

# Self-Realization

## MAGAZINE



Founded in 1925 by PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA



SISTER DAYA AND PARTY MEDITATING BY THE GANGES RIVER

Sister Daya (*center*), president of Self-Realization Fellowship, and a party from the Dakshineswar, India headquarters of Yogoda Sat-Sanga Society (SRF), meditating on the bank of the Ganges River. Photo was taken during a visit in March to the Botanical Gardens in Howrah. Across the river is the city of Calcutta.

*Healing of Body, Mind, and Soul*

MAY - JUNE, 1959  
25¢





PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

Photograph taken at Mt. Washington Center, Los Angeles, 1926



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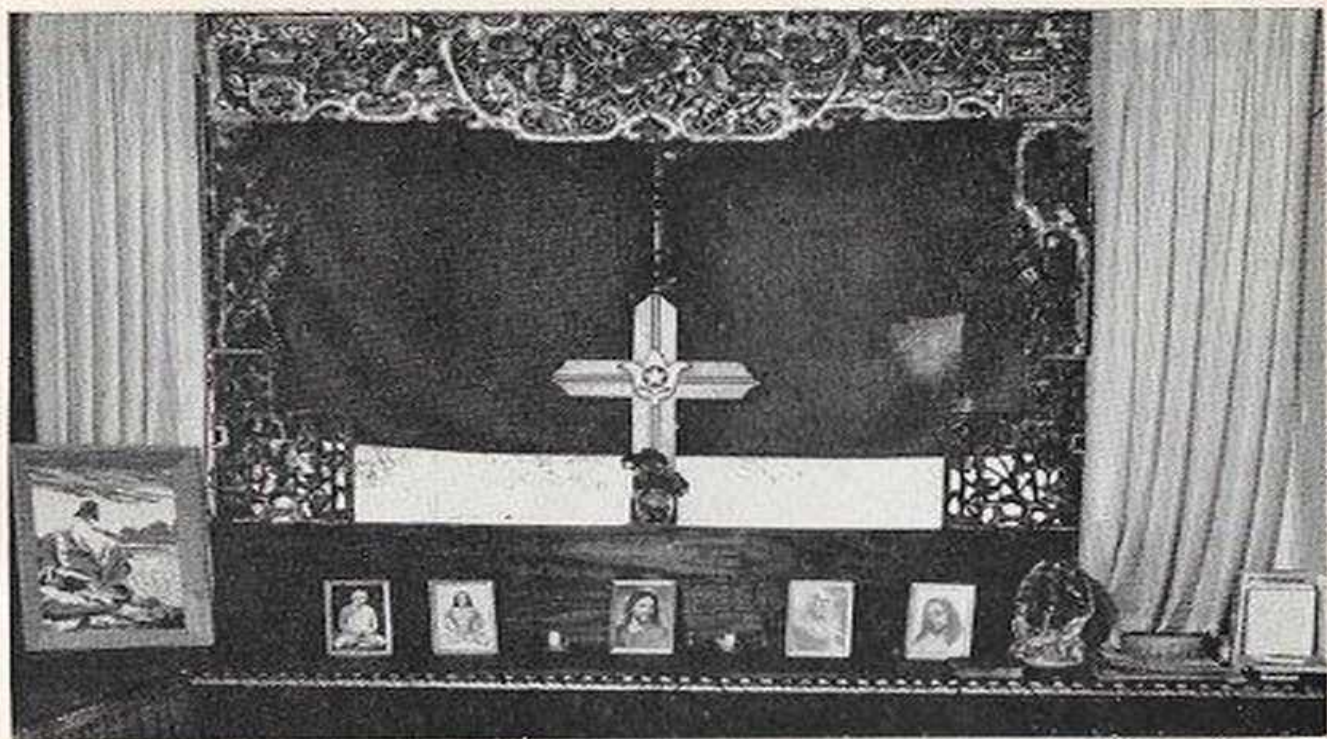
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Altar of Sunday School classroom in the Museum Building,  
SRF Lake Shrine, Pacific Palisades, California



Students and officials of the Bihar *Sangi Siksha Bhawan* (School of Music), Ranchi, pose with Sister Daya (*holding flowers*) and her party during the latter's visit to the school on January 18th



the practice of yoga postures after the age of forty.<sup>1</sup> The Knee-to-the-chest Pose may best be practiced in the afternoon or in the evening, at which periods there is usually more gas in the bowels than in the morning. The pose is simple and easy to perform.

## TECHNIQUE



### FIRST PHASE — *Dakshina Pawanmuktasana*

(1) Lying supine in *Savasana*, the Relaxation Pose, bend the right leg at the hip and knee, clasp the hands on the lower calf, and press the thigh against the abdomen and chest. Slowly exhale the breath as the leg is bent toward the trunk.

(2) Retain the position for a count of twelve, or whatever count is comfortable with the breath held out.

(3) Resume *Savasana*, while slowly inhaling.

(4) Repeat this first phase a second time, after an interval of a few seconds.

### SECOND PHASE — *Vama Pawanmuktasana*

Bending the left leg instead of the right, perform twice as instructed above for the first phase. (Skr. *vama*, left; *dakshina*, right.)

<sup>1</sup> Other yoga postures known to relieve the digestive tract of excess gases are:

(1) the inverted poses such as *Viparita Karani*, the Dorsalstand; *Sarvangasana*, the Shoulderstand; and *Sirshasana*, the Headstand (*Self-Realization Magazine*, January 1956, July and November 1953, and January and March 1952 respectively);

(2) the postures that compress the abdominal region, such as *Uttana Pada-sana*, the Leg-raising Pose; *Halasana*, the Plow Pose; *Bhujangasana*, the Cobra Pose; *Dhanurasana*, the Bow Pose; and *Mayurasana*, the Peacock Pose (*ibid.*, September and November 1958, March 1956, November 1949 issues); and

(3) the yoga exercises that depress the abdomen, such as *Uddiyana Bandha*, the Stomach Exercise (*ibid.*, January 1957); and *Nauli*, the isolation of the *rectus abdomini* muscles.

All of the foregoing postures and exercises require more time for mastery than does *Pawanmuktasana*.





### THIRD PHASE — *Dvipada Pavanamuktasana*

After a pause of thirty seconds in *Savasana*, perform the Knee-to-the-chest Pose with both legs (*Skr. dvi-pada*). Place the arms around the legs as shown in the accompanying photograph. Repeat three times.

#### *Key Points for Correct Practice and Quick Mastery*

The pose is correctly performed when the heel (or heels, depending on the phase one is practicing) touches the buttock, the thigh presses the chest, and the spine is kept straight.

People who are not accustomed to abdominal exercises should do each of the three phases only once at each practice, until the abdominal muscles become stronger through repetition of the pose.

People with much abdominal fat or with stiff hip joints will not be able to touch the chest with the thigh. Such persons should simply bring the knee as close to the chest as they can. Regular practice of the pose will help to remove fat and stiffness.

### VARIATIONS

*Pavanamuktasana* may be practiced while lying down, or while sitting, or while standing.

The lying-down variation may be advantageously performed on a slightly inclined plane, with the head downward. The passage of flatus (gas) is made easier in this tilted position since the gases of the colon are, in most cases, lighter than air. This fact explains why performance of the inverted or topsy-turvy poses, which reverse the pull of gravity

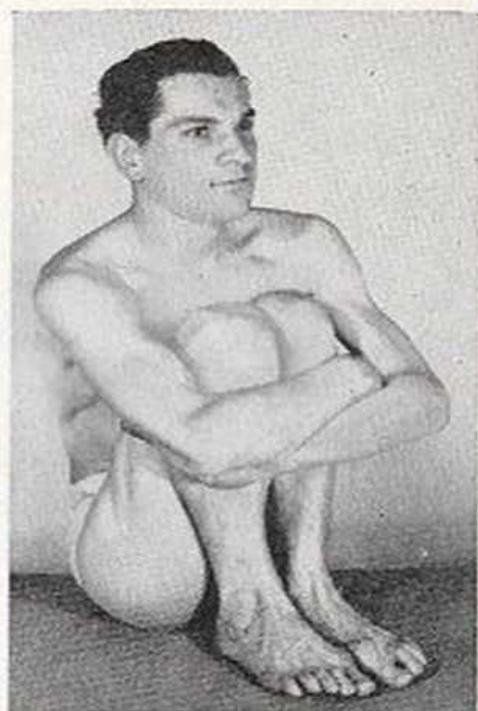


on the body, may lead quickly to the passage of flatus.<sup>1</sup> In the upright position colonic gases have a tendency to be trapped (X-ray experiments have shown) at the sharp angle at the juncture of the transverse colon and the left colon, under the left lower side of the rib box. In this condition a person is sometimes misled to think that his *stomach* is full of air, whereas actually it is not.

The sitting-up variation is usually practiced by performing only the third phase of *Pavanamuktasana*, drawing both thighs simultaneously to the torso. The arms are crossed around the legs as in the lying-down variation. The timing for this variation is different: perform it five times with an interval of ten seconds between each practice.

The standing position variation is of necessity practiced with only one leg at a time (*Eka-pada Pavanamuktasana*).

The two upright variations, sitting and standing, are especially helpful in releasing extra gases contained in the stomach.<sup>2</sup> Bedridden persons and postoperative patients often suffer from flatulency because, in the supine position, the air they swallow, instead of being belched, escapes through the pylorus into the intestines. Therefore these upright variations of *Pavanamuktasana* may be practiced with benefit by those who suffer from flatulency after meals. Similarly, mothers know that they should make young infants sit up after feeding in order that the babies may burp excess gases.



Sitting-up Variation

#### *Benefits of the Knee-to-the-chest Pose*

The immediate effect of *Pavanamuktasana* is to relieve the practitioner of the extra gases contained in the stomach and the intestines. Present day physiologists state that gas is constantly present in the

<sup>1</sup>The composition of the colonic gases where individuals eat an average diet is: 60% nitrogen, 30% hydrogen, about 1% methane and hydrogen sulfide (all lighter than air); and only 10% carbon dioxide (heavier than air). A milk diet increases the percentage of hydrogen; a meat diet that of methane; and a legume diet that of both methane and carbon dioxide.

<sup>2</sup>In the upper part of the stomach (fundus) there is normally an air bubble about 50 ml. or one-fifth of a cup in size.



digestive tract and they estimate it to amount normally to approximately one liter (about one quart). Most of the gas is to be found in the colon, very little in the small intestines and the stomach. When the gases are present in excessive amounts, a few minutes' practice of the pose eliminates them either through belching or through the passage of flatus. Because of that action, the Knee-to-the-chest Pose has been given the name *Pavanamuktasana* (Skr. *pavana*, gas + *mukta*, relieving + *asana*).

Several factors contribute to the effectiveness of the pose. It compresses the abdominal cavity, enlarges the pelvic cavity, and stimulates intestinal peristalsis.

*An Aid in Cases of Difficult Breathing, Labor, and Faulty Elimination*

When the thighs are brought close to the abdomen the abdominal cavity is compressed and impure venous blood is squeezed out of the abdominal reservoir (splanchnic vessels, spleen, etc.). This squeezing also produces a favorable effect on the return of the venous blood to the heart and consequently on breathing. Children suffering from congenital heart diseases (tetralogy of Fallot and related conditions) are often observed to adopt instinctively the squatting position—a posture very similar to the sitting-up variation of *Pavanamuktasana*—in order to lessen the difficulty that they have in breathing after vigorous exercise.



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Likewise, older patients have been found to get their breath much more easily when, after exercise, they adopt the squatting position or any similar position in which the legs are folded against the abdomen. Athletes, who know that belching after exercise can be a sign of exhaustion or impairment of heart action, would be helped by assuming the Knee-to-the-chest Pose or a squatting position at such times. These medical facts are interesting and corroborate the claim of yogis that this posture aids the functioning of the supra-colic organs<sup>1</sup> in the abdomen—liver, spleen, stomach, and pancreas—as well as the lungs and heart in the thoracic region (rib cage).

Obstetricians are well aware of the way the position enlarges the pelvic cavity. The folding of the legs against the abdomen results in moving the lower part of the sacrum away from the pubic bone. The sacrum thus undergoes a tipping movement that enlarges the inferior circumference of the pelvic cavity. This tipping movement which is called *nutation*, increases the anterior-posterior diameter of the aperture by 15% to 20% of its length. In cases of funnel pelvis during difficult labor (*dystocia*), obstetricians have the patient adopt the lying-down Knee-to-the-chest Pose or a similar position with extreme flexion of the thighs on the abdomen in order to facilitate the exit of the head of the fetus when it crosses the inferior aperture of the pelvis.

By compressing the abdominal cavity, enlarging the pelvic cavity, and stimulating the general intestinal peristalsis, *Pavanamuktasana* facilitates the passage of the intestinal contents—feces and flatus—from the colon in the abdomen to the rectum in the pelvis. It ensues that the squatting position, which is similar to the sitting-up variation of *Pavanamuktasana*, is physiologically superior to the usual perpendicular sitting position—with thighs at right angles to the trunk—for defecation.<sup>2</sup>

Practice of this pose is helpful to those who suffer from constipation, faulty elimination, or intestinal pains due to gases having been held for a long time in one segment of the bowels.

### *A Relief, Not a Cure*

*Pavanamuktasana* helps to *relieve* troubles arising from excess gas formation. It does not necessarily *prevent* gas formation.

The establishment of proper eating habits is necessary. Slow eating, thorough mastication and insalivation, and calm inner and outer environment will help one to swallow less air while eating (and consequently less nitrogen, a gas that is not easily absorbed by the intestines) and to assure proper digestion of food.

<sup>1</sup>Organs above the transverse colon.

<sup>2</sup>Some yogis recommend the use of a six- to eight-inch high footstool at the toilet stool to bring about a more natural position of the body during defecation, thus affording greater ease in excretion.



The question of diet itself in relation to gas formation is much debated. Yogis state that it is preferable to include in the diet plenty of fruits, nuts, vegetables, and dairy products, even though some of these foods may lead to gas formation, rather than follow a diet in which meat and starches are predominant, even though one finds they produce less gas. The effects of the latter type of diet are much more detrimental to the human organism than is gas formation. Moreover, in the fructo-lacto-vegetarian diet, it is always possible to avoid gas-forming foods or food combinations—a matter in which individual alimentary idiosyncrasies play an important role—so that the natural process of absorption and diffusion of the gases in the digestive tract will not be offset.<sup>1</sup>

Some people suffer from flatulency owing to injudicious *protracted* fasting. Paramahansa Yogananda advised that one should not fast for more than one day a week or for more than three days consecutively once a month without the advice and supervision of a licensed physician. On the other hand, overeating also is frequently found to be a cause of excess gas formation.

There are other causes that are not stressed often enough. One of these is improper posture. It is known that a straight spine is always conducive to the health of the internal organs while a bent spine hampers their proper functioning. A slumped or cramped posture leads to the formation and collection of internal gases. Sit straight! Live straight! Feel straight!

Even common ailments may be unsuspected causes of gas formation in the stomach or intestines: temporary or chronic constipation, diarrhea, colds, high blood pressure, and also certain diseases of the heart, lungs, and liver.

Adherence to physical health laws is important in controlling the gas formation problem. Even more important is *mental* health. Many medical doctors recognize that uncontrolled emotions—fears, worries,

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<sup>1</sup> Absorption by the blood and subsequent elimination by way of the lungs is the principal way in which the human organism throws off gases. Physiologists estimate that at least 90% of the intestinal gases are eliminated in this way. The liver, which is located in the course of this gas-loaded venous blood, is thought to have an important role in the biochemical transformations of these gases and especially in their deodorization, explaining perhaps the fact that a foul breath (*halitosis*) is a common sign of hepatic insufficiency.

Conversely, gases may diffuse from the blood into the intestinal lumen, if the blood pressure in the intestinal vessels is much higher than normal, or if the tonus of the intestinal muscles suddenly drops because of nervous reflex (whether from a physiological, pathological, or emotional cause). This process of gas diffusion by sudden "blushing" of the intestines may be the one involved in the sudden production of gas that follows the absorption of certain foods or drinks by persons with sensitive constitutions.



anxieties—will cause sudden bloating and flatulence. Therefore one should learn and follow laws of right thinking and right feeling—self-control, calmness, cheerfulness, humility, good will.<sup>1</sup>

But the surest way is to know the *spiritual* law that is involved in the formation of gas in the abdomen, to become conscious of it, control it, and apply it at will. According to ancient Sanskrit texts, gas formation is basically due to "non-functioning" of one of the vital life energies in the body, known as the *apana* or eliminating current. Disregard of physical, moral, and mental requisites for health unsettles the normal functioning of this *apana* current and consequently the natural gas-absorption-and-diffusion processes in the digestive system become imbalanced so that abnormal amounts of gas are formed.

Yet control and recharging of the *apana* current cannot be achieved in one day. Years of faithful application of devotional yogic methods for control of life energies are necessary.<sup>2</sup> Still, the novice should not be discouraged. For his help the yogis of India pointed out the laws of ideal living. And for those who suffer from specific complaints the yogis oft-times advised practical means such as *Pavanamuktasana* for gaining relief so that the mind might be freed for constructive pursuits.<sup>3</sup>

Our next article will be devoted to *Sirshasana*, the Headstand.

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<sup>1</sup> These laws of plain living and high thinking are explained in full in the Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons.

<sup>2</sup> Four great techniques of life-force control were taught in the West by Paramahansa Yogananda in the SRF Lessons.

<sup>3</sup> Most of the scientific material in this article may be substantiated by remarkable chapters on gas formation in the book, *An Introduction to Gastro-Enterology* by W. C. Alvarez, Professor of Medicine at the University of Minnesota (Paul B. Hoeber, Inc., New York, 1938, 4th edition), and in the book, *Clinical Physiology* by A. Grollman (McGraw-Hill, Inc., New York, 1957).

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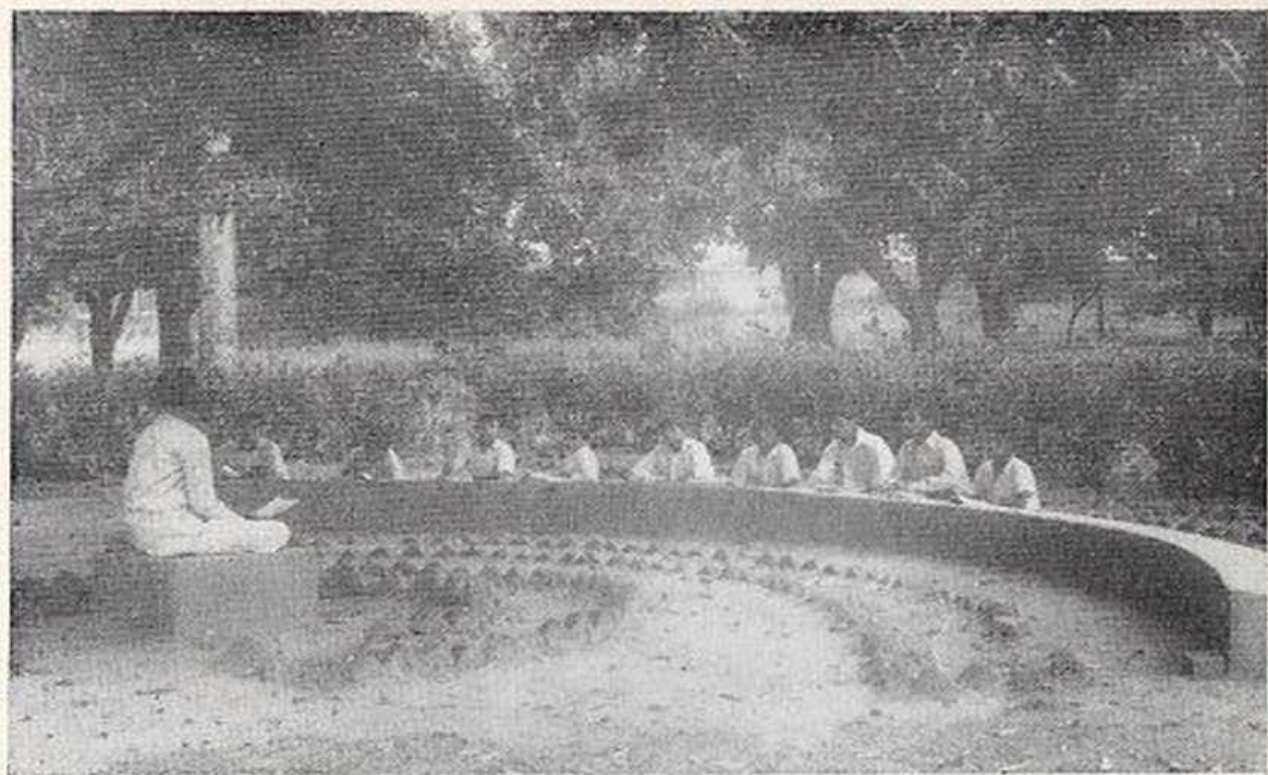
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(ABOVE) Teacher and students at YSS *Brahmacharya Vidyalaya* (*boys' school with yoga training*) in outdoor classroom. The school was founded in 1918 by Paramahansa Yogananda.

(BELOW) Children of YSS Free School, Ranchi, pose with Sister Daya (*extreme right*) during her visit in January, 1959.



# A SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE *BHAGAVAD-GITA*

(India's greatest scripture, a part of the "Mahabharata" epic)

By PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA



## Chapter XII, Stanzas 6-7

### Literal Translation

*For those who venerate Me, giving over all activities to Me (thinking of Me as the Doer of all actions), contemplating Me by single-minded yoga, indeed, O offspring of Pritha (Arjuna), I become before long their Redeemer (to bring them) out of the sea of mortal births.*

### Spiritual Interpretation

The yogi disconnects his mind from the disturbing activities of breath, with its 21,000 daily inhalations and exhalations, by quieting his heart through the practice of *Kriya Yoga*. He can disconnect his breath and mind from the senses and dissolve his ego in the perception of the blessed soul. The yogi may also become united with Divine Bliss by listening to the cosmic sound of the Holy Ghost, or *Aum*, and by meditating upon it and becoming one with it.

The yogic method of concentrating on the divine voice of God—the cosmic sound of *Aum*, which is the abode of all truth—and then meditating upon it and becoming one with it is a superior and more



reliable path than the Vedantic method, by which one concentrates on affirmations of *Vedanta* (Vedic lore) and thus becomes one with them. The latter method is inferior because of the possibility of misinterpretations of scriptural truths or of errors in comprehending them.

A *Kriya Yogi*, one who has attained soul perception through meditation on *Aum*, continuously realizes the omnipresent Spirit behind all souls; he becomes concentrated by single-minded union.

Such yogis find that the perception of the Infinite leads to final emancipation. Once the yogi becomes fixed in the changeless Spirit, he is no longer subject to the changes of births and deaths or of good and evil karma.

These two stanzas are describing again how the yogi reaches God by concentration on the definite expression of God as the cosmic sound (as taught by Self-Realization Fellowship technique), the gradual and easy steps of scientific yoga.

#### Chapter XII, Stanza 8

##### Literal Translation

*Immerse thy mind on Me alone; concentrate on Me thy discriminative perception; and beyond doubt thou shalt dwell immortally in Me.*

##### Spiritual Interpretation

The body-identified being keeps his mind and powers of discrimination busy with sensory and material objects. Thus he undergoes untold dissatisfaction and trouble.

All yogis who disconnect their minds and discrimination from the senses and place them on inner perceptions attain the state of changeless soul consciousness.

The practice of yoga removes the mind and the discriminative faculty from slavery to the senses, and keeps the mind and discrimination concentrated on the microcosmic image of Spirit—the soul manifested in the body. The yogi is thus able to feel the blessedness of the vast Spirit existing above the material world in the sphere devoid of all the vibrations of creation.

#### Chapter XII, Stanza 9

##### Literal Translation

*O Dhananjaya (Arjuna), if thou art not able to keep thy mind wholly on Me, then seek Me by yoga practices.*



## Spiritual Interpretation

From the 8th to the 11th stanzas of this chapter Krishna reveals various methods of attaining liberation—each path suitable to devotees who have attained a certain grade of spirituality. My guru Sri Yukteswarji often remarked that the various modes of liberation mentioned in the *Bhagavad-Gita* make its precepts so sweet, sympathetic, and useful in healing the manifold sicknesses of suffering humanity.

Thus Krishna says: "O Arjuna, if a devotee, through prenatal bad karma, cannot disconnect mind and discrimination naturally and easily from the senses, he should practice scientific step-by-step methods of yoga for soul union."

Any devotee who persists in yoga meditation will ultimately succeed in uniting his soul with Spirit.

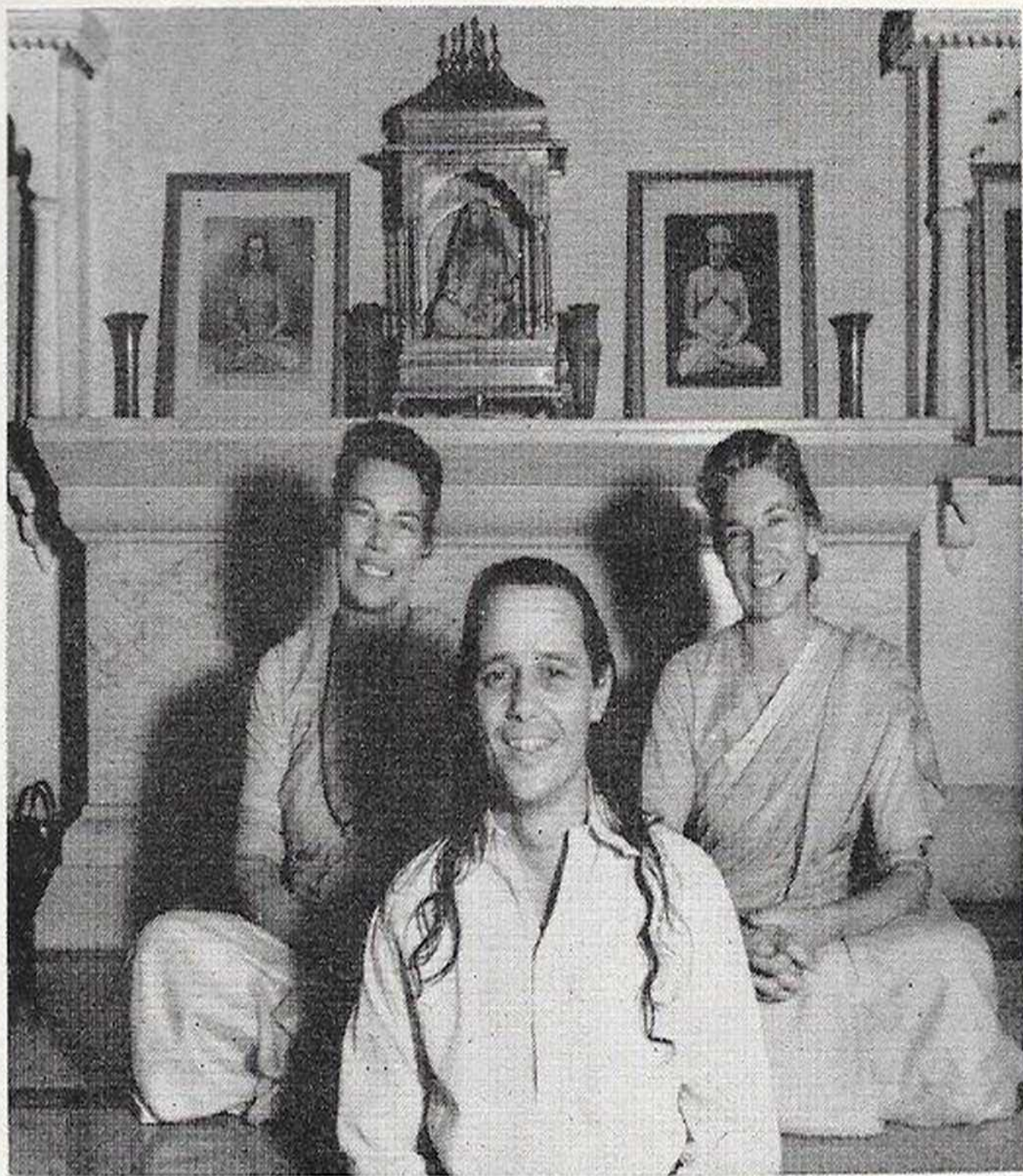
When a yogi again and again fights his restlessness and distractions, and with ever increasing intensity tries to feel divine communion in meditation, he will form a good habit. In time this habit will displace the mortal habit of sense perception and will lead ultimately to the vast perception of Divinity.

Though I was born with the blessed perception of Spirit, once in a while my mind became very restless when I was engaged in the practice of yoga. During some of my periodic attacks of restlessness while meditating I would visualize myself as playing football. At first it seemed that the habit of mentally playing football could not be erased from within me; nevertheless, I tried to make my meditations longer and more intense. I endeavored to make each day's realizations deeper than the spiritual perceptions of the previous day. In this way I became accustomed to remaining continuously in soul joy. The formation of this habit led to the experience of ecstatic bliss in omnipresent Spirit.



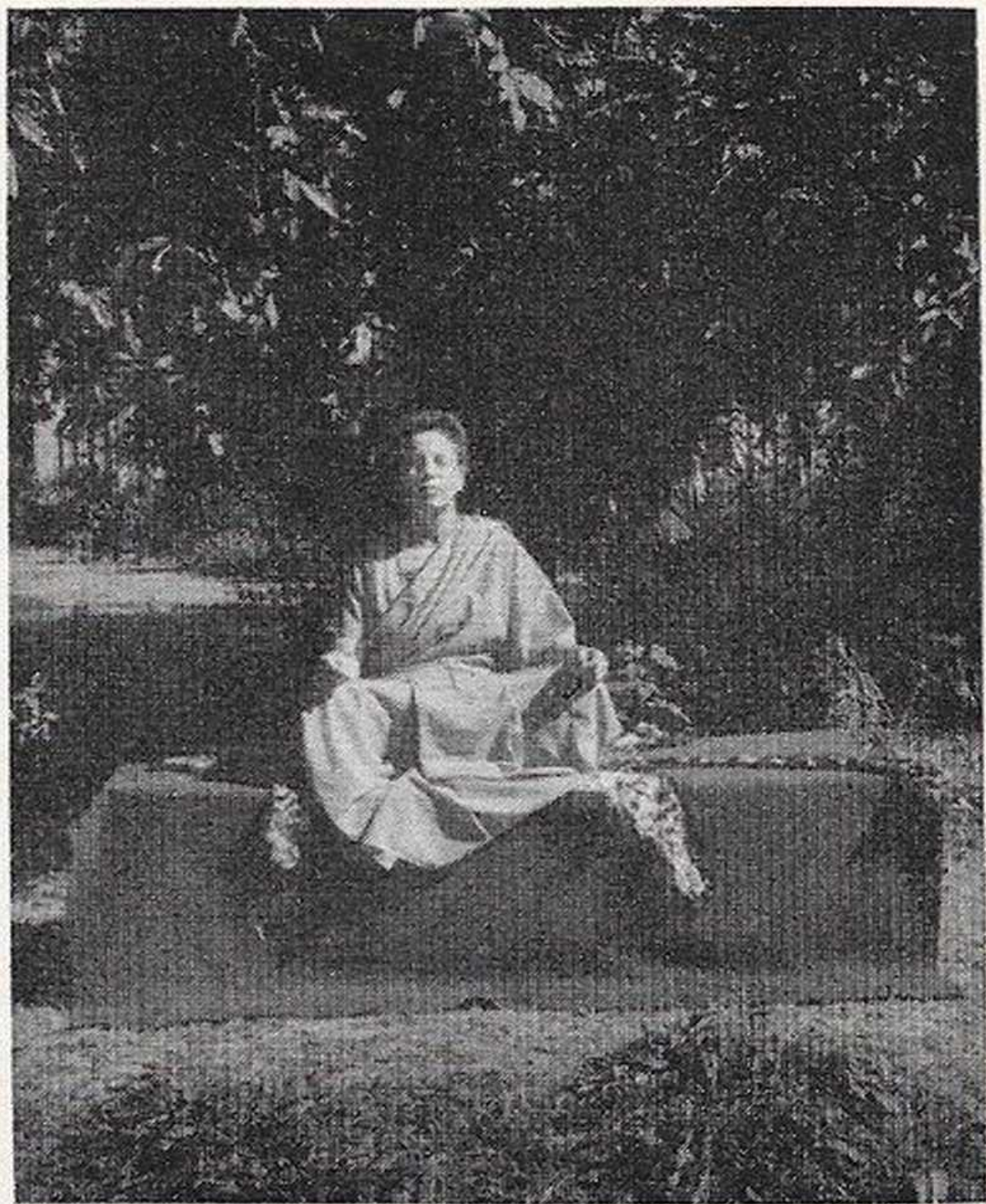
SRF India Center celebrated its 8th anniversary with a banquet in the India Hall auditorium on April 6th. The festivities were attended by 120 members of the Hollywood SRF Church.





Sisters Daya and Mataji, and Brahmachari Paramananda, before the altar in Tulsi Yogoda Ashram, Calcutta, March, 1959





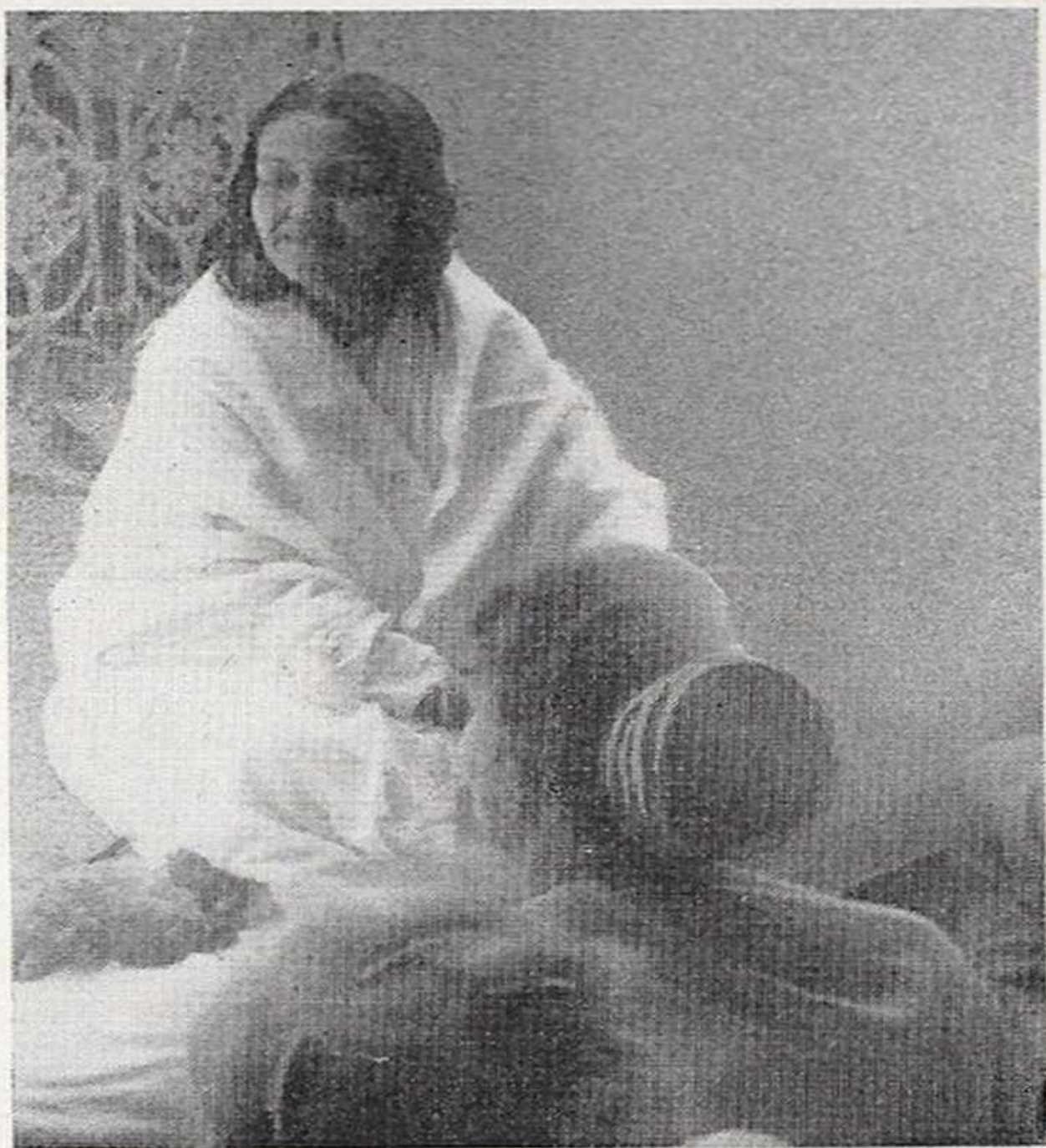
Sister Daya meditating in lotus pose on grounds of Ranchi YSS Ashram, January 17th





Sister Daya (*holding typed sheets and a copy of "The Master Said" in her lap*), discourses on Yogananda's teachings to YSS devotees during a service at Tulsi Yogoda Ashram, Calcutta, March, 1959. This YSS Center was opened in 1957.





Sisters Revati and Daya (*backs to camera*) meditating with Sri Ananda Moyee Ma, famous Bengali saint, at the latter's ashram in Calcutta. (*See opposite page.*)





Sri Prabhas Ghosh, vice-president of YSS, Sister Mataji, Sister Daya, Brother Kriyananda, and Brahmachari Robinarayan of the YSS Ashram in Puri; at the *Samadhi Mandir* (temple and final resting place) of Moti Lal Thakur, a prominent disciple of Swami Sri Yukteswar (*guru of Yogananda*).



Principal G. P. Dube of Ranchi College (*standing, center of platform*), welcoming Sister Daya (*seated at his right*), during her visit to the College on January 18th.