

# Self-Realization

## MAGAZINE

Founded in 1925 by PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

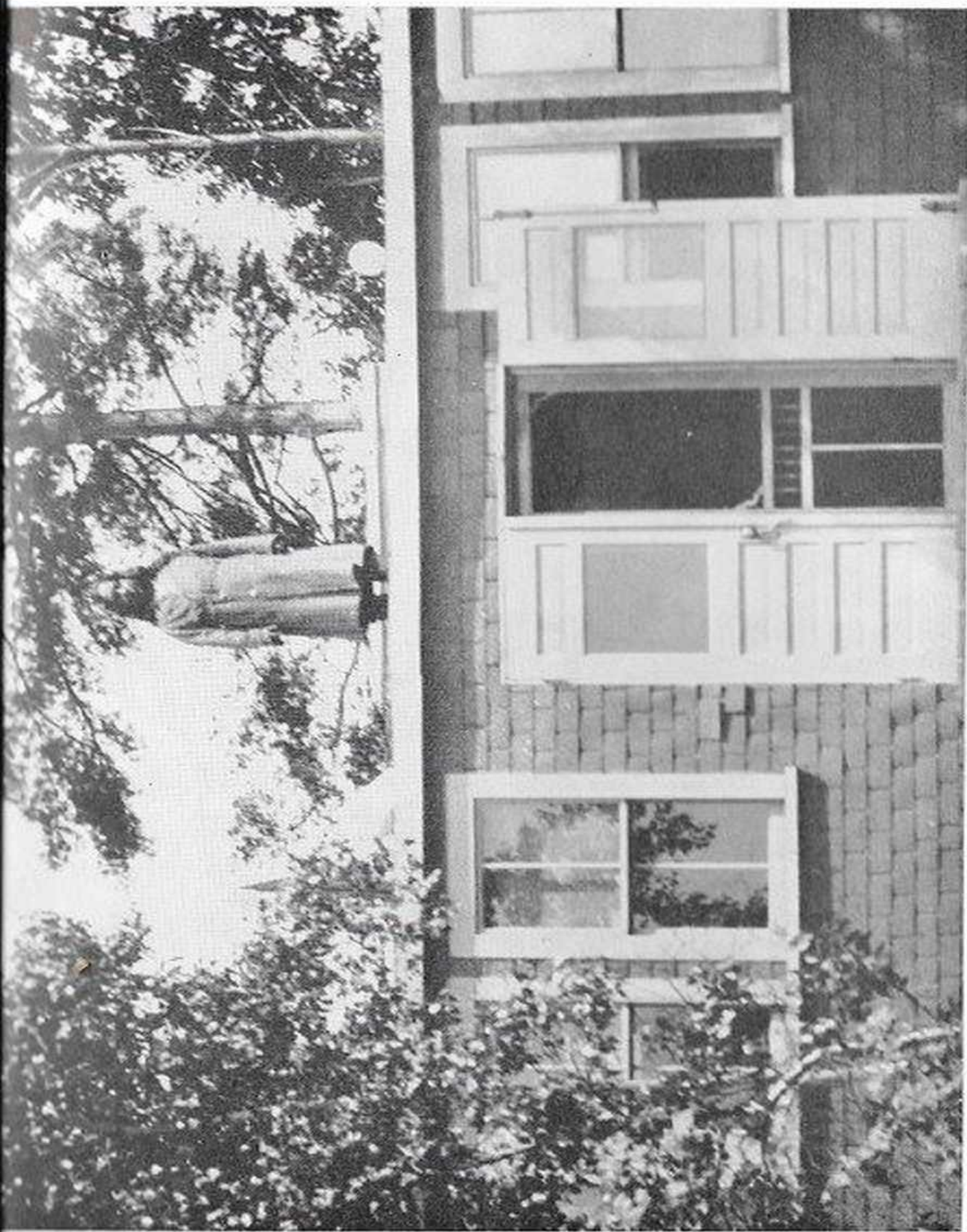


### SRF-YSS PRESIDENT WELCOMED IN INDIA

Sister Daya (*center, holding bouquet*), president of Self-Realization Fellowship and Yogoda Sat-Sanga Society; Sisters Mataji and Revati (*center, wearing garlands*); and Brother Kriyananda (*fifth from left*); being welcomed on October 19, 1958, to YSS headquarters, Dakshineswar, India. (*Fifth from right, front row*) Swami Atmananda, YSS secretary.

*Healing of Body, Mind, and Soul*

JAN. - FEB. 1959  
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Paramahansa Yogananda on roof of cottage built under his supervision in 1922 at Hardy's Pond, near Waltham, Mass., the first SRF Retreat in America. Photo taken in 1923. On roof (*left, partially hidden by foliage*) is small tent he used for meditation.

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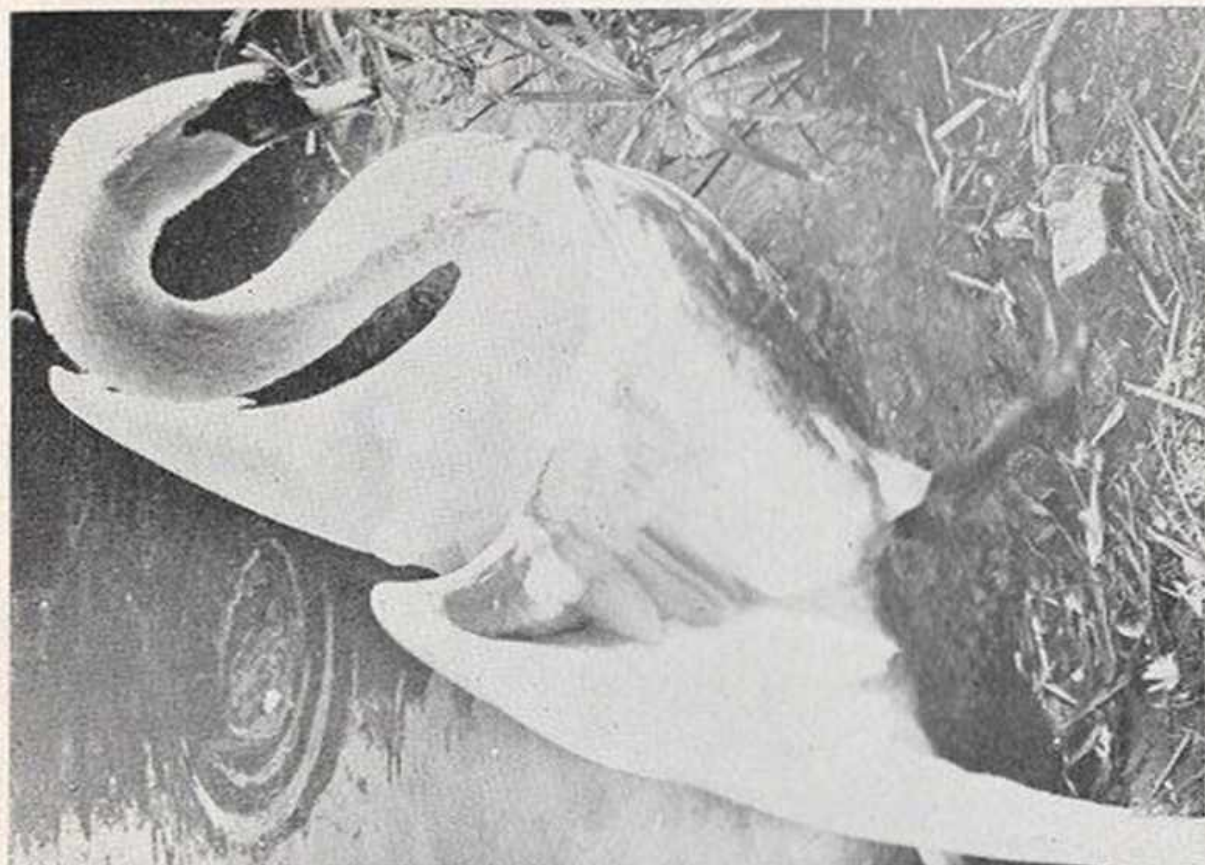
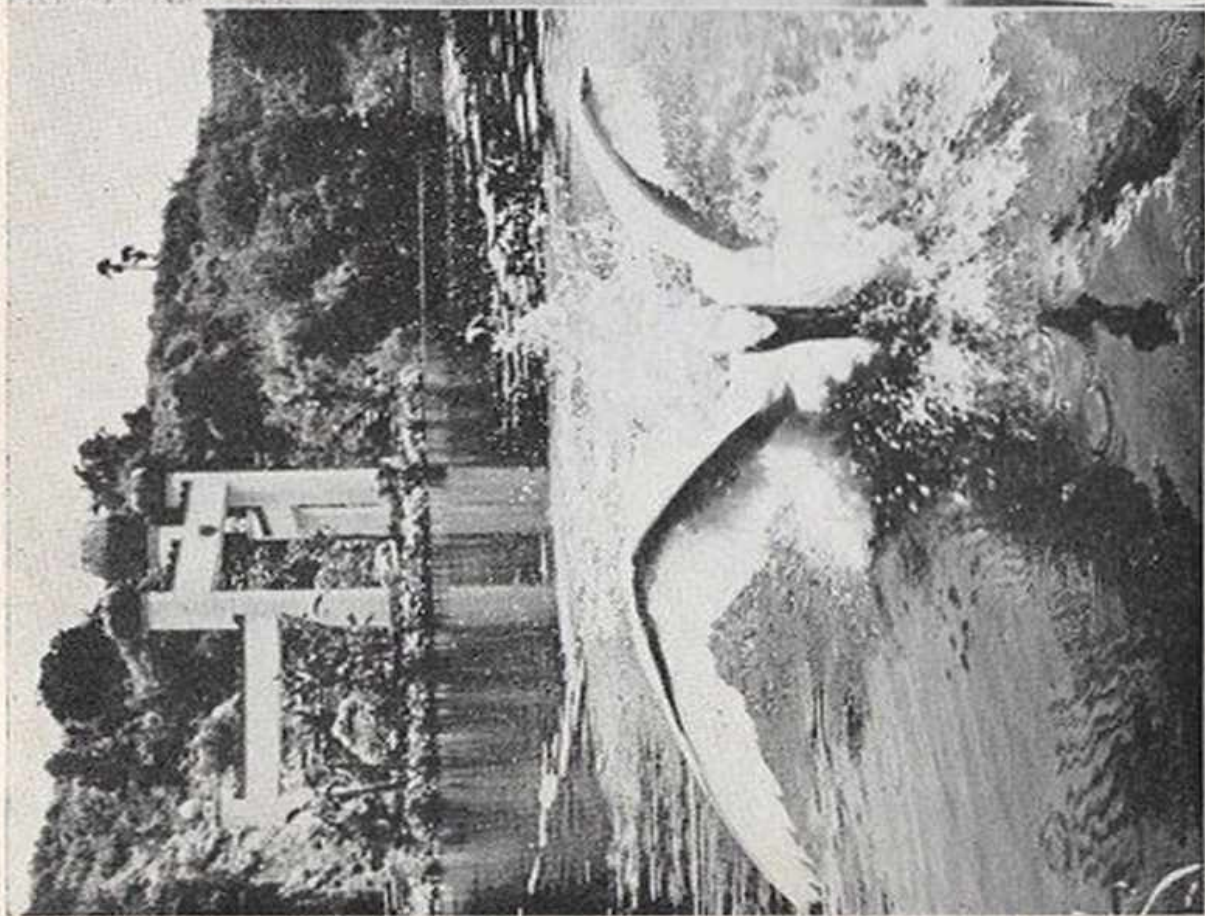
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Swans at SRF Lake Shrine, Los Angeles, display their beauty in action

# How to Read Character

By PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

*A talk given at SRF Mt. Washington Center on January 11, 1942*



The study of others' characters enables one to be alert to ways in which he can improve his own. To study character in a negative way, however, has a devastating effect. Everybody shuns a "character detective" who exposes the faults of others. Many people like to criticize other people, although they themselves cannot stand criticism. It is not right to criticize others for faults that you yourself have.

Character study is important only in this respect: one needs constantly to take note of good qualities in others and to implant those good traits in himself. My study of character comes when I choose people with whom to work. But I have an entirely different standpoint for choosing. Sometimes I let a person that I know is "bad" be with me, in the hope that he will change. If he responds to my spiritual thought for his welfare he becomes better; and if he doesn't, well, I take that chance. I am like a medical doctor who takes the chance of getting a disease himself in order to help a patient. All doctors have to take that chance because their desire is to serve. So it is with spiritual doctors; they undertake to judge others and show them their defects in order to help them to attain perfection.

Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" — (*Matthew 7:1*). He condemned that criticism of others which is done solely out of desire to hurt. Such behavior is unkind and spoils friendship. Criticism has no use whatsoever unless it is given with sincere love, and only when wanted. It should be offered with a loving desire to help the other person to improve. Those who have been able to improve themselves have the right to help others. From that point of view character study is good.

One type of character study is based on physiognomy. It is said that the salient characteristics of man are revealed in his body — a very strong statement, to be taken with great discrimination. Not all one's physiological characteristics do tell the real tale of the inner life.

Aristotle studied physiognomy as a guide to character. Hindu teachers go deeper. They say that all the thoughts of all one's incarnations are reflected in the eyes. Though the eyes reveal the whole story of the soul, not only of this life but of past lives, still it requires a master's mind to analyze the revelation of your past lives in the reflection of this life.

A yogi has calm eyes because he is thinking of the tranquil Spirit. Fear, anger, jealousy, sex, greed, spirituality—all these cause suitable reflections in the eyes. That is why detectives, who can control their facial muscles so as not to betray by their expressions what they are thinking, nevertheless cannot control the suspicion in their eyes.

Sometimes you are walking along and suddenly you see something in the eyes of a person you pass and you think, "I don't like that person," or, as the case may be, "I like him." Eyes tell the whole story.

Facial and bodily expressions have been studied, and the bumps on the head have been analyzed. Caesar didn't like Cassius because he was thin and couldn't smile. Some people think that fat people are luxury-loving and don't like to work, and that thin people are spiritual. On the other hand, in India fat people are often considered to be spiritual and thin people not so much so. Some writers say that those who are thin think too much and therefore flesh doesn't grow around them. A study of history shows that both thin and stout people have been good rulers. Physical appearance doesn't always tell the story.

If you are fat now you were fat before; or if in this life you are thin you have been thin for several incarnations. You have inherited from the past those hidden characteristics; and no matter what you eat, that thought-pattern tends to manifest itself.

Physiognomy as a revealer of character is true from the standpoint that if one takes into account all the thoughts that have passed through a particular mind during incarnations, they show in the body. But it takes the intuitive power of a master to "read" one's physiognomy completely and correctly.

Two husbands heard the news that their wives had drowned. One was showing great grief and the other was not saying anything; but the one who showed sorrow outwardly felt less love for his wife than did the husband who didn't reveal by his physical expression any pain at all. So physical expressions and movements do not always indicate what you feel or are. For example, Socrates was very ugly. He met a great astrologer who said, "Socrates, you are the most evil and wicked person I know." Socrates' students were very angry at the astrologer, but their teacher replied: "You are right. I have been all that in the past. But though I have overcome it by wisdom now, still the things I did then are registered in this body, making it appear ugly."

No two faces are the same. Each is different because of characteristics that have manifested themselves in this life and in past lives. So it is not a matter of simply judging people as bad or good because their looks are repellent or pleasing.

St. Francis was not physically attractive, whereas Brother Masseus was a handsome man. But Brother Masseus did not possess the spiritual

beauty of St. Francis. St. Francis' body was ugly because in his early years he had been a luxury-loving person and was worldly; even though he overcame that way of self-indulgence, still his body registered the life he had lived.

There is another branch of investigation related to physiognomy, that of pathognomy. A pathognomist studies the feelings and emotions of others through their outward signs or expressions in the body; in peoples' movements, the incidents in their lives, and in their emotional reactions. That is a very deep study—finding out the true feelings and reactions of people. All those who come to me for training I place in certain situations to see how their minds and feelings will react. If they respond adversely I try to correct them; but I don't do that unless I have the authority and permission of the person, unless that person has asked to be corrected. You can analyze people more accurately according to their feelings than according to their physical appearances. I combine the two methods.

One's feelings and habits indicate his characteristics. But some people have cultivated the ability to hide their true feelings because they don't want to expose themselves to others.

The study of physical characteristics and the study of the emotions should be combined for the most accurate analysis. Some people are emotionally stirred at the slightest thing. Musicians in this country are as a rule very emotional, and most of your music is emotional, because it is written around the theme of human love. In India music centers around the thought of God. That is why it tends to quiet the storms of emotion and to bring out deep spiritual calmness. Not all Western musicians are emotional, of course; nor are all Indian musicians spiritual, though for the most part they are.

In dealing with emotional people you can seldom bank on their stability. Today they are enthusiastic about you and tomorrow they leave you. I have seen such persons come to the hermitage and within a few days they would make me feel they were going to be as firmly loyal as the disciple John. Next month I would find they had gone. If anything hurts me it is the avowal of friendship and then the breaking of that trust. I am very sensitive on that point in giving my friendship to people; but when I give it I never take it back.

One can easily tell the difference between the motor type and the thoughtful type of man: the former always wants to work and the latter wants to think things through. Both types are needed. I advise motor types to meditate and think more; I tell thoughtful types to meditate and work more, in order to create a harmonious balance. Motor types like to act at once. They should be taught to direct their energies into spiritually rewarding activities.

People who are addicted to bad habits such as overeating or smoking or drinking, and so on, have to be carefully handled. Any obstruction of desire causes anger. If you take food away from a greedy man he will be wrathful. Do not try to help such sense slaves until they themselves indicate a desire to improve.

Try to mix with people who are normal, and better still, with people who are supernormal. A wrestler will never increase his strength unless he works out with a stronger man.

Swami Shankara said that even-minded people will know God. The Master of the universe sits on the altar of even-mindedness. By even-mindedness man enjoys the perfect equilibrium of peace.

One of three basic qualities predominates in every man, according to Hindu philosophy. *Sattva* is the quality of those that have spiritual tendencies. They eat properly, cultivate good habits, and are devoted to the Lord. The *rajas* type is active; such persons keep busy with work until they die. Those in whom the *tamas* quality is uppermost fill their lives with quarrels and anger and jealousy and sex.

Any habit that holds you from spiritual attainment should be overcome. You must be the master of your thoughts and actions. It is better to be the active *rajas* type and to have your habits under control than to be the *tamas* type; but the *sattva* type in whom goodness manifests itself is ideal. Those who want to improve themselves should mix more with *sattva* types.

Very few people know in what lies their own good. By this one criterion you can judge anybody. Ninety-nine per cent of all people fail under that test. Tell a person, for his own good, to do a particular thing, and he will do exactly the opposite. Why? Because he can't help himself; his materialistic habits are too strong. Very often people won't do what you suggest, even though they know it is good for them, just because you have said so. Those who really want to improve should mix more with those who are calm and self-controlled. The weak should seek out the strong and the strong should seek out those who are even stronger.

After judging the *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* qualities in others you can analyze their physical qualities. Some people say that women are "catty." But men can be just as catty. The cat eats the tame canary and then sits calmly like a yogi in order to cover up his evil act. Some people enjoy being destructive to others' peace and happiness. Their whole purpose is to disturb and upset; they go about in society and seek out fights, like predatory wolves.

Certain types of people have been compared to the jay — chattering all the time. It is said that man was created first, and that the god



Twashtri then took the gentleness of the moon, the softness of the down from the swan's breast, the beauty of the flowers, and the chatter of the jay, and, combining these things, made woman. And man was so happy. But after a while he went to Twashtri and said, "She is a beautiful creature. I really appreciate her. But she talks without rest and she has become the bane of my life. Take her back." Then after two months the man again visited Twashtri. "I am very sad," he said. "Please return the woman to me." But after a while he came again and said, "Please take her back." This time Twashtri said, "No, you have to keep her!"

Women can complain, for their part, about men. Unless men and women understand each other they are a torture to each other. Man and woman both were created on the same platform of equality in God, because no man can come without woman and no woman can come without man. It is the duty of man and woman to bring a balance within themselves between their predominating qualities. Man is guided more by reason and woman more by emotion. Each person should perfect both reason and feeling within himself, so that in the eyes of God they may each be perfect, with both reason and feeling properly balanced.

Some people behave like donkeys; they seem to have no memory whatsoever, and they are stubborn. No matter how much they have been tortured by the consequences of sense slavery, still they go on practicing their bad habits. They quickly forget the painful results of sense indulgence and hence do not learn from their experiences.

In nature all the different animals represent different emotions and characteristics; but man has them all in himself. He can act like the snake or the wolf or the fox or the lion. Within us is the essence of hades and heaven. We should learn to express more of the divine within us.

A great study of character is to be had in the analysis of the eyes and the emotions. But the greatest way to learn about character is by soul intuition. If you remain calm you will be able to feel intuitively and exactly the nature of each man you meet.

My task is to take all kinds of people for training and help. It is not good to set a limitation on any man, confining his possibilities to a certain analysis; but whether he changes or remains the same, intuition will be able to tell you, more than your diagnosis of the eyes or feelings, whatever that person is. Intuition is the greatest power of analysis. As a mirror reflects all things held before it, so when your mind-mirror is calm, you will be able to see reflected in it the true character of others. If you are busy doing good to all, remaining calm and meditative, the true character of whoever comes to you will be reflected in the mirror of your mind.

# Yoga Postures For Health

By B. TESNIERE, M.D., and BRAHMACHARI LELAND



## PADMASANA — THE LOTUS POSE

Practiced by yogis since time immemorial, *Padmasana*, the Lotus Pose, is "the best asana for the yogi of East and West." \* Remarkable for its healing values, *Padmasana* is outstanding among all meditation postures. Interested persons intuitively feel the superior value of the pose and, magnetically drawn to it, have an intense desire to learn more about it, to practice it, to master it. Those who feel they will never be able to master the pose will be encouraged and helped by reading the two paragraphs, "Hints for Success" and "Hope for Westerners."

### Posture is Half the Battle

"Posture is half the battle," Paramahansa Yogananda used to say, when speaking of the meditation path to God. *Padmasana*, being both the most scientific and the most practical of all meditation postures, offers to aspiring yogis the possibility of winning this first half of the battle, i. e., gaining control over the body in order to enter and maintain the meditational state. No chair, no cushion is needed; one sits in perfect equilibrium; the restless body consciousness is cut off, and one feels the peace of God falling on his being; another world emerges, the world of Spirit. How is this possible? Through the three virtues of *Padmasana*: its stabilizing effect, its interiorizing effect, and its spiritualizing effect.

### Stabilizing Effect

The Lotus Posture assures complete physical stability. The center of gravity is very low in *Padmasana*, perhaps lower than in any other meditation pose. More important, the triangular base of the pose rests firmly on the floor. The knees and thighs do not have a tendency to tip up, as is common in most other meditation postures; they "grip" the floor like a new set of automobile tires. Finally, the "socle" of the pose is immovable; the use of both hands is necessary (except in rare cases) to get the legs into and out of the pose. No other posture approaches *Padmasana* in this respect of fixity of position.

Beginner yogis intelligently use this physical stability to achieve

\* Paramahansa Yogananda in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, p. 166.

mental steadiness through the practice of yogic concentration exercises. Advanced yogis take advantage of the security offered by the pose "to protect themselves against the danger of falling backward or forward during the trance state of *sabikalpa samadhi*."\*

There is a third advantage to the fixity of the lotus pose: on its pedestal-like base the statuette of the spine may easily be held straight and upright throughout the practice of the higher yogic techniques. Any incorrect position of the spine results in a tension of the spinal muscles and a pinching of the spinal nerves. The life energy and consciousness are thus tied to these parts of the physical body and it becomes physiologically impossible to withdraw them into the subtle astral body where divine consciousness is more easily experienced. On the other hand, the yogi who sits in a perfect spinal position automatically frees his mind from bone-and-muscle consciousness and thus is helped in his attempts to fix his mind on the astral spine where he may contact some aspect of the inner world. It is because the interiorized yogi views the varicolored flowerlike rays of light of the seven cerebrospinal centers, often called "lotuses" (Sanskrit *padma*), that this pose is called *Padmasana*,† Lotus Pose, Paramahansa Yogananda tells us.

#### Interiorizing Effect on Blood Circulation

Several factors come into play in *Padmasana* to divert, to some extent, the flow of blood and life energy from the outer regions of the body, particularly the legs, toward the various organs and nerve dynamos of the trunk and spine.

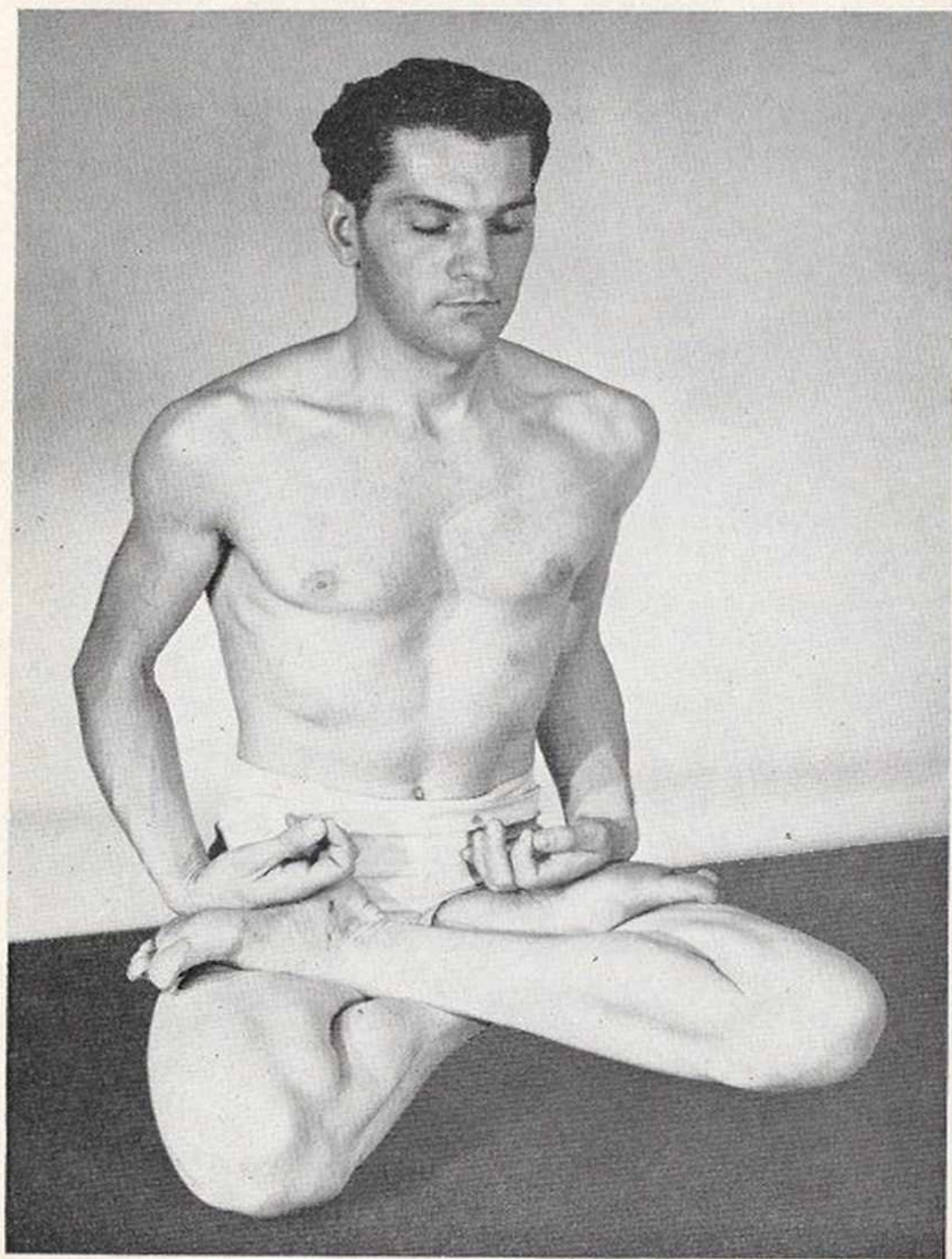
First of all, the placing of the legs in a horizontal position creates hemodynamic‡ conditions that are less demanding on the heart than is the sitting-on-a-chair position with the legs down. Measurements show that the heartbeats are 10% slower in a cross-legged position. The reason is that the heart does not have to pump the columns of venous blood in the legs back to the heart against the pull of gravity. Since concentration is deeper when the heart is calmer, the yogis of yore devised many cross-

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\* Saints of various faiths have been observed in the breathless and motionless trance of *sabikalpa samadhi*. The Christian mystic, St. Teresa of Avila, for example, would have her body "so immovably fixed that the astonished nuns in her convent were unable to alter her position or to rouse her to outward consciousness" (*Autobiography of a Yogi*, p. 488). In such great souls, the love for God was so intense that they could reach Him without following the spiritual techniques of yoga. Paramahansa Yogananda explains that the yoga techniques will take most individuals 90% of the way, the remaining 10% depending on one's devotional approach to God.

† The pose is also known by the name of *Kamalasana*, *Kamala* being another Sanskrit word meaning "lotus."

‡ That which concerns the circulation of blood.



*PADMASANA* — THE LOTUS POSE

legged poses for meditation purposes: *Samasana*, *Siddhasana*, *Sukhasana*,\* *Swastikasana*, and so on. However, among these postures *Padmasana* ranks first, because of its exclusive circulatory effects. In most cross-legged poses, the feet are placed under the thighs or calves of the legs and thus have their own limited circulation somewhat diminished. *Padmasana* on the contrary is the only cross-legged pose in which the feet are placed *over* the legs, pressing them on the thighs and thus slowing down the circulation of blood in the whole lower limbs. This results in the remarkable effect of deriving some of the arterial flow from the main (femoral) artery of the leg to the nearest (hypogastric) artery above it, which irrigates the pelvic region as well as the base of the spine. We shall explain later the importance of this fact.

The second type of factors concerns the life energies and will be readily understood by the following analogies taken from the scientific fields of psychology and physics.

It is now common knowledge among psychologists that the human body has a dynamic right-left polarity. In most people, the right side is the active one, and the left side the passive one. This polarity shows up particularly where it is inverted—as in left-handed children—and explains the difficulty they experience in trying to act as right-handed persons.

Owing to polarity the mind is led to express itself outwardly, and to enter in contact with the world of duality—creation, or *maya*. This is entirely opposite to what the yogis strive to achieve in meditation: concentration on the inner world, on the unity of soul and Spirit. Therefore any means that will neutralize the positive-negative polarity in the limbs will be favorable for meditation.

One method—a natural tendency that may be observed in others during group meditation—is to clasp the hands, which gives a feeling that the outward-going energies in the hands are contained and neutralized, reinforcing by that much the power of inner concentration. There is, however, a drawback to this practice. When the hands are clasped the shoulders cannot be held as far back as they should be, and the dorsal spine soon gives way to a faulty round-backed position. Therefore it is better to bring the legs into contact instead, by adopting one of the many cross-legged meditation poses. Thus the positive and negative currents may be neutralized without any sacrifice of spinal erectness, which is so important to deep meditation. *Padmasana* excels all other cross-legged meditation poses for the following important reason.

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\* *Self-Realization Magazine*, May 1956.

## Spiritualizing Effect on Body and Mind

Regular practice of the Lotus Pose spiritualizes the body and mind of the practitioner. The extra blood received in the reproductive glands reabsorbs the gonadal secretion and thus helps to transmute physical creative energy into spiritual energy. *Padmasana* is known to transmute the physical urge and thus to aid in achieving *brahmacharya* (self-control), and to develop one's powers of concentration and spiritual perception. The greater flow of blood at the base of the spine is favorable to the awakening of the subtle *kundalini* power, through the practice of advanced yogic techniques\* combined with devotion to God. Both these physiological processes, however, are slow and do not explain the immediate feeling of great calmness one experiences when he gets into the Lotus Pose.

It is well known by students of physics that electricity in conductors tends to escape through needle points, i.e., through those places where "the radius of curvature is least." This accounts for the circular shape of insulating materials used on high voltage lines to reduce the amount of energy lost during the transmission of electrical power.

The same law applies to nervous energy, and advanced yogis long ago found that bodily energies tend to escape through the bodily extremities, such as the fingers and toes, drawn earthward by the earth currents. The purpose of meditation — which is to concentrate the mind on the Spirit within instead of on Its outer material manifestations — is thus subtly hampered. To help prevent this and so deepen meditation practices, yogis recommend the use of insulating materials such as kusha grass, tigerskin, silken cloth, woolen blanket, etc.... A less expensive means of insulation consists in just turning the feet and the hands upwards, as in the Lotus Pose! In this respect *Padmasana* is unique among all meditation poses.†

Physicists have also noticed that, under certain conditions, the needle points of electrical conductors cease to emit energy, and act instead as receiving antennas, just as lightning rods collect atmospheric electricity during a thunderstorm. The same phenomenon occurs in *Padmasana*. The upturning of the hands and feet not only insulates the body from the negative earth currents, but also attunes it to the positive all-permeating spiritual currents. The upturned fingers and toes, acting as

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\* These higher techniques are given in the SRF Lessons.

† *Vajrasana*, the Pelvic Pose (*Self-Realization Magazine*, July 1957), is the only other sitting posture — sometimes used for meditation purposes — in which the feet are turned upward. Although *Vajrasana* is far from bestowing the same physical stability as the Lotus Pose, it is interesting to note that the Pelvic Pose was extensively used by the early Christians in their prayers and meditations.

bodily TV antennas, pick up these spiritual currents and conduct them inside the bodily home.

Psychologically speaking, the upturning of the limbs' extremities changes the vibratory rate of the subconscious mind. The instinctive animal tendencies of defense, protection, and consequent tension accompany the downward position of the "paws." By upturning his hands man experiences a more evolved attitude of surrender, love, receptivity, and divine relaxation. Since "meditation is complete relaxation in God," as Paramahansa Yogananda once defined it, we see that the Lotus Posture affords the best physical, physiological, and psychological conditions for such an endeavor.

Everything in the Lotus Pose conspires to prevent the downward and outward flow of the bodily energies and to impel them instead inward and upward in the spiritual centers of man. Or, in other words, to neutralize the horizontal right-left polarity of the body and bring about the vertical polarity of the astral spine and brain. The yogi's consciousness is thus led to float on the ocean of Spirit, untouched by earthly vibrations, just as a lotus flower floats on a lake, untouched by its muddy waters (this is the usual definition of *Padmasana*). In short, those who achieve mastery of the Lotus Pose will be reminded of the Biblical verse: "The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him" — (*Habbakuk 2:20*).

#### HOW TO ASSUME THE LOTUS POSE

- 1) Sit erect, stretching the legs forward.
- 2) Bring the right foot toward the body and, grasping it with the hands, gently set it on the left thigh. Then lower the right knee to the ground.
- 3) Similarly, gently set the left ankle on the right thigh, and lower the left knee to the ground.
- 4) Straighten the spine.
- 5) Place the hands, palms upwards, at the junction of the thighs and abdomen, either behind or on top of the near-by foot.
- 6) Try to feel the peace springing from within. Mentally affirm: "I am a Prince of Peace, sitting on the throne of silence, and directing the kingdom of my activities."
- 7) Breathe normally. Retain the pose one minute in the beginning. Gradually increase the time—a minute a week in the beginning, then five minutes at a time—until you can sit in this posture indefinitely for meditation.

## HINTS FOR SUCCESS

The Lotus Pose is usually, but not always, difficult for Westerners to assume. The reason lies in the difference of sitting habits in the East and in the West: squatting or sitting cross-legged is as customary in the East as is sitting on a chair in the West. In Oriental people the whole system of bones, ligaments, and muscles in the lower limbs is thus accustomed from early childhood to much wider movements than most Occidentals employ. No wonder that, when the latter first try to get into the Lotus Posture, they usually experience painful protests from their ankles or knees or hip joints!

Westerners seeing the Lotus Pose for the first time usually think that *Padmasana* requires an unnatural or acrobatic dislocation of the joints. Therefore they don't try to assume this pose and thus miss its exceptional calming effects. The truth is that the joints of the legs have a much greater latitude of movement than we usually use, and the practice of yogic postures gradually uncovers the latent nimbleness and power of the body vehicle. Just as most businessmen use less than 25% of their power of concentration but can develop it to 100% through the practice of definite techniques,\* so also most individuals use less than 25% of their bodily suppleness but can develop it to 100% through the practice of the yogic asanas. Those who are eager to master *Padmasana* do not even have to go this far, as the pose requires only 50% of potential physical limberness.

How can one succeed in limbering his knees and ankles? Many methods have been proposed. They may be classified under two main categories: physical methods, which have an immediate action; and biological means, which have a long-range effect.

The physical methods all tend toward the same goal: activation of the blood circulation in the legs. In accordance with the well-known principle in physics that "heat expands," any means that warms up the ligaments of the knee and ankle joints will facilitate the assuming of the pose. The most direct way is to massage the ligaments that give pain in the pose (either the talo-fibular ligament on the outer side of the ankle or the tibial collateral ligament on the inner side of the knee). Various types of oil may be used. The left knee should be looked after more carefully than the right, as it bears the greater strain.

There are, however, other ligaments in the knee joint that are exercised by the pose (the posterior cruciate ligament in the middle of the joint and the medial meniscus inside the joint). The stirring of the

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\* The yogic techniques of concentration are explained in the SRF Lessons.



blood circulation should thus be equal throughout the knee joint and its nine feeding arteries. One will find that the best asana in this respect is *Paschimottanasana*, the Posterior-Stretching Pose (*Self-Realization Magazine*, January 1956). To plunge the legs up to the knees in hot water is an extreme means, but it works wonders. To practice the pose in the sunshine (when this is possible) is much simpler, and quite efficient.

Persons who have been standing on their feet all day long will find it more difficult to practice *Padmasana* in the evenings than in the mornings. The reason is that, added to the strain of elongating the knee and ankle ligaments in *Padmasana*, there is a congestion of venous blood in the legs. In this case the preliminary performance of an inverted pose, such as *Viparita Karani*, the Dorsalstand (*Self-Realization Magazine*, January 1958), will be found a great help.

These immediate methods should be supplemented with long-range means that are based on the biological law that "function creates the organ." Regular and persevering practice of the Lotus Pose itself, or if this is not possible, of *Ardha-Padmasana*, the Half-Lotus Pose, setting alternately the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh, is the best way to elongate the ligaments of the knee and ankle joints. It might take some time—more time perhaps than the mastery of a pose wherein muscles (rather than ligaments) have to be elongated—but those who keep on without losing courage or faith will realize what is true also of the higher techniques of yoga: that seemingly impossible yogic attainments can be achieved through steady, intelligent, and persevering practice.

Children, who are gifted by nature with supple joints and ligaments, will not as a general rule need these preliminary exercises. That is why parents who are concerned with the spiritual upbringing of their children should see that they practice *Padmasana* very young, and form the habit of meditating in this posture.

Whatever one's physical condition, one should remember always to proceed gently. Any harsh movement should be strictly avoided. If the joints are not supple enough, do not force them in order to get into the Lotus Posture at any cost. Rather, go as far as you can *within comfortable limits*. It may take from one day to several months to master the pose, depending on one's agility, body build, karma, etc. But those who make the swiftest progress are those who have proceeded, not by jerks, but smoothly, gradually, and regularly, in perfect accord with Leibnitz' aphorism: *Natura not facit saltus*, "Nature does not make jumps."

In the next issue variations of *Padmasana* will be given, also key points for mastery of the pose, and a discussion of its healing benefits.

A SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION  
OF THE *BHAGAVAD-GITA*

By PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA



*Chapter XI, Stanzas 15-31, continued*

*The ego, karma, senses great abide  
And wait to leap upon our wisdom's chiefs;  
And yet they all do ride  
The race of death, to fall and hide  
Fore'er in Thy devouring mouth,  
Adorned with crushing cruel teeth uncouth.  
The victor and the vanquished must  
(Thine offspring both, the righteous and ungodly ones)  
Thy love still claim; yet all some day shall kiss the dust,  
And sleep on common floor of earth.  
The shattered skulls of some are seen,  
As caught Thy greedy teeth between.  
As diverse, restless, watery waves  
Of river branches all do crave  
To force through crowded wavelets' way  
And meet where Neptune's home long lay,*

*So the heroic streams of life  
Do plunge to meet in maddest strife  
Within Thy foaming mouth of sea,  
Where sparkling lives do dance so free.  
As insects lost in beauty's game  
All swiftly, thoughtless rush to flame,  
So fog-born passion's fires pretend  
To glow like heavenly light of Thine.  
And draw on mortals to attend  
The trumpet call to deathly line.  
Thy mouth ablaze  
Doth bring to gaze  
Its leaping tongues to lick  
The angry blood of strong and weak.  
Thou, Gourmand God, dost eat  
With hunger infinite;  
O Vishnu, Thou dost scorch  
The worlds with all-pervading fiery torch.  
Be pleased, O Prime of gods;  
I ache to know Thee, Primeval Lord.  
Tell Thou to me—O Fiery Mood,  
Who art yet so good—  
Thy Royal Will,  
Unknown to me still.*

*Chapter XI, Stanzas 32-34*

The Blessed Lord said:  
*"I am Endless Doom,  
E'er ready to roam  
In burning maw  
Of Mine the weaklings' awe  
And all the mortal meat  
Of weary worlds of deathly change, and treat  
Them with My nectar life  
To new and fearless, better strife.  
E'en if thou dost not slay*

*These wicked warriors all in war array,  
 They surely certain have to fall,  
 Ah, in My teeth-of-law, withal.  
 Arise, awake! Arise, awake!  
 Oh, dash to death thy foe, the flesh a captive make,  
 And seize the victor's fame  
 With battle-hunted game.  
 Wealth of the King  
 Of Peace, and heaven's kingdom bring!  
 I know right now the happenings all  
 That mystic future forth doth call;  
 And thus thy foes and warriors true,  
 Long, long ago I slew  
 Ere thine agent-hand  
 (That I would wield to land  
 Thy foes on death's dim shore) could understand.  
 My agent thou;  
 Oh, this is how  
 I work my plans in universe  
 Through instruments diverse;  
 'Tis I who slew and yet will slay the senses' train  
 Through thee, as through both past and future ones,  
 My soldiers sane!*

*Chapter XI, Stanzas 35-42*

**Literal Translation**

Sanjaya said (to King Dhritarashtra):

*After hearing Krishna's words the trembling and awe-stricken Arjuna, joining his palms (in supplication), again made humble obeisance, and addressed Krishna in a quavering voice.*

Arjuna said:

*O Hrishikesha (Krishna)! Rightly are the worlds proud and gladdened to exude Thy glory! The demons, terrified, seek safety in distance; while the multitudes of Siddhas (perfected beings) bow down to worship Thee.*

*And why should they not pay Thee homage, O Vast Spirit? For greater art Thou than Brahma the Creator, who issued from Thee. O Infinite One, O God of Gods, O Shelter of the Universe, Thou art the Imperishable—the Manifested, the Unmanifested, and That beyond (the Ultimate Mystery).*

*The Primal God art Thou! the Pristine Spirit, the Final Refuge of the Worlds, the Knower and the Known, the Supreme Fulfillment! Thine Omnipresence shines in the universe, O Thou of Inexhaustible Form!*

*O Flowing Life of Cosmic Currents (Vayu), O King of Death (Yama), O God of Flames (Agni), O Sovereign of Sea and Sky (Varuna), O Lord of Night (the Moon), O Divine Father of Countless Offspring (Prajapati), O Ancestor of All! To Thee praise, praise without end! To Thee my salutations thousandfold!*

*O Endless Might, O Invincible Omniscient Omnipresence, O All-in-All! I bow to Thee in front and behind, I bow to Thee on the left and the right, I bow to Thee above and beneath, I bow to Thee enclosing me everywhere!*

*Unaware of this, Thy Cosmic Glory, and thinking of Thee only as a human friend, often have I audaciously hailed Thee as "Comrade" and "Krishna" and "Son of Yadu."\* For all such words, whether spoken carelessly or with affection; and for any irreverence I have displayed toward Thee, O Unshakable Lord! in jest or at mealtimes, while walking or sitting or lying down, alone with Thee or in others' company—for all such (unintentional slights), O Thou Illimitable! I beg forgiveness.*

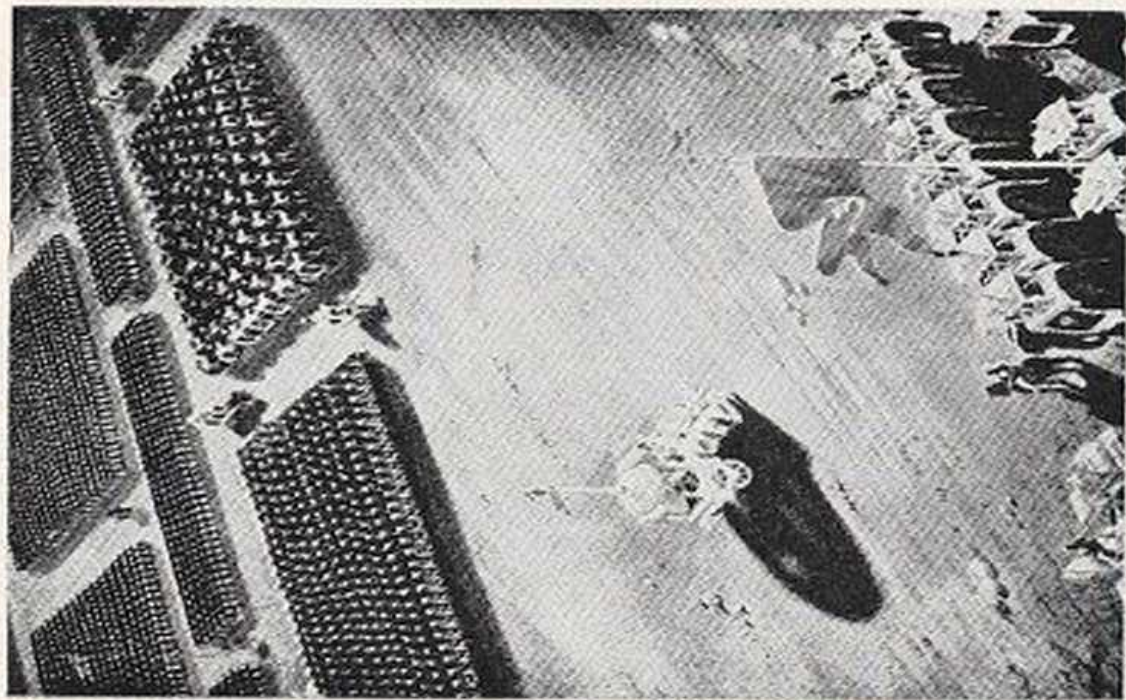
### Spiritual Interpretation

Stanzas 41-42 symbolically portray a devotee's state of mind after the first awakening of his "divine eye." He then reproaches himself for his previous blindness to God's omnipresence.

"With what readiness I took the world for granted, thoughtless of its Source!" he mourns. "I was sensible of creation, but of its Creator how insensible! knowing not that only by His power did I eat and walk and talk and observe and reason and pray. Of itself what atom could exist at all? Forgive my past heedlessness and ungrateful indifference to Thee, O Silent Witness of every thought and action, O Unshakable Supporter of all!"

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\* Krishna was a younger son of a chief of the Yadavas (Yadus), eminent Kshatriya warriors.



Two illustrations from *The Bhagavad-Gita in Pictures* by P. S. Mehra. (*Left*) Arjuna's chariot drawn up between two mighty forces arrayed for battle. (*Right*) Arjuna kneels in awe before his friend and guru, Lord Krishna, after having beheld a vision of his cosmic form.

Chapter XI, Stanza 43

Literal Translation

*Father of All art Thou! of animate and inanimate alike. None but Thee is worthy of worship, O Guru Sublime! Unparalleled by any other in the three worlds, who may surpass Thee, O Lord of Power Incomparable?*

Spiritual Interpretation

The Bible puts the same thought thus: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God."\*

Man is essentially Spirit; he misunderstands his real Being if he seeks fulfillment by embodiment in any of the three worlds (physical, "the earth"; astral, "the water under the earth," the vast enveloping astral sheath of light waves around the material cosmos; and causal, the "heaven above"). So long as he "bows down" before the attractions of the created or phenomenal universe, so long is he an idolater of "graven images," a follower of false doctrines, a heathen unaware of the One True God.

Only by identifying his soul with the Uncreated, the Pure and Ever-Undeified Spirit, may man be delivered from the flux of creation—"Egypt," darkness, delusion, "the house of bondage."

From those who do not seek the Lord for Himself, the Ultimate Truth, but remain satisfied with His "untruth" (the "unreal" because transitory world), He turns away, "jealously" brooking no flaw in the devotee's right perception of Him.

The man who knows that God is without peer will worship none but Him. No secondary objective will serve; his goal is the Primal Unique.

Chapter XI, Stanzas 44-45

Literal Translation

*Therefore, O Adorable One, I cast myself at Thy feet to implore Thy pardon. As a father to his son, as a friend to a close friend, as a lover to his beloved, do Thou, O Lord, forgive me!*

\*Exodus 20:2-5.

*Overjoyed at having gazed upon a vision never seen before, yet I am not free from terror. Be merciful to me, O Lord of Gods, O Shelter of the Worlds! Show me Thyself in a form (more diminutive and comprehensible). I long to see Thee as the Four-Armed (Vishnu), diademed and holding Thy mace and disc. Reappear in that same form, O Thou who art Thousand-Armed and Universe-Bodied!*

The Blessed Lord said:

*I have graciously exercised Mine own Yoga Power to reveal to thee, O Arjuna, and to none other! My Supreme Primeval Form, the Radiant and Infinite Cosmos!*

*No mortal man—save only thyself, O Great Hero of the Kurus!—is able to look upon My Universal Shape. That vision is not attainable by sacrifices or charity or works or rigorous austerity or study of the Vedas.*

*Be not affrighted or stupefied at seeing My Terrible Aspect. With dreads removed and heart rejoicing, behold once more My (familiar) form!*

Sanjaya said (to King Dhritarashtra):

*After speaking thus, the Lord of the World resumed the shape (of Krishna). He, the Great-Souled One, appearing in the form of grace (desired by Arjuna), consoled His fear-stricken devotee.*

Arjuna said:

*O Granter of All Wishes (Krishna)! As I gaze on Thee again in gentle human shape, my mind is quieted and I feel more like my natural self.*

The Blessed Lord said:

*Very difficult it is to behold, as thou hast done, the Vision Universal! Even the gods ever yearn to see it. But it is not unveiled through one's penance or scriptural lore or gift-giving or formal worship. O Scorcher of the Sense-Foes (Arjuna)! only by undivided devotion (commingling by yoga all thoughts in One Divine Perception) may I be seen in My Cosmic Form and recognized in reality and finally embraced in Oneness!*

*He who works for Me alone, who makes Me his goal, who lovingly surrenders himself to Me, who is nonattached (to My delusive cosmic-dream worlds), who bears ill will toward none (beholding Me in all)—he enters My being, O Arjuna!*



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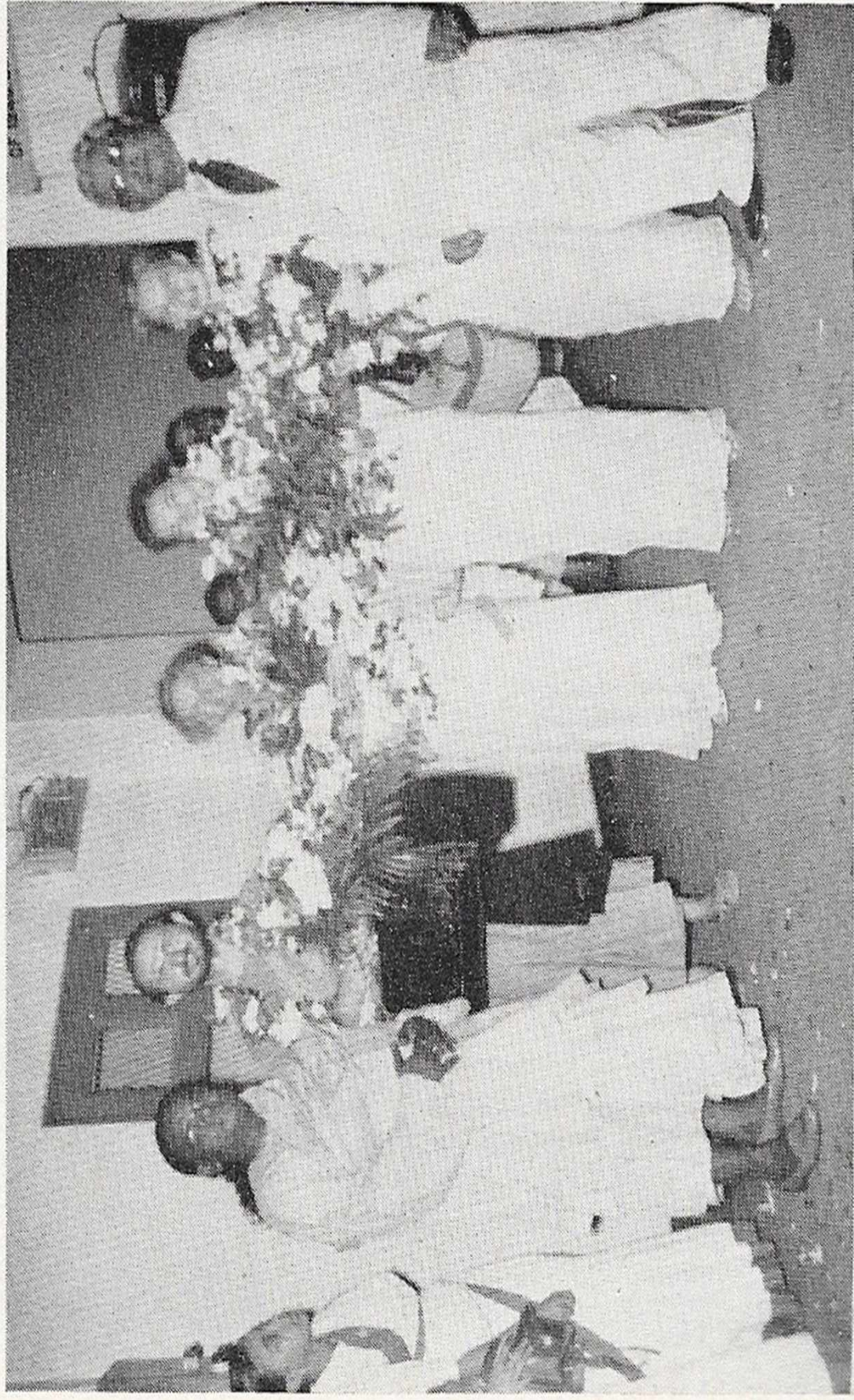
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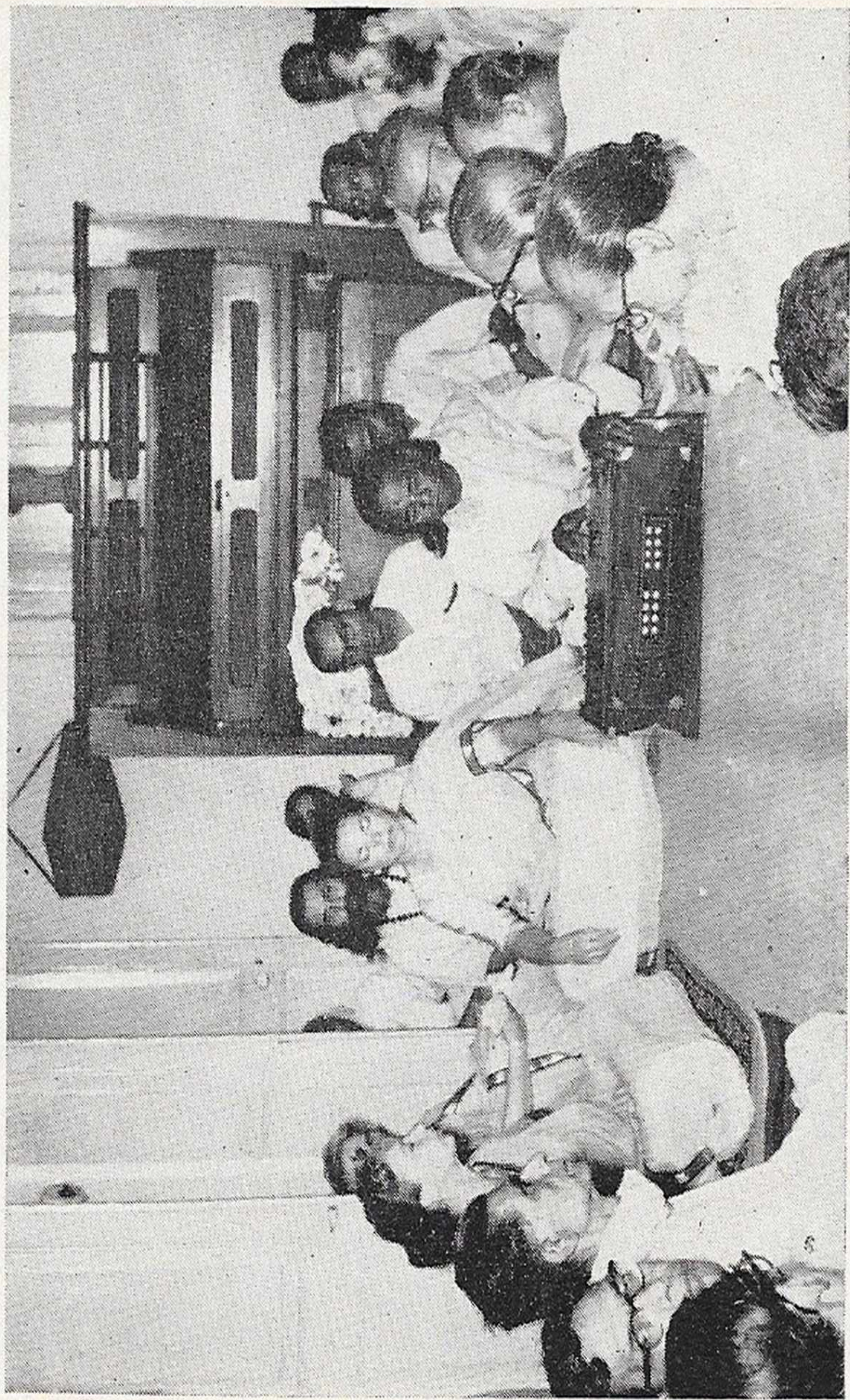
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(From left) Swami Atmananda; Brother Kriyananda; Sister Revati; Sister Daya, YSS-SRF president; Sister Mataji; and Sri Prabhas Ghose; at Dum Dum Airport, Calcutta, on October 13, 1958. The visitors from SRF headquarters, Los Angeles, were welcomed to India by the YSS officers with flower garlands and bouquets.



Meditation meeting at YSS headquarters, Dakshineswar, India, October 19th. Sister Daya, YSS-SRF president, is seated by Swami Atmananda (*playing harmonium*).

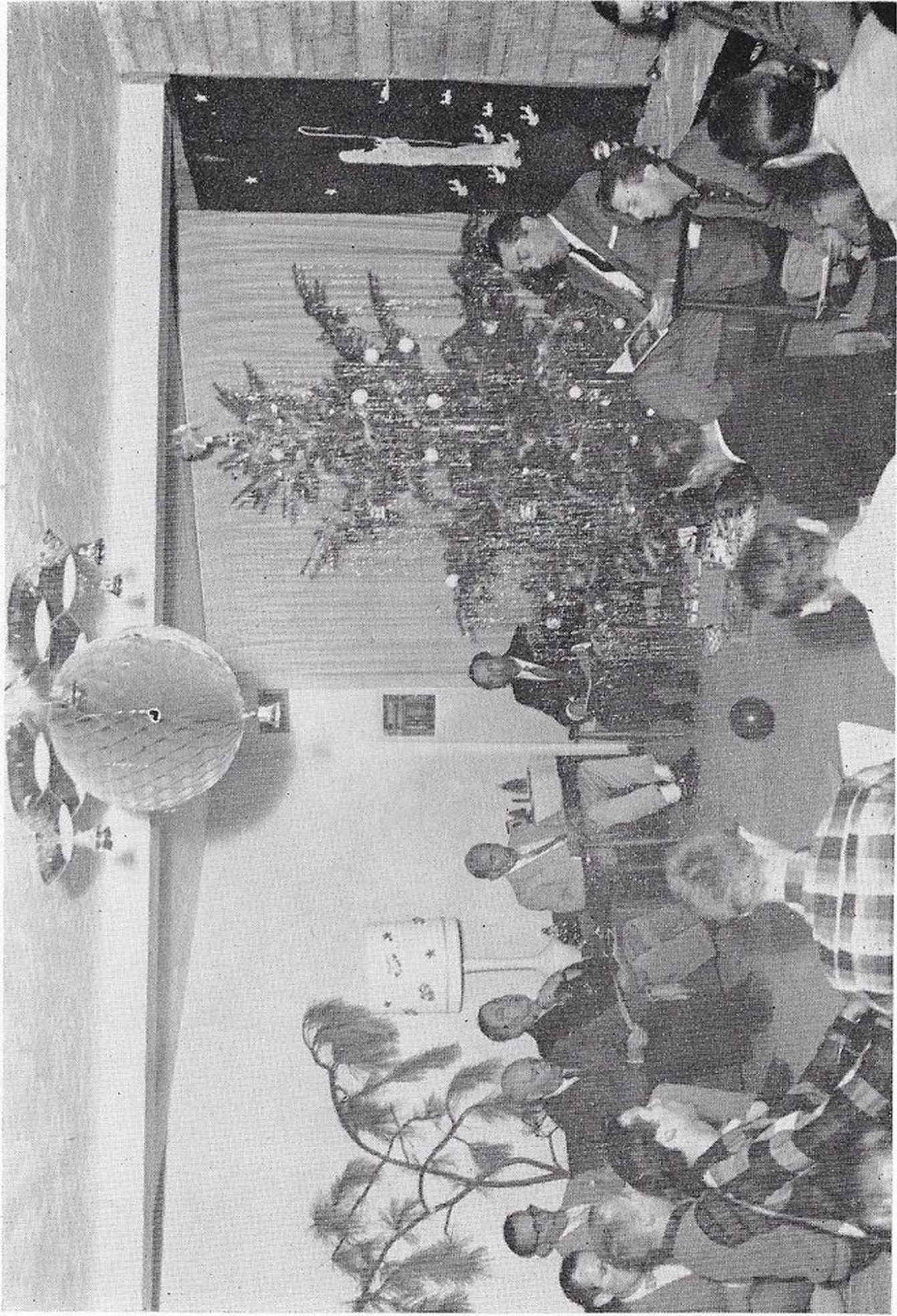


Altar in chapel of Rajasi Janakananda Ashram, SRF Mt. Washington Center, decorated for ceremony celebrating the birthday anniversary on January 5th of Paramahansa Yogananda, founder of SRF



SRF CENTER, MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

Yogacharya J. M. Cuaron, SRF center leader, at entrance to meeting place of SRF Center, Mexico City. The group has been holding regular meditation meetings since 1944 when the center was organized by the late Mrs. Pearl Watson and Mr. Cuaron.



SRF monks singing carols on Christmas Eve in new Rajasi Janakananda Ashram, SRF headquarters, Los Angeles