

# Autobiography of a Yogi

Paramahansa Yogananda

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# *Autobiography of a YOGI*

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**By**  
**Paramhansa Yogananda**

WITH A PREFACE BY

W. Y. Evans-Wentz, M.A., D.Litt., D.Sc.

"Except ye see signs and wonders,  
ye will not believe."-John 4:48.

Copyright, 1946, by  
Paramhansa Yogananda

*Dedicated To The Memory Of*

**LUTHER BURBANK**

**An American Saint**

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# Contents

Preface, By W. Y. EVANS-WENTZ

List of Illustrations

## Chapter

1. My Parents and Early Life
2. Mother's Death and the Amulet
3. The Saint with Two Bodies (Swami Pranabananda)
4. My Interrupted Flight Toward the Himalaya
5. A "Perfume Saint" Performs his Wonders
6. The Tiger Swami
7. The Levitating Saint (Nagendra Nath Bhaduri)
8. India's Great Scientist and Inventor, Jagadis Chandra Bose
9. The Blissful Devotee and his Cosmic Romance (Master Mahasaya)
10. I Meet my Master, Sri Yukteswar
11. Two Penniless Boys in Brindaban
12. Years in my Master's Hermitage
13. The Sleepless Saint (Ram Gopal Muzumdar)
14. An Experience in Cosmic Consciousness
15. The Cauliflower Robbery
16. Outwitting the Stars
17. Sasi and the Three Sapphires
18. A Mohammedan Wonder-Worker (Afzal Khan)
19. My Guru Appears Simultaneously in Calcutta and Serampore
20. We Do Not Visit Kashmir
21. We Visit Kashmir
22. The Heart of a Stone Image

23. My University Degree
  24. I Become a Monk of the Swami Order
  25. Brother Ananta and Sister Nalini
  26. The Science of Kriya Yoga
  27. Founding of a Yoga School at Ranchi
  28. Kashi, Reborn and Rediscovered
  29. Rabindranath Tagore and I Compare Schools
  30. The Law of Miracles
  31. An Interview with the Sacred Mother (Kashi Moni Lahiri)
  32. Rama is Raised from the Dead
  33. Babaji, the Yogi-Christ of Modern India
  34. Materializing a Palace in the Himalayas
  35. The Christlike Life of Lahiri Mahasaya
  36. Babaji's Interest in the West
  37. I Go to America
  38. Luther Burbank -- An American Saint
  39. Therese Neumann, the Catholic Stigmatist of Bavaria
  40. I Return to India
  41. An Idyl in South India
  42. Last Days with my Guru
  43. The Resurrection of Sri Yukteswar
  44. With Mahatma Gandhi at Wardha
  45. The Bengali "Joy-Permeated Mother" (Ananda Moyi Ma)
  46. The Woman Yogi who Never Eats (Giri Bala)
  47. I Return to the West
  48. At Encinitas in California
-

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# ILLUSTRATIONS

Frontispiece

Map of India

My Father, Bhagabati Charan Ghosh

My Mother

Swami Pranabananda, "The Saint With Two Bodies"

My Elder Brother, Ananta

Festival Gathering in the Courtyard of my Guru's Hermitage in Serampore

Nagendra Nath Bhaduri, "The Levitating Saint"

Myself at Age 6

Jagadis Chandra Bose, Famous Scientist

Two Brothers of Therese Neumann, at Konnersreuth

Master Mahasaya, the Blissful Devotee

Jitendra Mazumdar, my Companion on the "Penniless Test" at Brindaban

Ananda Moyi Ma, the "Joy-Permeated Mother"

Himalayan Cave Occupied by Babaji

Sri Yukteswar, My Master

Self-Realization Fellowship, Los Angeles Headquarters

Self-Realization Church of All Religions, Hollywood

My Guru's Seaside Hermitage at Puri

Self-Realization Church of All Religions, San Diego

My Sisters -- Roma, Nalini, and Uma

My Sister Uma

The Lord in His Aspect as Shiva

Yogoda Math, Hermitage at Dakshineswar

Ranchi School, Main Building

Kashi, Reborn and Rediscovered

Bishnu, Motilal Mukherji, my Father, Mr. Wright, T.N. Bose, Swami

Satyananda

Group of Delegates to the International Congress of Religious Liberals, Boston,

1920

A Guru and Disciple in an Ancient Hermitage

Babaji, the Yogi-Christ of Modern India

Lahiri Mahasaya

A Yoga Class in Washington, D.C.

Luther Burbank

Therese Neumann of Konnersreuth, Bavaria

The Taj Mahal at Agra

Shankari Mai Jiew, Only Living Disciple of the great Trailanga Swami

Krishnananda with his Tame Lioness

Group on the Dining Patio of my Guru's Serampore Hermitage

Miss Bletch, Mr. Wright, and myself -- in Egypt

Rabindranath Tagore

Swami Keshabananda, at his Hermitage in Brindaban

Krishna, Ancient Prophet of India

Mahatma Gandhi, at Wardha

Giri Bala, the Woman Yogi Who Never Eats

Mr. E. E. Dickinson

My Guru and Myself

Ranchi Students

Encinitas

Conference in San Francisco

Swami Premananda

My Father

Map of India

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# PREFACE

By W. Y. EVANS-WENTZ, M.A., D.Litt., D.Sc.

Jesus College, Oxford; Author of

*The Tibetan Book of the Dead,*

*Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa,*

*Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines, etc.*

The value of Yogananda's *Autobiography* is greatly enhanced by the fact that it is one of the few books in English about the wise men of India which has been written, not by a journalist or foreigner, but by one of their own race and training--in short, a book *about* yogis *by* a yogi. As an eyewitness recountal of the extraordinary lives and powers of modern Hindu saints, the book has importance both timely and timeless. To its illustrious author, whom I have had the pleasure of knowing both in India and America, may every reader render due appreciation and gratitude. His unusual life-document is certainly one of the most revealing of the depths of the Hindu mind and heart, and of the spiritual wealth of India, ever to be published in the West.

It has been my privilege to have met one of the sages whose life- history is herein narrated-Sri Yukteswar Giri. A likeness of the venerable saint appeared as part of the frontispiece of my *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*. <sup>1-1</sup> It was at Puri, in Orissa, on the Bay of Bengal, that I encountered Sri Yukteswar. He was then the head of a quiet ashrama near the seashore there, and was chiefly occupied in the spiritual training of a group of youthful disciples. He expressed keen interest in the welfare of the people of the United States and of all the Americas, and of England, too, and questioned me concerning the distant activities, particularly those in California, of his chief disciple, Paramhansa Yogananda, whom he dearly loved, and whom he had sent, in 1920, as his emissary to the West.

Sri Yukteswar was of gentle mien and voice, of pleasing presence, and worthy of the veneration which his followers spontaneously accorded to him. Every person who knew him, whether of his

own community or not, held him in the highest esteem. I vividly recall his tall, straight, ascetic figure, garbed in the saffron-colored garb of one who has renounced worldly quests, as he stood at the entrance of the hermitage to give me welcome. His hair was long and somewhat curly, and his face bearded. His body was muscularly firm, but slender and well-formed, and his step energetic. He had chosen as his place of earthly abode the holy city of Puri, whither multitudes of pious Hindus, representative of every province of India, come daily on pilgrimage to the famed Temple of Jagannath, "Lord of the World." It was at Puri that Sri Yukteswar closed his mortal eyes, in 1936, to the scenes of this transitory state of being and passed on, knowing that his incarnation had been carried to a triumphant completion. I am glad, indeed, to be able to record this testimony to the high character and holiness of Sri Yukteswar. Content to remain afar from the multitude, he gave himself unreservedly and in tranquillity to that ideal life which Paramhansa Yogananda, his disciple, has now described for the ages. W. Y. EVANS-WENTZ

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1-1: Oxford University Press, 1935.

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PARAMHANSA YOGANANDA

*October 28, 1945*

*Encinitas, California*

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## CHAPTER: 1

### *My Parents and Early Life*

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The characteristic features of Indian culture have long been a search for ultimate verities and the concomitant disciple-guru <sup>1-2</sup> relationship. My own path led me to a Christlike sage whose beautiful life was chiseled for the ages. He was one of the great masters who are India's sole remaining wealth. Emerging in every generation, they have bulwarked their land against the fate of Babylon and Egypt.

I find my earliest memories covering the anachronistic features of a previous incarnation. Clear recollections came to me of a distant life, a yogi <sup>1-3</sup> amidst the Himalayan snows. These glimpses of the past, by some dimensionless link, also afforded me a glimpse of the future.

The helpless humiliations of infancy are not banished from my mind. I was resentfully conscious of not being able to walk or express myself freely. Prayerful surges arose within me as I realized my bodily impotence. My strong emotional life took silent form as words in many languages. Among the inward confusion of tongues, my ear gradually accustomed itself to the circumambient Bengali syllables of my people. The beguiling scope of an infant's mind! adultly considered limited to toys and toes.

Psychological ferment and my unresponsive body brought me to many obstinate crying-spells. I recall the general family bewilderment at my distress. Happier memories, too, crowd in on me: my mother's caresses, and my first attempts at lispings phrase and toddling step. These early triumphs, usually forgotten quickly,

are yet a natural basis of self-confidence.

My far-reaching memories are not unique. Many yogis are known to have retained their self-consciousness without interruption by the dramatic transition to and from "life" and "death." If man be solely a body, its loss indeed places the final period to identity. But if prophets down the millenniums spake with truth, man is essentially of incorporeal nature. The persistent core of human egoity is only temporarily allied with sense perception.

Although odd, clear memories of infancy are not extremely rare. During travels in numerous lands, I have listened to early recollections from the lips of veracious men and women.

I was born in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and passed my first eight years at Gorakhpur. This was my birthplace in the United Provinces of northeastern India. We were eight children: four boys and four girls. I, Mukunda Lal Ghosh <sup>1-4</sup>, was the second son and the fourth child.

Father and Mother were Bengalis, of the *kshatriya* caste. <sup>1-5</sup> Both were blessed with saintly nature. Their mutual love, tranquil and dignified, never expressed itself frivolously. A perfect parental harmony was the calm center for the revolving tumult of eight young lives.

Father, Bhagabati Charan Ghosh, was kind, grave, at times stern. Loving him dearly, we children yet observed a certain reverential distance. An outstanding mathematician and logician, he was guided principally by his intellect. But Mother was a queen of hearts, and taught us only through love. After her death, Father displayed more of his inner tenderness. I noticed then that his gaze often metamorphosed into my mother's.

In Mother's presence we tasted our earliest bitter-sweet acquaintance with the scriptures. Tales from the *mahabharata* and *ramayana* <sup>1-6</sup> were resourcefully

summoned to meet the exigencies of discipline. Instruction and chastisement went hand in hand.

A daily gesture of respect to Father was given by Mother's dressing us carefully in the afternoons to welcome him home from the office. His position was similar to that of a vice-president, in the Bengal-Nagpur Railway, one of India's large companies. His work involved traveling, and our family lived in several cities during my childhood.

Mother held an open hand toward the needy. Father was also kindly disposed, but his respect for law and order extended to the budget. One fortnight Mother spent, in feeding the poor, more than Father's monthly income.

"All I ask, please, is to keep your charities within a reasonable limit." Even a gentle rebuke from her husband was grievous to Mother. She ordered a hackney carriage, not hinting to the children at any disagreement.

"Good-by; I am going away to my mother's home." Ancient ultimatum!

We broke into astounded lamentations. Our maternal uncle arrived opportunely; he whispered to Father some sage counsel, garnered no doubt from the ages. After Father had made a few conciliatory remarks, Mother happily dismissed the cab. Thus ended the only trouble I ever noticed between my parents. But I recall a characteristic discussion.

"Please give me ten rupees for a hapless woman who has just arrived at the house." Mother's smile had its own persuasion.

"Why ten rupees? One is enough." Father added a justification: "When my father and grandparents died suddenly, I had my first taste of poverty. My only breakfast, before walking miles to my school, was a small banana. Later, at the university, I was in such need that I applied to a wealthy judge for aid of one

rupee per month. He declined, remarking that even a rupee is important."

"How bitterly you recall the denial of that rupee!" Mother's heart had an instant logic. "Do you want this woman also to remember painfully your refusal of ten rupees which she needs urgently?"

"You win!" With the immemorial gesture of vanquished husbands, he opened his wallet. "Here is a ten-rupee note. Give it to her with my good will."

Father tended to first say "No" to any new proposal. His attitude toward the strange woman who so readily enlisted Mother's sympathy was an example of his customary caution. Aversion to instant acceptance- typical of the French mind in the West-is really only honoring the principle of "due reflection." I always found Father reasonable and evenly balanced in his judgments. If I could bolster up my numerous requests with one or two good arguments, he invariably put the coveted goal within my reach, whether it were a vacation trip or a new motorcycle.

Father was a strict disciplinarian to his children in their early years, but his attitude toward himself was truly Spartan. He never visited the theater, for instance, but sought his recreation in various spiritual practices and in reading the *bhagavad gita*. <sup>1-7</sup> Shunning all luxuries, he would cling to one old pair of shoes until they were useless. His sons bought automobiles after they came into popular use, but Father was always content with the trolley car for his daily ride to the office. The accumulation of money for the sake of power was alien to his nature. Once, after organizing the Calcutta Urban Bank, he refused to benefit himself by holding any of its shares. He had simply wished to perform a civic duty in his spare time.

Several years after Father had retired on a pension, an English accountant arrived to examine the books of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway Company. The

amazed investigator discovered that Father had never applied for overdue bonuses.

"He did the work of three men!" the accountant told the company. "He has rupees 125,000 (about \$41,250.) owing to him as back compensation." The officials presented Father with a check for this amount. He thought so little about it that he overlooked any mention to the family. Much later he was questioned by my youngest brother Bishnu, who noticed the large deposit on a bank statement.

"Why be elated by material profit?" Father replied. "The one who pursues a goal of evenmindedness is neither jubilant with gain nor depressed by loss. He knows that man arrives penniless in this world, and departs without a single rupee."

father1

FATHER

Bhagabati Charan Ghosh

*A Disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya*

Early in their married life, my parents became disciples of a great master, Lahiri Mahasaya of Benares. This contact strengthened Father's naturally ascetical temperament. Mother made a remarkable admission to my eldest sister Roma: "Your father and myself live together as man and wife only once a year, for the purpose of having children."

Father first met Lahiri Mahasaya through Abinash Babu, <sup>1-8</sup> an employee in the Gorakhpur office of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway. Abinash instructed my young ears with engrossing tales of many Indian saints. He invariably concluded with a tribute to the superior glories of his own guru.

"Did you ever hear of the extraordinary circumstances under which your father became a disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya?"

It was on a lazy summer afternoon, as Abinash and I sat together in the compound of my home, that he put this intriguing question. I shook my head with a smile of anticipation.

"Years ago, before you were born, I asked my superior officer-your father-to give me a week's leave from my Gorakhpur duties in order to visit my guru in Benares. Your father ridiculed my plan.

"Are you going to become a religious fanatic?' he inquired. 'Concentrate on your office work if you want to forge ahead.'

"Sadly walking home along a woodland path that day, I met your father in a palanquin. He dismissed his servants and conveyance, and fell into step beside me. Seeking to console me, he pointed out the advantages of striving for worldly success. But I heard him listlessly. My heart was repeating: 'Lahiri Mahasaya! I cannot live without seeing you!'

"Our path took us to the edge of a tranquil field, where the rays of the late afternoon sun were still crowning the tall ripple of the wild grass. We paused in admiration. There in the field, only a few yards from us, the form of my great guru suddenly appeared! 1-9

"Bhagabati, you are too hard on your employee!' His voice was resonant in our astounded ears. He vanished as mysteriously as he had come. On my knees I was exclaiming, 'Lahiri Mahasaya! Lahiri Mahasaya!' Your father was motionless with stupefaction for a few moments.

"Abinash, not only do I give *you* leave, but I give *myself* leave to start for Benares tomorrow. I must know this great Lahiri Mahasaya, who is able to materialize himself at will in order to intercede for you! I will take my wife and ask this master to initiate us in his spiritual path. Will you guide us to him?'

"Of course.' Joy filled me at the miraculous answer to my prayer, and the quick, favorable turn of events.

"The next evening your parents and I entrained for Benares. We took a horse cart the following day, and then had to walk through narrow lanes to my guru's secluded home. Entering his little parlor, we bowed before the master, enlocked in his habitual lotus posture. He blinked his piercing eyes and leveled them on your father.

"Bhagabati, you are too hard on your employee!' His words were the same as those he had used two days before in the Gorakhpur field. He added, 'I am glad that you have allowed Abinash to visit me, and that you and your wife have accompanied him.'

"To their joy, he initiated your parents in the spiritual practice of *Kriya Yoga*. 1-10 Your father and I, as brother disciples, have been close friends since the memorable day of the vision. Lahiri Mahasaya took a definite interest in your own birth. Your life shall surely be linked with his own: the master's blessing never fails."

Lahiri Mahasaya left this world shortly after I had entered it. His picture, in an ornate frame, always graced our family altar in the various cities to which Father was transferred by his office. Many a morning and evening found Mother and me meditating before an improvised shrine, offering flowers dipped in fragrant sandalwood paste. With frankincense and myrrh as well as our united devotions, we honored the divinity which had found full expression in Lahiri Mahasaya.

His picture had a surpassing influence over my life. As I grew, the thought of the master grew with me. In meditation I would often see his photographic image emerge from its small frame and, taking a living form, sit before me. When I attempted to touch the feet of his luminous body, it would change and again

become the picture. As childhood slipped into boyhood, I found Lahiri Mahasaya transformed in my mind from a little image, cribbed in a frame, to a living, enlightening presence. I frequently prayed to him in moments of trial or confusion, finding within me his solacing direction. At first I grieved because he was no longer physically living. As I began to discover his secret omnipresence, I lamented no more. He had often written to those of his disciples who were over-anxious to see him: "Why come to view my bones and flesh, when I am ever within range of your *kutastha* (spiritual sight)?"

I was blessed about the age of eight with a wonderful healing through the photograph of Lahiri Mahasaya. This experience gave intensification to my love. While at our family estate in Ichapur, Bengal, I was stricken with Asiatic cholera. My life was despaired of; the doctors could do nothing. At my bedside, Mother frantically motioned me to look at Lahiri Mahasaya's picture on the wall above my head.

"Bow to him mentally!" She knew I was too feeble even to lift my hands in salutation. "If you really show your devotion and inwardly kneel before him, your life will be spared!"

I gazed at his photograph and saw there a blinding light, enveloping my body and the entire room. My nausea and other uncontrollable symptoms disappeared; I was well. At once I felt strong enough to bend over and touch Mother's feet in appreciation of her immeasurable faith in her guru. Mother pressed her head repeatedly against the little picture.

"O Omnipresent Master, I thank thee that thy light hath healed my son!"

I realized that she too had witnessed the luminous blaze through which I had instantly recovered from a usually fatal disease.

One of my most precious possessions is that same photograph. Given to Father