

# Paramahansa Yogananda

## Purveyor of a Different Jesus and a Different Gospel

by J. Greg Sheryl



Anyone who has practiced yoga for a while probably has heard the name "Yogananda." Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952),<sup>1</sup> a 20th-century Hindu yogi, was a devotee of yoga and yogic meditation. Indeed, he appears to have viewed yogic meditation as the key to everything.

He brought his practice from India to America in 1920, where he lived for most of the rest of his life before dying in 1952 at age 59. He may be best known for his book, *Autobiography of a Yogi*.<sup>2</sup> He has been called "the Father of Yoga in the West,"<sup>3</sup> and he founded the organization Self-Realization Fellowship to promote his teachings. Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) continues to publish his resource materials.

The particular "brand" of yoga that Yogananda is known for is called kriya yoga, which is "an advanced Raja ["royal"] Yoga technique."<sup>4</sup>

### HIS LIFE

Although one might suppose that the best account of Yogananda's life is his *Autobiography of a Yogi*, such may not be the case. There is another book, also published by Self-Realization Fellowship, called *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*.<sup>5</sup> It contains much information about Yogananda's life, work, and teachings, as well as personal recollections of others about him and his final days. It also shows,

to an extent, how much he is esteemed by his followers.

Yogananda was born Mukunda Lal Ghosh on Jan. 5, 1893. His autobiography says:

"My name was changed to Yogananda in 1915 when I entered the ancient monastic Swami Order. In 1935 my guru bestowed on me the further religious title of *Paramahansa*."<sup>6</sup>

Later, he explains that the name "Yogananda ... means 'bliss (*ananda*) through divine union (*yoga*)'"<sup>7</sup> and also mentions that "Yogananda is a fairly common name among swamis."<sup>8</sup> As for the title "Paramahansa," he explains that when it was given to him by his guru, Yuktswar, in 1935, "It now formally supersedes your former title of *Swami*," he said as I knelt before him."<sup>9</sup> And he further explains the meaning of the name:

"Lit., *parama*, highest; *hansa*, swan. The white swan is mythologically represented as the vehicle or mount of [the Hindu god] Brahma the Creator."<sup>10</sup>

Mukunda's birthplace was "Gorakhpur in northeastern India near the Himalaya Mountains."<sup>11</sup>

Yogananda says in his autobiography that he was healed by a photograph of his parents' guru.<sup>12</sup> After his mother's death when he was 11, he wrote, "Intense pangs of longing for

God assailed me. I felt powerfully drawn to the Himalayas."<sup>13</sup> More than once, Mukunda tried to follow his dream of fleeing to the Himalayas.<sup>14</sup>

Biographical material and photos of Yogananda accompany his books. One says:

"It was in 1910, at the age of seventeen, that he met and became a disciple of the revered Swami Sri Yukteswar. In the hermitage of this great master of Yoga he spent the better part of the next ten years receiving Sri Yukteswar's strict but loving discipline. After graduating from Calcutta University in 1915, he took formal vows as a monk of India's venerable monastic Swami Order, at which time he received the name Yogananda."<sup>15</sup>

In 1917, Yogananda founded a boys' school at Dihika in Bengal with seven boys.<sup>16</sup> But his big break came three years later when he:

"...received an invitation to serve as the delegate from India to an International Congress of Religious Liberals in America. It was to convene that year [1920] in Boston, under the auspices of the American Unitarian Association."<sup>17</sup>

On Oct. 6, 1920,<sup>18</sup> he spoke before the assemblage on "The Science of Religion." That same year, he founded the Self-Realization Fellow-

ship in the United States.<sup>19</sup> This was the American counterpart to the Yoganoda Satsanga Society of India, which he had founded in 1917.

“For the next several years, he lectured and taught on the East coast and in 1924 embarked on a cross-continental speaking tour. In Los Angeles, he began a two-month series of lectures and classes in January of 1925. As elsewhere, his talks were greeted with interest and acclaim.”<sup>20</sup>

Also in 1925, the International Headquarters of SRF was established in Los Angeles, Calif.<sup>21</sup> It is still in Los Angeles on top of Mount Washington.

A volume containing some of his speeches says that on Jan. 28, 1925:

“*The Los Angeles Times* reported: ‘The Philharmonic Auditorium presents the extraordinary spectacle of thousands being turned away an hour before the advertised opening. ... Swami Yogananda is the attraction. A Hindu invading the United States to bring God in the midst of a Christian community, preaching the essence of Christian doctrine.’”<sup>22</sup>

This same volume states:

“In the early 1930’s Paramahansa began to withdraw gradually from nationwide public lecturing. ‘I am not interested in crowds,’ he said, ‘but in souls who are in earnest to know God.’ Thereafter, he concentrated his efforts on classes for serious students, and spoke mostly at his own Self-Realization Fellowship temples and the international headquarters.”<sup>23</sup>

Yogananda embarked on “an eighteen-month tour of Europe and India in 1935-36,”<sup>24</sup> after which he returned to the United States. In 1946, he published his now-famous *Autobiography of a Yogi*. He died of a heart attack on March 7, 1952, while giving a speech. He had turned 59 two months earlier.

After he died — for the 20 days that his body remained unentombed — his

body exhibited no physical signs of decay, a fact attested to in a written statement (which was also notarized) given by Harry T. Rowe, the Mortuary Director of the Forest Lawn Memorial-Park Association, who stated:

“The absence of any visual signs of decay in the dead body of Paramhansa Yogananda offers the most extraordinary case in our experience.”<sup>25</sup>

The document further stated:

“The physical appearance of Paramhansa Yogananda on March 27th, just before the bronze cover of the casket was put into position, was the same as it had been on March 7th. He looked on March 27th as fresh and as unravaged by decay as he had looked on the night of his death. On March 27th there was no reason to say that his body had suffered any visible physical disintegration at all. For these reasons we state again that the case of Paramhansa Yogananda is unique in our experience.”<sup>26</sup>

Then, “In 1977, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the [death] of Paramahansa Yogananda, the Government of India issued [a] commemorative stamp in his honor.”<sup>27</sup>

The most recent edition and printing of *Autobiography of a Yogi*<sup>28</sup> embellishes the cover photograph of Yogananda by placing a nimbus (a halo of light) around his head.

## FAMOUS PEOPLE

By the time of his death, “Yogananda [had] personally initiated over 100,000 students into kriya yoga.”<sup>29</sup> Among those he initiated was Mahatma Gandhi<sup>30</sup> and horticulturalist Luther Burbank,<sup>31</sup> to whom he dedicated *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

The Self-Realization Fellowship Website reports:

“Among those who became his students were many prominent figures in science, business, and the arts, including horticulturalist Luther Burbank, operatic soprano Amelita Galli-Curci, George Eastman (inventor of the

Kodak camera), poet Edwin Markham, and symphony conductor Leopold Stokowski. In 1927, he was officially received at the White House by President Calvin Coolidge, who had become interested in the newspaper reports of his activities.”<sup>32</sup>

Another source states:

“The most popular lay minister at the Los Angeles headquarters [of Self-Realization Fellowship] is television star Dennis ‘McCloud’ Weaver, an SRF disciple for some 40 years.”<sup>33</sup>

Dennis Weaver died in 2006.

## HIS WORK

Yogananda was a Hindu despite his apparent respect for Jesus and the Bible. Christian apologists John Ankerberg and John Weldon observe:

“SRF claims religious tolerance and pluralism, and even to be Christian. However the essentially Hindu outlook of SRF is illustrated in Yogananda’s definition of ‘self-realization’ as the recognition of our own divinity. It is ‘The knowing — in body, mind, and soul — that we are one with the omnipresence of God; that we do not have to pray that it comes to us, that we are not merely near it at all times, but that God’s omnipresence is our omnipresence. ...’ The essential beliefs of SRF parallel Vedantic Hinduism in the monistic, or non-dualist (*advaita*) tradition.”<sup>34</sup>

Another example is found in a volume of Yogananda’s speeches where it states:

“His Holiness the Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram, revered spiritual leader of millions in South India, wrote of Paramahansa: ‘... We are grateful to Yogananda for spreading Hindu philosophy in such a wonderful way in America and the West.’”<sup>35</sup>

*Autobiography of a Yogi* was first published in 1946 and was expanded by him before his death.<sup>36</sup> It is a dangerous book because it is an attractively packaged presentation of

Hinduism and it promotes anti-Christian doctrines of astrology, idolatry, reincarnation, contacting the dead, and so forth.

The late Beatle, George Harrison, a Hindu, said of Yogananda's *Autobiography*:

*"I keep stacks of Autobiography of a Yogi around the house, and I give it out constantly to people. When people need 'regrooving,' I say read this, because it cuts to the heart of every religion."*<sup>37</sup>

But Ankerberg and Weldon write that *Autobiography of a Yogi* "is replete with occult experiences."<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the promotion of Hinduism, occultism, and other anti-Christian teachings in this book, it is very difficult to locate the line separating truth from fiction; for some of the experiences he relates in it are patently false on their surface.<sup>39</sup>

On the book's title page is John 4:48: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." To remedy this situation, Yogananda's solution is to serve up tale after tale of miraculous events that he has heard of, experienced, and/or supposedly witnessed. This quotation from John's Gospel is ironic for a couple of reasons:

First, Yogananda doesn't actually "show" us any miraculous signs and wonders; he merely relates them, and we must decide whether or not to believe him. Many of the things he describes simply could not have occurred.

Second, in context, the words Yogananda quotes from the Gospel of John are a reproach of the Lord to a nobleman, who wants Jesus to heal his dying son. Jesus complies with the man's request, apparently with reluctance. This is a far cry from the way Yogananda uses the verse.

Far from obliging man's perverted desire for miraculous signs, Jesus clearly stated:

*"A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matthew 16:4).*

Another book by Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*,<sup>40</sup> is a set of teachings by Yogananda on the four New Testament Gospels. It is subtitled, "A revelatory commentary on the original teachings of Jesus." These commentaries were developed from articles Yogananda had written for the Self-Realization Fellowship's magazine. Yogananda claims that the expertise to write such a commentary came "by revelation." Yogananda describes the source of his revelation:

*"He [Jesus] approved very dearly and blessed me for writing these interpretations. This I can say without pride, because the interpretation of Christ's words herein is not mine. It has been given to me. I am happy this book is coming through me; but I am not the author. It is Christ. I am only the vehicle through which it is explained. I hear Christ in the land of my inspiration; I behold Christ speaking to me all the eternal wisdom he intended to convey within his pregnant words. Even when urged by well-meaning British teachers in my youth, I never read the New Testament, except for a few passages; for had I done so, theology under their tutelage would have blinded my vision and prejudiced my hearing, and I could not have heard Christ's voice or seen him speak. Now I rejoice as I will always long to rejoice to hear Christ speak to me his words of life, truth, and eternal liberation for all."*<sup>41</sup>

As one looks at his explanations of passages, it obviously wasn't the living Christ or the Holy Spirit who inspired his commentary. By forcing Hindu philosophy into the Bible, Yogananda makes unrecognizable Scripture passages that are otherwise profound in their simplicity. Here are a couple of examples:

**John 3:16:** "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Yogananda says this about the passage:

*"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son' to redeem it; that is, God the Father remained hidden beyond the vibratory realm that went out from His Being, but then secreted Himself as the Christ Intelligence in all matter and in all living beings in order to bring, by beautiful evolutionary coaxings, all things back to His home of Everlasting Blessedness."*<sup>42</sup>

**John 3:14-15:** "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Yogananda interprets this passage this way:

*"Jesus explains that whosoever believes in the doctrine of lifting the bodily consciousness (son of man) from the physical to the astral by reversing the life force through the coiled passage at the base of the spine, will not perish, that is, be subject to mortal changes of life and death, but will gradually acquire the immutable state — Christ Consciousness, the Son of God."*<sup>43</sup>

Although Dr. Ronald B. Allen of Dallas Theological Seminary was speaking on a different subject, his words apply to this, when he said, "This isn't exegesis [determining the meaning of the text]; it isn't [even] eisegesis [reading a meaning into the text]; this is metagesis [changing the text]!"

## YOGANANDA, TELL ME A STORY...

In *Autobiography of a Yogi* and elsewhere, Yogananda relates things that are questionable, highly suspect, or even patently false.

In a letter written from the Holy Land, regarding some of his experiences there, Yogananda wrote:

*"He [Jesus] was with me everywhere; and a very special communion I had in Bethlehem where he was born as the little*

babe body of Jesus. He touched me as I entered the ancient menagerie where Mary brought him into the world — in a humble little stable under an inn. This place is absolutely authentic. I know it from the Divine. But there are other places where different factions have marked Jesus did this and that, which have some errors. Every place was verified from within. Most places are authentic.”<sup>44</sup>

In one talk, Yogananda declared:

“For most of his followers Christ exists as an ideal personage they have read about in the Bible. But to me he is much more than that. He is real. Once, eight years ago, he came alone and meditated with me all night long. ... Many other times I have seen him in visions, and talked with him. And that same Christ you too can see.”<sup>45</sup>

“Jesus attained most of his perfection in his former incarnation as Eliseus (Elisha). I know for certain that he was Eliseus in a past life, and that Jesus’ guru, John the Baptist, was Elijah (Elias), in his former life.”<sup>46</sup>

“We are all children of God. Many incarnations ago He created us as *He created Jesus*.”<sup>47</sup>

In one place, he describes a vision he supposedly had of Jesus. In part, he wrote:

“As he gazed down at me, a Holy Grail appeared at his mouth. It descended to my lips and touched them; then went up again to Jesus. After a few moments of rapt silent communion, he said to me: ‘Thou dost drink of the same cup of which I drink.’”<sup>48</sup>

The “cup” that Jesus drank was that of obeying the Father’s will by being crucified for our sins by the hands of sinful men. Yogananda never drank such a cup. To be fair, Yogananda doesn’t associate the “cup” with this meaning; rather, he associates it with a reference to a cup in the Gnostic gospel of Thomas.

## SERIOUSLY SENIOR CITIZENS

In *Autobiography*, Yogananda tells of people who are (or were) supposedly centuries old. One of these was a guru, who probably never lived, named “Babaji.” Supposedly, this “deathless guru,” as Yogananda refers to him, is still alive after many centuries. He even is said to have initiated the Hindu philosopher Shankara into kriya yoga.<sup>49</sup> Shankara lived around the 9th century A.D. This would make Babaji older than Methuselah, the oldest man recorded in the Bible, who “only” lived to be 969 years old (Genesis 5:27). Additionally, Yogananda also tells of a Trailanga Swami, who was rumored to be over 300 years old, weighed more than 300 pounds, and went around naked.<sup>50</sup> Despite this, Yogananda incongruously refers to him as “the Christlike yogi, Trailanga.”<sup>51</sup>

Without any hint that he might be putting us on, Yogananda writes, “Mahavatar Babaji and a number of other great masters have lived for several hundred years.”<sup>52</sup> He also wrote of Babaji, “Babaji is ever in communion with Christ; together they send out vibrations of redemption and have planned the spiritual technique of salvation for this age.”<sup>53</sup>

Christian author and researcher Elliot Miller writes:

“Yogananda’s autobiography is replete with accounts of the mystical and miraculous, including his own ecstatic visions as well as his encounters with legendary Hindu ‘saints.’ ... Most fantastic of all is his description of Babaji, the ‘yogi Christ of India,’ who — like the ‘Immortals’ in the 1990s *Highlander* movies and television series — is believed to have retained the same 25-year-old appearance for hundreds or even thousands of years. Babaji allegedly initiated [Yogananda’s guru] Sri Yukteswar’s master, Lahiri Mahasaya, and thus got the SRF ball rolling. In the SRF visitor center, a drawing of Babaji, which had been sketched under Yogananda’s supervision, accompanies photographs of Mahasaya and Yukteswar. Not sur-

prisingly, although Yogananda supposedly met Babaji and his *Autobiography* is filled with pictures of the people (including Indian gurus and ‘saints’) described in its pages, no known photograph of the ‘yogi Christ’ exists.”<sup>54</sup>

Yogananda’s *Autobiography* also informs us:

“Babaji (revered father) is a common title; many noted teachers in India are addressed as ‘Babaji.’ None of them, however, is [the] Babaji [referred to here]... . The existence of [Babaji] was revealed to the public for the first time in 1946, in *Autobiography of a Yogi*.”<sup>55</sup>

Consistent with this assertion, we also read therein:

“That there is no historical reference to Babaji need not surprise us. The great guru has never openly appeared in any century; the misinterpreting glare of publicity has no place in his millennial plans. Like the Creator, the sole but silent Power, Babaji works in a humble obscurity. ... Such masters always veil themselves from the gross public gaze and have the power to become invisible at will. For these reasons, and because they generally instruct their disciples to maintain silence about them, a number of towering spiritual figures remain world-unknown. I give in these pages on Babaji merely a hint of his life — only a few facts that he deems fitting and helpful to be publicly imparted.”<sup>56</sup>

So we must rely on Yogananda’s assertion that Babaji exists — like so many other events in Yogananda’s *Autobiography*. Nevertheless, Yogananda contradicts himself about Babaji’s supposed desire to be hidden from the public’s gaze only three pages later when he writes:

“Only one reason, therefore, motivates Babaji in maintaining his physical form from century to century: the desire to furnish humanity with a concrete example of its own possibilities.

Were man never vouchsafed a glimpse of Divinity in the flesh, he would remain oppressed by the heavy mayic delusion that he cannot transcend his mortality."<sup>57</sup>

Yogananda cannot have it both ways. Babaji must either wish to avoid the public stare or to show himself to the public to help their enlightenment.

In Yogananda's *Autobiography*, we find tales of supposedly historical events involving materializations of extra bodies, materializations of lunches on gold plates, materialization of a palace in the Himalayas, etc. Flesh and blood resurrections of dead people and materializations of living people in the book become almost commonplace. In one place (according to a story that his guru, Yukteswar, supposedly related), an old, limping man, who was a yogi, suddenly "straightened himself; his body instantly became strong and youthful."<sup>58</sup> On another occasion, Yogananda's recently deceased guru, Yukteswar, appears in "flesh and blood" in order to give him a lengthy discourse on the afterlife.<sup>59</sup> His guru explains in part:

"As the prophets are sent on earth to help men work out their physical karma, so I have been directed by God to serve on an astral planet as a savior," Sri Yukteswar explained. "It is called Hiranyaloka or 'Illumined Astral Planet.'" There I am aiding advanced beings to rid themselves of astral karma and thus attain liberation from astral rebirths."<sup>60</sup>

The Scriptures warn us to beware of such people when it says:

"By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber" (2 Peter 2:3).

The New International Version has a particularly vivid translation of the first part of this verse. It reads, "In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up." Unfortunately, it is not always easy to tell what actually occurred in his

*Autobiography* and what did not, or what was embellished or exaggerated.

### YOGANANDA'S DOCTRINES

Yogananda believed in and taught the Hindu doctrines of karma (the law of cause-and-effect) and reincarnation. He also proclaimed the Hindu doctrine of the material world being *maya* (an illusion; delusion). He also taught yoga.

**God and Man:** Yogananda believed in a Supreme Being. It wasn't the biblical God, but the Hindu god Brahman. He believed Brahman was an impersonal being but greater than man, and man was a manifestation of Brahman. He wrote:

"The wave cannot say, 'I am the ocean,' for the ocean can remain without the wave, but the wave cannot remain without the ocean. It is all right for a fully liberated master to say, 'God has become myself,' but he would never say, 'I am God.' The ocean has become the wave, but the wave is not the ocean."<sup>61</sup>

"Hinduism as well as Christianity believes in one God. ... Uninformed Westerners conclude that Indians as a whole worship idols. But we worship only Brahman, Spirit. The concept of one God is the same in Hinduism as in Christianity."<sup>62</sup>

It is true that *some* Hindus believe in one God; some Hindus believe in many gods; and some Hindus are atheists, believing in *no* God. And regardless of whether a particular Hindu is a monotheist or not, Brahman is assuredly *not* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! As James reminds us, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble!" (James 2:19) Being a monotheist, in and of itself, doesn't qualify one for salvation. However, Brahman is not the biblical God. And many, if not most, Hindus worship more than one god. Yogananda himself worshipped "the Divine Mother," although he may have considered her to be merely one aspect of Brahman, rather than a separate deity. In any event, from his *Autobiography* it is evident that he also

worshipped various Hindu gurus and Hindu "saints":

"We are all part of the One Spirit. When you experience the true meaning of religion, which is to know God, you will realize that He is your Self, and that He exists equally and impartially in all beings."<sup>63</sup>

As he stated in one of the quotations above, Yogananda believed that God has become each being. In other words, Yogananda was a pantheist: He believed that God was everything. This is certainly not the Christian concept of God, and contradicts his assertion in the quotation above, where he claimed that the Christian concept of one God was the same as the Hindu concept of one God. The Christian God is separate from His creation, not identical with it. Yogananda wrote:

"Befriend the Self and the Self will save you. There is no other savior than your Self. ... Seize the God within you and realize that the Self is Divinity."<sup>64</sup>

**Sin:** Yogananda's exalted view of man led to a defective view of man's primary problem. He wrote:

"Man only increases the inner darkness of his spiritual ignorance when he thinks of himself as a sinner."<sup>65</sup>

"Through use of the *Kriya* [yoga] key, persons who cannot bring themselves to believe in the divinity of any man will behold at last the full divinity of their own selves."<sup>66</sup>

A problem that often arises with Yogananda's Hindu description of man's problem is the notion that people have to "work off" something during their multiple lives before breaking out of the cycle of reincarnation.

Yogananda attributes man's sins to "ignorance," and explains it this way:

"Then why do people behave in an evil way that is bound to cause pain and sorrow? Such actions arise from the greatest of all sins — ignorance. 'Wrong-

doer' is the right word rather than 'sinner.' You may condemn wrongdoing but should not condemn the doer. Sins are errors committed under the influence of ignorance, or delusion. But for a different degree of understanding, you might be in the same boat."<sup>67</sup>

Yogananda — and Hinduism in general — teaches that man is ignorant of his "true identity" of being one with "God" (the Hindu supreme deity Brahman).

Yogananda doesn't deny the existence of sin. However, he calls ignorance "the greatest of all sins," and implies that all other sins flow from this. Notice also the non-existent distinction Yogananda makes in the above citation between "wrongdoer" and "sinner."<sup>68</sup> And he also admits that people may behave in "an evil way" and commit "wrongdoing" and "sins." Yet he somehow wishes to exempt such a person from being labeled a "sinner." People who sin — and that is all of us as Romans 3:23 declares — are sinners.

As he does with most problems, Yogananda proposes meditation as the solution:

"While still in this body, work to destroy the seeds of your past karmas (actions). Remember, roasted seeds will not germinate. People who in deep meditation roast their karmic seeds in the fires of wisdom will never again need to reincarnate on earth."<sup>69</sup>

In other words, to stop the cycle of reincarnation, people have to pay off their "karmic debt." It should be noted that Hinduism does recognize good karma as well as bad karma. However, it emphasizes bad karma.<sup>70</sup>

*The Holy Spirit:* Yogananda appears to view the Holy Spirit as a cosmic intelligent "It," rather than the personal God:

"The Holy Ghost is the Cosmic Intelligent Vibration, whose sound is the *Aum* [i.e., OM] or Amen heard in deep yoga meditation. ... In its vibration is our comfort."<sup>71</sup>

The Holy Spirit is not an "it," but the one personal God — the third Person of the Trinity. He demonstrates the traits of personality: He loves (Romans 15:30); can speak (Acts 28:25; Hebrews 3:7; Revelation 22:17); can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30); can be lied to (Acts 5:3); can be insulted (Hebrews 10:29); can be resisted (Acts 7:51); can be blasphemed against (Mark 3:29), and so forth.

*Jesus and Christianity:* At times, Yogananda seems full of reverence for Jesus. He can even refer to "the blessed Lord Jesus."<sup>72</sup> He obviously admired Him, and sought to make him a divine guru, even incorporating Jesus as one of the six gurus of Self-Realization Fellowship, with Krishna and himself being two of the others.

Part of the problem with Yogananda's view of Jesus is that he didn't understand the uniqueness of Jesus. Hinduism can accept Jesus as one of many gods, even as Yogananda placed Jesus on the same level as the mythological god Krishna. Gandhi, whom Yogananda met and admired, well illustrates this problem that Hinduism has in accepting the unique and unparalleled deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. In his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi wrote:

"It was more than I could believe that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God, and that only he who believed in him would have everlasting life. If God could have sons, all of us were His sons. If Jesus was like God, or God Himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself. ... I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born."<sup>73</sup>

The Reverend Philip Graham Ryken observed:

"Authentic, biblical Christianity has always been an exclusive religion. This became apparent during the Roman Empire. When the Emperor Alexander Severus heard about Christianity, he

placed an image of Christ beside the other gods in his private chapel, just to be safe. The Romans were happy to welcome Jesus into their pantheon. What the Romans could not understand was why Christians refused to reciprocate. If the emperor was willing to worship Christ, why weren't Christians willing to worship the emperor? Yet the early Christians insisted that in order to worship Christ at all, they had to worship Christ *alone*. ... Jesus Christ refuses to have any colleagues."<sup>74</sup>

And the Scriptures also declare:

"Jesus said to him [Thomas], 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6).

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Again, to quote Ryken:

"To use an analogy, Jesus is like God's telephone number. The God of the universe can only be contacted through Jesus Christ. Philosophical pluralists insist on getting through to God no matter what number they dial. But that is not how the telephone system operates, and it is not how God operates either. Jesus is the only direct line to God."<sup>75</sup>

The Lord Jesus, being God in the flesh, is peerless. He has no equals and no rivals. He is King of kings and Lord of lords (see Revelation 19:16).

### THE DIFFERENT JESUS OF PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

Part of Yogananda's attitude about Jesus is expressed in a book of excerpts of his teachings about Jesus. The title of the section of the book is called "Jesus the Christ — Avatar and Yogi."<sup>76</sup>

Yogananda wrote:

"Do you believe in the divinity of Christ?' a visitor inquired. Parama-

hansa Yogananda replied: 'Yes. I love to talk of him because he was a man of perfect Self-realization. However, he was not the only son of God, nor did he claim to be. Instead, he clearly taught that those who do the will of God become, like himself, one with Him. Wasn't it the mission of Jesus on earth to remind all men that the Lord is their Heavenly Father, and to show them the way back to Him?'"<sup>77</sup>

Yogananda denied the *unique deity* of Jesus. Jesus never taught that those who do the will of God become one in essence with Him. Additionally, Jesus' mission was to die for the sins of men and to, Himself, be the way back to God; it was not to tell sinners that they are *already* sons of God and to *show* them the way back to Him. Yogananda also wrote:

"There is a distinguishing difference of meaning between *Jesus* and *Christ*. His given name was Jesus; his honorific title was 'Christ.' In his little human body called Jesus was born the vast Christ Consciousness, the omniscient Intelligence of God omnipresent in every part and particle of creation."<sup>78</sup>

There is a difference between the name "Jesus" and the title "Christ." However, it isn't the difference that Yogananda thinks. The title "Christ" means "Messiah," and it wasn't merely an "honorific" (a respectful title), but it actually signified that Jesus is God's Anointed One. As to Yogananda's denigration of the body of Jesus by the words, "his little human body called Jesus," this seems, at the very least, both disrespectful and irreverent. He further wrote:

"The Christ in Jesus lived among men as one of them that they too might learn to live like gods."<sup>79</sup>

Again, Yogananda seems determined to deny Jesus' unique divinity. And Jesus' mission was certainly not to live among men so that we could learn to live like gods.

**The Second Coming of Jesus:** Yogananda seems to have held contradictory views of the Second Coming of Christ. In one place he said:

"The God-ordained saviors of mankind have to return to earth again, but when they will come, no one can say. Thus many people believe in Christ's second coming; but when it may happen depends on the will of God. The great ones come only with the permission of the Heavenly Father."<sup>80</sup>

Yet in the Introduction to his book on the Gospels, he states:

"In titling this work *The Second Coming of Christ*, I am not referring to a literal return of Jesus to earth. He came two thousand years ago and, after imparting a universal path to God's kingdom, was crucified and resurrected; his reappearance to the masses now is not necessary for the fulfillment of his teachings. What is necessary is for the cosmic wisdom and divine perception of Jesus to speak again through each one's own experience and understanding of the infinite Christ Consciousness that was incarnate in Jesus. That will be his true Second Coming."<sup>81</sup>

Elsewhere, Yogananda declares:

"Worshiping Jesus is not truly meaningful until one can expand his consciousness to receive within himself the Christ Consciousness. That is the second coming of Christ. Unless you do your part, a thousand Christs come on earth would not be able to save you. You have to work for your own salvation. Then Christ can help you."<sup>82</sup>

### YOGANANDA'S DIFFERENT GOSPEL

**Entering the Kingdom of God:** According to Yogananda, the guru Babaji told one of his disciples:

"My son, arise. Receive your initiation into the kingdom of God through *Kriya Yoga*."<sup>83</sup>

**Hell:** Yogananda opposed the doctrine of hell:

"So although the notion of everlasting hellfire and damnation is untenable and should be ban-

ished from the superstitious minds of men, the existence of an Eternal Heaven in God is incorruptibly true."<sup>84</sup>

"The orthodox notion of eternal hellfire and damnation is an utterly false precept; it arises not from God or His true prophets but from man's own unforgiving wrath against the evil actions of his brethren. It is nothing but satanic delusion that makes men ascribe to the all-loving God, who is equally the Father of all, a revengeful, vindictive spirit that creates hells and purgatories."<sup>85</sup>

Part of the problem with Yogananda's false assertions above is that Jesus Himself taught the doctrine of hellfire and damnation (e.g., Matthew 13:40-42; 25:41-46). And the Bible teaches the doctrine elsewhere also.

### ROUNDING OUT THE PICTURE

While desiring to unite both East and West, Yogananda clearly believed in the spiritual superiority of India among the nations of the world. It is obvious that he was proud of this supposed spiritual superiority. He wrote, "India is the mother of religion."<sup>86</sup> And also:

"The wisdom garnered by India, the eldest brother among the nations, is a heritage of all mankind."<sup>87</sup>

Yogananda's final words preceding his fatal heart attack were before the (then) Ambassador from India to the United States, Dr. Binay R. Sen. They were from a patriotic poem he had written about India, entitled, "My India." Immediately preceding his recitation of those lines from "My India," he had said:

"I am proud that I was born in India. I am proud that we have a great Ambassador representing my spiritual India. I am very proud today."<sup>88</sup>

Without attempting to put a damper on a legitimate sense of patriotism that Yogananda might have felt, a couple of things need to be mentioned:

First, Hinduism is not the oldest religion in the world; Judaism is.<sup>89</sup> Secondly, Yogananda denied the clear teaching of Jesus, Who said some words that Yogananda would have done well to heed. The Lord told the woman at the well, "You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

The Hindus worship an unknown god called Brahman. The Jews worship the true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Salvation is of ("from") the Jews, in that, through the Jewish people came the patriarchs, the prophets, the Old Testament Scriptures, and the Savior of the world.

Without going into everything that Yogananda wrote regarding this verse, we cite the following, illustrating his denial of the Savior's clear teaching in this verse. Yogananda wrote:

"When Jesus said that 'salvation is of the Jews,' he was not referring to the Jews as a nation, but to the exalted class or caste of spiritually developed souls. ... He meant that salvation is for the spiritually exalted — the position, socially speaking, generally accorded to the Jews, who were held to represent the highest standard of spirituality in that place and time."<sup>90</sup>

Little of the Self-Realization Fellowship's literature mentions the fact that, for the last two years of his short life, Yogananda was not in good health.<sup>91</sup> And when it does say so, his ill health is explained away by making it sound as though he was working out the "bad karma" of others.<sup>92</sup>

This is significant because of the reputed health benefits of yoga and because Yogananda told of yogis who had lived such lengthy lives: Babaji, Trailanga Swami, the South Indian Agastya, and others. In the speech he gave immediately preceding his death, he said:

"One morning I was passing by an empty field next to a store. That evening, as I passed that same way again, I saw a house standing in the field. I inquired

of a man if the house had been there in the morning. 'No,' he replied, 'they just put it up.' When I think of such energy, I like to be an American. But *when I hear of so many American millionaires who die prematurely after making a business success, then I like to be a Hindu.*"<sup>93</sup>

Notice, first of all, that Yogananda referred to himself as a Hindu, lest there be any lingering doubts. And this was mere minutes before he breathed his last. Secondly, though, notice his lamentation of "American millionaires who die prematurely," Yogananda probably had no inkling that he was about to die; nor, that he himself would die so young.<sup>94</sup>

As to the amazing immutability of his body some 20 days after his death, Elliot Miller has well observed:

"Whether or not Yogananda's body showed signs of decay at the time of his burial, he is still in his crypt. The tomb of Jesus, on the other hand, is empty."<sup>95</sup>

## AN EVALUATION

Yogananda was a fascinating, intelligent, gifted, and charismatic figure whose work affects people even today.

For all his apparent reverence toward Jesus and his frequent use of the Bible, Paramahansa Yogananda didn't value Christ as the unique Son of God, the only Savior. Instead, he believed that all men were sons of God, and that other men could become saviors. It seems likely that he even viewed himself as such a savior of men.

Someone once asked Yogananda whether or not he was a Christian. Yogananda concluded his reply this way:

"He who keeps ever alight the lamp of remembrance of the Heavenly Father and who obeys the precepts of Jesus is a Christian.' He added, 'It is for you to decide whether or not you think I am a Christian.'"<sup>96</sup>

Part of what makes Yogananda dangerous is that, like all false teach-

ers and prophets, some of what he said and wrote was true. Christian researchers John Ankerberg and John Weldon wrote:

"...false teaching is a mixture of truth and error. Thus, people may at the same time be encouraged and nourished by some things that are true but unknowingly accept error along with it. Unfortunately, sometimes even a small amount of error may be dangerous. Ninety-eight percent of rat poison is wholesome food. Only two percent is deadly."<sup>97</sup>

The Apostle Paul wrote:

"For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted; you may well put up with it!" (2 Corinthians 11:2-4)

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

And Jesus said:

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.



Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:15-20).

### Endnotes:

1. His first name (actually a title, rather than a name) is sometimes spelled without the middle "a" thus, "Paramhansa," rather than "Paramahansa."
2. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1993. Self-Realization Fellowship is not the only publisher of Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Because pagination differs in the various editions (and the different printings) of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, when citing from it from now on, I will cite the chapter first, and then the page number, so that the reader can locate the citation by the chapter, if not by the page number. Unless otherwise indicated, all page citations and quotations in this article from this book are from the 12th edition, 12th paperbound printing, 1993 mass paperback version.
3. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Yoga of Jesus: Understanding the Hidden Teachings of the Gospels*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2007, pg. vii. Also, Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Science of Religion*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2001, from the back cover.
4. *Undreamed of Possibilities: An Introduction to Self-Realization Fellowship*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1997, pg. 9, quoted in Elliot Miller, "Swami Yogananda and the Self-Realization Fellowship," *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 02, pg. 36.
5. Self-Realization Fellowship, *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2002.
6. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 1, pg. 4, footnote, italics in original.
7. *Ibid.*, chapter 24, pg. 258, italics in original.
8. *Ibid.*, footnote.
9. *Ibid.*, chapter 42, pg. 460, italics in original.
10. *Ibid.*, footnote, italics in original.
11. *Ibid.*, chapter 1, pg. 4.
12. *Ibid.*, chapter 1, pg. 10.
13. *Ibid.*, chapter 2, pg. 18.
14. *Ibid.*, chapter 2, pg. 19. See also, chapter 4, pp. 34ff. and chapter 13, pp. 157ff.
15. *The Science of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 87.
16. *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*, op. cit., pg. 78.
17. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 37, pg. 400.
18. *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*,

- op. cit., pg. 79. The speech was made available as a pamphlet. Later, in 1924, and to this day, a revised and expanded edition was published. It is entitled *The Science of Religion*. See Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Science of Religion*, op. cit., copyright page.
19. See John Bowker, editor, *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, pg. 1059, s.v., "Yogananda, Paramahansa"; Irving Hexham, *Pocket Dictionary of New Religious Movements*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002, pg. 99, s.v., "Self-Realization Fellowship"; and Ron Rhodes, *Find It Quick Handbook on Cults & New Religions*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2005, pg. 178.
20. *The Science of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 88.
21. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Man's Eternal Quest*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1988, 2nd edition, pp. xvi-xvii.
22. *Ibid.*, text at the bottom of a page of photographs inserted between pages 14-15, italics and ellipsis in original.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. xvii.
24. *The Science of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 89.
25. *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*, op. cit., pg. 121.
26. *Ibid.*, pg. 123.
27. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., pg. 571, supplemental material following the last chapter.
28. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2007, 13th edition, mass market edition.
29. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1999, pg. 427.
30. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 44, pg. 508.
31. *Ibid.*, chapter 38, pg. 414.
32. "The Life of Paramahansa Yogananda," document available at: [www.yogananda-srf.org/py-life/life2.html](http://www.yogananda-srf.org/py-life/life2.html).
33. *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*, op. cit., pg. 427.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. 428, ellipsis and italics in original. Although the terms that they use to describe the "brand" of Hinduism are important, they need not concern us here. What is important to realize is that Yogananda (and his Self-Realization Fellowship organization) teach a form of Hinduism. The Yogananda quotation cited by Ankerberg and Weldon is from Paramahansa Yogananda, *Man's Eternal Quest*, (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1975, pg. 480).
35. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. xv.
36. Self-Realization Fellowship Catalog 2008-09, pg. 16.
37. *Ibid.*, pg. 17, italics in original.
38. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The*

- Facts on Hinduism in America*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1991, pg. 18.
39. My thanks to Dr. Robert P. Lightner for suggesting this wording.
40. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2004. A shorter 1-volume collection of excerpts from this 2-volume set is published as Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Yoga of Jesus: Understanding the Hidden Teachings of the Gospels*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2007.
41. *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. xxxii-xxxiii, emphasis added.
42. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Discourse 1, pg. 17.
43. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Discourse 14, pg. 269.
44. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pg. xv.
45. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. 233.
46. *Ibid.*, pg. 231.
47. *Ibid.*, pg. 232, emphasis added. Jesus is the Creator, Who has always existed, not a creature who had a beginning!
48. *The Second Coming of Christ*, op. cit., Vol. I, pg. xxxii.
49. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 33, pg. 346 and footnote on pp. 346-347.
50. *Ibid.*, chapter 31, pp. 329-331.
51. *Ibid.*, chapter 31, pg. 333.
52. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Healing By God's Unlimited Power*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2005, pg. 23.
53. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 33, pg. 347.
54. "Swami Yogananda and the Self-Realization Fellowship," op. cit., pp. 34, 36, italics in original.
55. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 33, pg. 348, footnote, italics in original.
56. *Ibid.*, chapter 33, pg. 347.
57. *Ibid.*, chapter 33, pg. 350.
58. *Ibid.*, chapter 18, pg. 213.
59. *Ibid.*, chapter 43, pp. 475-476ff.
60. *Ibid.*, chapter 43, pg. 476.
61. *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*, op. cit., Vol. II, Discourse 47, pg. 915.
62. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. 299. The next-to-the-last sentence is cited by Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*, pg. 426.
63. Quotation by Paramahansa Yogananda on the Self-Realization Fellowship Website, document available at: [www.yogananda-srf.org/aboutsrf/index.html](http://www.yogananda-srf.org/aboutsrf/index.html). This statement rendered in italics on webpage.
64. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. 9.
65. Paramahansa Yogananda, *How To Cultivate Divine Love*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2006, pg. 16.
66. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 35, pg. 386, italic in original.

67. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Why God Permits Evil and How To Rise Above It*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2004, pp. 45-46.

68. The Bible clearly states that, "All unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 5:17).

69. Paramhansa Yogananda, *Karma and Reincarnation*. Nevada City, Calif.: Crystal Clarity Publishers, 2007, pg. 53.

70. Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998, pg. 197.

71. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. 300, italic in original.

72. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 49, pg. 558.

73. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, translated by Mahadev Desai. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1983, pg. 119. An unabridged republication of the edition published by Public Affairs Press, Washington, D.C., 1948, under the title *Gandhi's Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

74. Philip Graham Ryken, *Is Jesus the Only Way?* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1999, pp. 10, 11, italic in original.

75. *Ibid.*, pg. 37.

76. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Yoga of Jesus: Understanding the Hidden Teachings of*

*the Gospels, Selections from the writings of Paramahansa Yogananda*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2007, pg. 1. This book is, in the main, excerpts from the 2-volume set by Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*.

77. *Ibid.*, pg. 2, italics in original.

78. *Ibid.*, pg. 5, italics in original.

79. *Ibid.*, pg. 4.

80. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. 235.

81. *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*, op. cit., Vol. I, pg. xxi, italics in original.

82. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. 292.

83. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 34, pg. 362, italics in original.

84. *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*, op. cit., Vol. II, Discourse 68, pg. 1336.

85. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Discourse 48, pg. 931.

86. *The Yoga of Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 13.

87. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 49, pg. 568.

88. *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*, op. cit., pg. 69. The entire text of Yogananda's short speech is given in this book. This book contains much good biographical material about Yogananda.

89. See Ronald Enroth, editor, *Evangelizing the Cults: How to Share Jesus with Children, Parents, Neighbors, and Friends Who Are Involved in a Cult*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Vine Books, 1990, pg. 21. This specific is taken from the chapter on "Hinduism" by Mark Albrecht.

90. *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*, op. cit., Vol. I, Discourse 18, pg. 308.

91. *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*, op. cit., pp. 12, 32.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-95.

93. *Ibid.*, pg. 68, emphasis added.

94. This book consistently takes great pains to make it appear that Yogananda knew about and gave intimations of his coming demise. However, from what he said here in his speech, it certainly doesn't sound like it. Otherwise, why would he point out the premature deaths of American millionaires?

95. "Swami Yogananda and the Self-Realization Fellowship," op. cit., pg. 41.

96. *The Yoga of Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 20, this statement rendered in italics in the book.

97. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on False Teaching in the Church*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1988, pg. 5, italics in original.

## YOGA AND THE CHRISTIAN

(continued from page 1)

blend with one another. There is no known founder of Hinduism, no credal statements of faith to sign and no agreed-upon authority. In fact, one can be a good Hindu and believe in one god, many gods or no god at all!"<sup>3</sup>

Christian researchers John Ankerberg and John Weldon state:

"In its most simple definition, Hinduism may be defined as the religious beliefs and practices common to India. Defining Hinduism in a more precise manner is difficult because of the wide number of practices and teachings it offers."<sup>4</sup>

*The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* says Hinduism is "The major continuing and connected religions of India, which have now spread throughout the world."<sup>5</sup>

It also says, "About 80 per cent of India's approx. one billion people

regard themselves as Hindu, and there are about 30 million Hindus elsewhere in the world."<sup>6</sup>

Hinduism does have scriptures and core beliefs. Hindu scriptures include the four Vedas; their commentaries, called the Upanishads (also known as Vedanta, "the last of the Vedas"); the Mahabharata (of which the Bhagavad Gita is a small portion); the Ramayana; and other lesser books.

One of the popular gods within Hinduism's pantheon is Krishna, the main character in the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita is sometimes called "the Gita" and, as noted above, is a portion of the larger Hindu epic called the Mahabharata.

As far as "core beliefs," Fritz Ride-nour states, "There are, however, two foundational assumptions that almost all Hindus believe without question: reincarnation and karma."<sup>7</sup> Christian researcher Elliot Miller adds a third: "practice of some form of yoga."<sup>8</sup>

Reincarnation is the belief that, after death, one's soul is recycled in

another body — human, animal, or insect. Karma is the law of cause and effect, involving the idea that a person must somehow pay for the wrongs they have done, either in this life or the next. Hinduism also teaches the caste (or class) system, although some Hindus, such as Gandhi, opposed it. Seminary professor George Braswell explains:

"According to the Laws of Manu [a portion of the Hindu scriptures] the caste system is justified by the belief in Karma and the transmigration of souls. Hindus are not in their social position by accident, and there is no injustice in being in any caste. One gets what one merits. ... The caste system still remains in India."<sup>9</sup>

Braswell further describes the five broad castes within Hinduism:

1. "The *Brahmin* caste is the most privileged one. It is the protector and transmitter of the Veda scriptures and has general oversight of society."