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The *Mahasamadhi* of a World Teacher

*On March 7, 1952, Paramahansa Yogananda
Left the Body for Omnipresence*

On March 7, 1952, the incarnation of Paramahansa Yogananda came to a perfect close. A life without blemish ended in *mahasamadhi* (a yogi's final conscious exit from the body). Death took place at 9:30 pm., a few moments after Paramahansaji had uttered the final words in a speech at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. Unstintingly he gave of himself to the very end, to the last breath of his life.

Born a *Kshatriya* (a member of the second Hindu caste, originally that of kings and warriors), Yoganandaji died as he had lived: a divine warrior against the chief foe of man—ignorance.

Paramahansaji's last days were literally and symbolically bound up with the visit to Los Angeles of the Ambassador of India at that time, Mr. Binay Ranjan Sen. The great Guru could not go to India, so India—in the person of her highest foreign representative—came to the Guru.

The last photograph of Yoganandaji, taken a few minutes before his death, shows the Ambassador's wife pranaming to him as he rose from his seat to go to the speaker's stand. By that last beautiful gesture, an Indian woman symbolised the respect of her nation for the man who, more than any other son of India, made the perennial wisdom of the rishis known and loved in the West.

A letter from the Mortuary Director of Forest Lawn Memorial-Park, one of America's largest and most beautiful cemeteries, appears on pp. 121-124 incl. of this booklet. He testifies that Yoganandaji's body remained "in a phenomenal state of immutability." For weeks after the

Master's passing, his unchanged face shone with the divine lustre of incorruptibility. This miracle appears to have taken place through the grace of the Heavenly Father, that men might know the goodness of Yoganandaji's mission on earth. The beautiful phenomena attending Paramahansaji's death have aroused world interest in the soul-revealing possibilities of yoga.

Yoganandaji came to America to fulfil a specific mission, that of spreading in the West a knowledge of yoga techniques by which man can enter into conscious communion with his Creator. Paramahansaji was the last in a line of four gurus* who were divinely inspired—directly commanded by God—to teach openly to the modern world the secret yogic science of self-liberation that was the glory of ancient India.

"*Kriya Yoga*, the scientific technique of God-realization, will ultimately spread in all lands, and aid in harmonising the nations through man's personal, transcendental perception of the Infinite Father." With these words Mahavatar Babaji sent Yoganandaji, in 1920, to the West.

The young monk—trained for his high duty for ten years at the Indian hermitage of his guru, Swami Sri Yukteswarji—laboured lovingly for more than thirty years in the New World, honouring the trust of the great humanitarian masters behind him. To them and to God, Master† gave all credit for the successful execution of his mission.

"After my passing," Paramahansaji said, "the SRF teachings will be the guru."‡ By these words and in many other ways he indicated that the practical interest in yoga which he had initiated in the West would

* The line of four gurus: Mahavatar Babaji, who is still living in the Himalayas; Lahiri Mahasaya (1828-1895), who gave initiation to 5000 *Kriya Yoga* disciples in India; Swami Sri Yukteswar (1855-1936), who trained Yoganandaji for his mission in the West; and Paramahansa Yogananda.

† By many of his disciples, Yoganandaji is called "Master"—i.e., one who is master of himself—denoting the reverence and respect similarly conveyed by the customary Sanskrit terms "Guru" or "Gurudeva." The *Guru Gita*, sloka 17, aptly refers to the meaning of guru as *gu*, "darkness," *ru*, "that which dispels"; i.e., "dispeller of darkness."

‡ In India Paramahansa Yogananda's work is known as Yogoda Satsanga Society of India ("Yogoda teachings"); for the West he translated the name as Self-Realization Fellowship, by which it is known worldwide.

continue to grow after his death. Like all other men of God, Master did not emphasise the importance of his own personality but rather the necessity of one's own struggle to achieve the life beautiful.

“‘Divine union,’ the *Yogavatar* [Lahiri Mahasaya] proclaimed, ‘is possible through self-effort, and is not dependent on theological beliefs or on the arbitrary will of a Cosmic Dictator.’ Through use of the *Kriya* 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.”*

During his last three years Paramahansaji withdrew more and more from public life in order to devote himself fully to literary work: editing and revision of his earlier books and the completion of new writings. Shortly before his death he said to a disciple: “My life work is done.”

Great devotees of God, the Hindu scriptures tell us, are given forewarning of the time of their departure from this earth. A true yogi, unlike the unenlightened man, is never rudely surprised by Death. Yoganandaji had been aware of the general plan of his life ever since his youthful years with his omniscient guru, Sri Yukteswar. Master well knew his life would not be a long one. “I shall not live to be old,” he told a disciple in 1924.

Paramahansaji gave a number of close disciples many hints that he would pass on in March 1952. They did not understand the full implication of his words. It seemed impossible that, for them, a morning was fast approaching when the sun would not rise in the East.

Divine “Leave of Stay”

On many occasions during his last few years Master indicated that his time to go had long since passed; nevertheless, he had been able to secure divine permission for a further “leave of stay” on the earth. The childlike saint often talked with God in the form of the Divine Mother.

Mr. Cuaron, leader of the SRF centre in Mexico City, wrote after Yoganandaji's passing: “Master said to me in various conversations: ‘I am

* Quoted from *Autobiography of a Yogi*, chapter 35.

living on borrowed time. Divine Mother has asked me more than once to withdraw from this earth, as my time is up; and if I do not do it willingly, She will drag me away.' Master added that he was very grateful to Her, as several times She had granted Her consent to a continuation of his stay on earth in order to finish some important work."

"Greater Love Hath No Man"

In helping to lift the karmic load of disciples, a guru sometimes works out on his own body some of their karma.* In his compassionate love, Paramahansaji lightened the burden of many a disciple, and for this reason the great master suffered certain physical disabilities during the last two years of his life.† But he never complained. His angelic patience and cheerfulness were always an inspiration to those around him. He never said "no" to anyone in need of his spiritual help.

That his illness was a metaphysically induced one is proved by the fact that, whenever some occasion demanded his presence, he could always "take up his bed and walk." He granted many interviews to visitors who had no intimation that Master had left a sickbed to receive them, so well and radiant did he appear.

The "beginning of the end" may be placed as November 17, 1951. That was the date of death for his most advanced woman disciple, eighty-two-year-old Sister Gyanamata. Master conducted the funeral services for her at the SRF Hermitage in Encinitas. He told a disciple, "Now that Sister is gone, there is nothing that holds me here." In 1940 Yoganandaji had said to a little Encinitas resident who was in Gyanamata's charge, "I shall not long outlive Sister."

After her funeral Master went to an SRF retreat in the desert, about 200 miles outside Los Angeles. He loved the desert, its spaciousness and silence.

* "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. . . I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:13-15, Bible).

† See page 93.