a) As we know from modern physics, everything, including that which we consider to be tangible matter, is simply a form of energy.
 - b) Spirit, manifesting as the Word or Wisdom of God, can be expressed verbally by the word "Om", alternately and more accurately pronounced "Aum".
9. Now if we take a slightly broader understanding of the word "Word", extending it beyond its biblical connotation, we find that it means intelligent vibration, intelligent energy. This vibrational energy, combined with thought, is what makes any sound uttered by any intelligent being intelligent.
10. Yogananda says that before creation there was only undifferentiated Spirit.
11. According to Eastern cosmogony, creation begins with the creative energy and sound of Cosmic Vibration. These emanate from the Creator and, permeated with Cosmic Intelligence, condense into subtle elements, or what we think of as forces: thermal, electromagnetic, gravitational and others perhaps yet to be discovered.
12. In Hindu scriptures, this vibration which we refer to as the Holy Ghost, is known as Aum. This word is an acronym composed of the letters representing *akara* (creative vibration), *ukara*

(preservative vibration), and *makara* (vibratory power of dissolution). These symbols represent the three stages in the repeating cycle of Hindu cosmology: creation, sustenance, and destruction.

13. This whole concept goes back to the ancient Vedic teachings which describe creation as *Vak* (cosmic vibration) being with *Prajapati* (Father-Creator). These same scriptures identify *Vak* as *Brahman* (God).
14. There are a great many equally insightful and even more advanced perspectives on Jesus' teachings in the noncanonical gospels, but that is beyond the scope of our class this time.
15. IF TIME DISCUSS STRING THEORY AND THE VIBRATORY SOUND CONCEPT OF CREATION. (p. 26)