



The Life of Yogananda: The Story of the Yogi Who Became the First Modern Guru

Philip Goldberg

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He was called “the 20th century’s first superstar guru” (*Los Angeles Times*), and today, nearly a century after he arrived in the United States, he’s still the best known and most beloved of all the Indian spiritual teachers who have come to the West. Now, finally, Paramahansa Yogananda has the authoritative biography he deserves.

Yogananda, considered by many to be the father of modern yoga, has had an unsurpassed global impact thanks to the durability of his teachings, the institutions he created or inspired, and especially his iconic memoir, *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

Since its publication in 1946, that book has sold millions of copies and changed millions of lives. But it doesn’t tell the whole story.

Much of Yogananda’s seminal text is devoted to tales about other people, and it largely overlooks the three vital decades he spent living, working, and teaching in America. Huge chunks of his life—challenges, controversies, and crises; triumphs, relationships, and formative experiences—remain unknown to even his most ardent devotees. In this captivating biography, scholar and teacher Philip Goldberg fills the gaps, charting a journey that spanned six decades, two hemispheres, two world wars, and unprecedented social changes. The result is an objective, thoroughly researched account of Yogananda’s remarkable life in all its detail, nuance, and complex humanity.

But this is more than a compelling life story. “Yogananda would, I believe, want any book about him to not only inform but transform,” Goldberg writes. “It is my hope that readers will be enriched, expanded, and deepened by this humble offering.” That is sure to be the case for both Yogananda enthusiasts and those who discover him for the first time in these illuminating pages.

The Life of Yogananda: The Story of the Yogi Who Became the First Modern Guru **Details**

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Pranada Comtois says

This is an easy, informative read. Written with heart, but not blind faith in Paramahansa Yogananda, the author has gifted us with a broad view of this modern, influential mystic. I'm called to greater depth in my spiritual journey by hearing of Yogananda's single-minded focus on being a presence of good in the world.

Tandava Brahmachari says

Goldberg is walking a very delicate line here, as he tries to convey the world-changing life of a true spiritual avatar, while still allowing skeptics to think of him in purely human terms. This probably makes it hard to please anybody completely. The way I came to think of it was that reading this book is not a spiritual experience, as reading *Autobiography of a Yogi* is, but more just a factual one. Maybe this is a better place for some people to start, but I would generally recommend reading the AY first.

Of course, if you *have* read the AY (especially if you've read it repeatedly), much of the content here is familiar, particularly regarding his boyhood in India. There are a few extra details there from *Mejda*, and others, and of course, additional historical and cultural context, which is nice. But it can also get a bit tedious at times, and he's simply summarizing so much of what was said more vividly and elegantly in the original.

But more of the book is devoted to his time in America, which is appropriate, since that was covered less in the AY. I was somewhat familiar with most of this as well, simply from all my additional reading, but not to the same degree, so it was more interesting to go into more detail here. And I appreciated how he evenmindedly acknowledged various scandals while also pointing out how they are unsupported by an objective look at the available evidence. He doesn't go into great detail, but says enough to indicate he's done his research. Appropriate for his overall balancing act.

The one thing I was slightly miffed about was his use of the 2013 edition of the AY in all his citations. I realize that it may be the more commonly read version, but as a historian, it seems he should have used the original edition, without all the posthumous edits. There was only one particular quote that seemed problematic, though, which is the claim that Babaji didn't originally want Lahiri to let anyone else teach Kriya Yoga. That seems unlikely, given that this was the beginning of a mission to spread Kriya around the world, and it isn't in the original edition. So if he was going to include that information, I would have preferred a citation from something published in Yogananda's lifetime. Any other differences I noticed were relatively inconsequential, though.

So anyway, this book didn't particularly knock my socks off, but I think he did what he intended to do with it, and I'm glad he wrote it. As he said in the introduction: "To those who feel I left out or misconstrued important information, I encourage you to write your own book. Yogananda deserves multiple biographies." And so I appreciate that he's setting a good example.

Jon says

Noble book about great spiritual leader

Dr Goldberg after painstaking research tells the external story of a modern day saint and literary figure. The internal life is at times retold in Yogananda's own words and those of his disciples. Goldberg's reportage includes controversy and criticism which is fair game and fairly reported. Sometimes Goldberg equivocates unnecessarily about Yogananda's paranormal and spiritual powers: to whom is the author pandering? All in all this is a lovely and illuminating book about an extraordinary man and his life.
