

Paramhansa Yogananda's Seven Bright Lights

From the Autobiography of a Yogi:

The eve of my departure for the United States found me in Sri Yukteswar's holy presence.

"Forget you were born a Hindu, and don't be an American. Take the best of them both," Master said in his calm way of wisdom. "Be your true self, a child of God. Seek and incorporate into your being the best qualities of all your brothers, scattered over the earth in various races."

Then he blessed me: "All those who come to you with faith, seeking God, will be helped. As you look at them, the spiritual current emanating from your eyes will enter into their brains and change their material habits, making them more God-conscious."

He went on, "Your lot to attract sincere souls is very good. Everywhere you go, even in a wilderness, you will find friends."

Both of his blessings have been amply demonstrated. I came alone to America, into a wilderness without a single friend, but there I found thousands ready to receive the time-tested soul-teachings.

Of course Yogananda generated thousands of bright lights during his time in America—but he only granted the title of Yogacharya (teacher of yoga) to just seven individuals.

"You must not think you have reached the end after a little meditation. You must keep in contact with this teaching, because it is a combination of two of the greatest religions in the world and the truth of all religions. Nothing else in the world has been given which is so scientific. If you follow it to the end you will see that it encompasses every religion, and gives a new expression to Christianity and Yoga. Self-Realization is showing for the first time that Christianity can be lived."

Paramhansa announced that several of the members present might henceforth use the title *Yogacharya* (teacher of yoga): Dr. M. W. Lewis, Mr. José Cuaron, Swami Premananda, J. Oliver Black, Rev. C. Bernard, Rev. K. Michael.

Varied Program Presented

The Garden Party program on Sunday, August 26th, was a full one. The guests were first entertained with musical selections by Miss Eleonore Maes, *soprano*, Mr. Alleno Giovanetti, *tenor*, and Mr. John van Luen, *pianist*. A buffet lunch was then served in the garden, following which everyone gathered on the tennis court for the final talks and a demonstration of yoga postures.

Dr. M. W. Lewis of the Encinitas SRF Colony was Master of Ceremonies for the afternoon, and after formally welcoming the assembled guests he introduced Rev. C. Bernard, who explained the purpose and guided the demonstration of yoga postures.

Dr. Lewis then introduced Rev. Mildred Hamilton, who shares with her husband Ralph Hamilton the joint leadership of the SRF Seattle Center. Voicing at the outset the thought which permeated all the subsequent talks, the Rev. Mrs. Hamilton said:

"I have often wished that I might acknowledge publicly all that our beloved Master has done for me. Some of you do not know, perhaps, how great a saint you have for your Guru. You all know of the miracles of Christ, how he healed the sick, raised the dead. I am a living example to show that our own Master has that power, for he has done it for me not once, but many times. I hope that in some measure I can convey my gratitude, which I have tried to express in this little poem:

Out of God's paradise you came,
Filling my waiting soul with His ecstasy.
Teaching of love divine, wisdom from heaven,
Each word a jewel whose luster time cannot deaden.
To you I owe my life — through your intercession
God granted me more time to learn His wondrous lessons.
Oft have I wondered how I could repay
All the love and beauty you have given.

NOVEMBER, 1951

31

News of SRF Centers



Los Angeles, Calif.

The *Los Angeles Mirror* ran the following news story on August 9, 1952. The article was written by the church editor of the *Mirror*, Mr. Omar Garrison.

"When Self-Realization Church of All Religions, 4860 Sunset Blvd., opened its doors in 1942, its founder, the late Paramhansa Yogananda, dedicated it to 'the ideal of human brotherhood and the realization of one God as the Father of all mankind.' To emphasize that theme, the architecture and interior appointments of the church combine features of both East and West.

"A reflection pool, set in a spacious expanse of greensward, reflects the gold-leafed lotus domes of an arched entrance tower. The blue, white, and gold interior of the church provides facilities for both worship and drama, with a silk-curtained stage, flanked by two pulpits. Recessed in the walls are statuettes of Christ, and of some of the world's great religious teachers and saints: Buddha, Krishna, the Virgin Mary, and St. Francis of Assisi.

"Equipment of the main hall includes a pipe organ, rheostat-controlled lighting, and blue, wall-

to-wall carpeting. In planning the church, the Hindu founder told his building committee:

"If theaters can be embellished to attract everyone toward material amusement, shall we not make God's house even more lovely to entice people to find the Creator of all beauty?"

"Much of the building and landscaping of the church was done by resident students of Self-Realization Fellowship, which maintains a Lake Shrine in Pacific Palisades, and headquarters that include a residence for members on Mt. Washington Estates.

"Regular 11 o'clock Sunday services are conducted alternately by the Rev. C. Bernard and the Rev. Donald Walters. In charge of Sunday school activities are Misses Lois Carpenter and Eva Lorraine."

At the *Kriya Yoga* Initiation ceremony in 1951, the last which Paramhansa Yogananda attended, the Master conferred upon several SRF ministers the title of *Yogacharya*. The following ministers may now use the title *Yogacharya* (teacher of yoga): Mildred Hamilton, Seattle, Wash., and Jose M. Cuaron, Mexico City, D. F.

SELF-REALIZATION

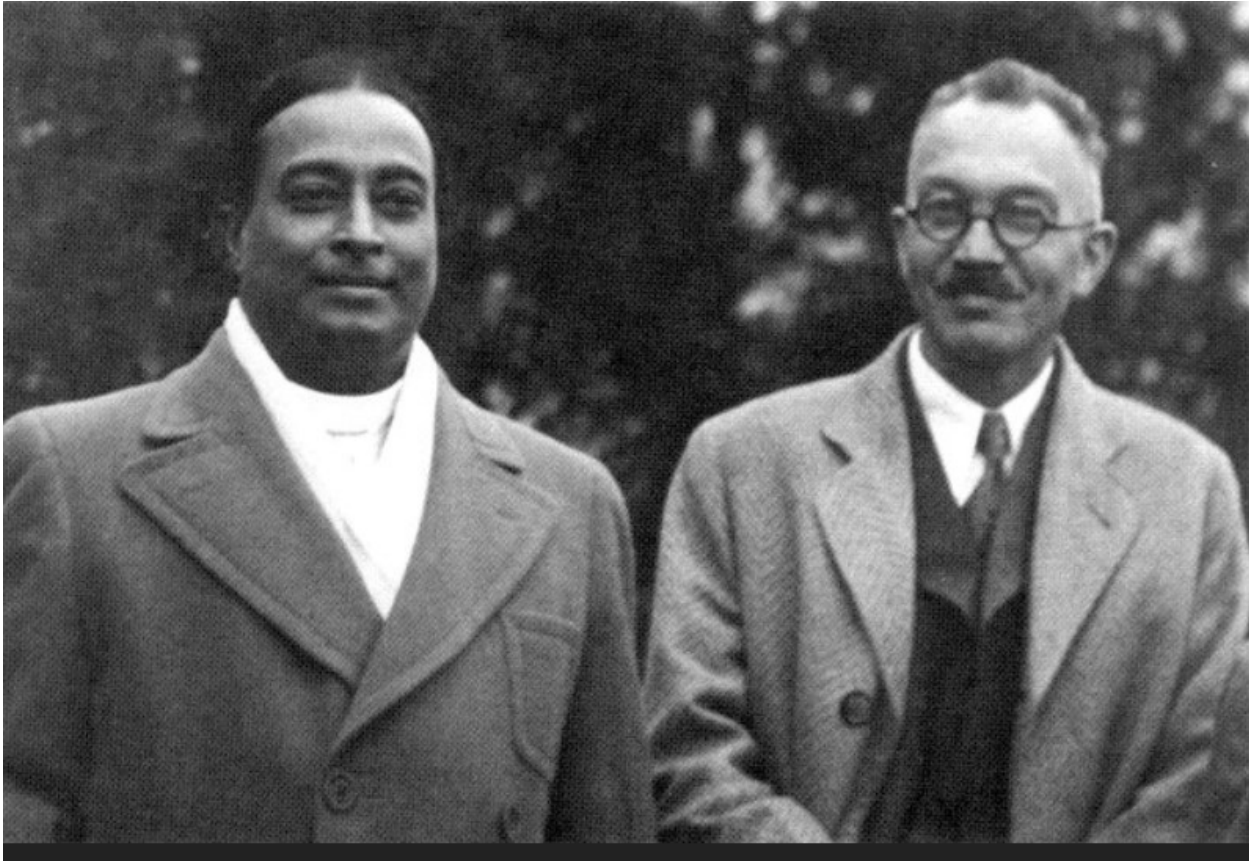
44

September, 1952

As you can see above East West Magazine—the official SRF publication—announced six Yogacharyas in November of 1951. Then in the September 1952 edition they announced a seventh that Master had granted to Mother Hamilton in 1951 during his last Kriya initiation.

Let's review these seven Yogacharyas and see what we can learn and be inspired by:

1) Dr MW Lewis



Paramhansa Yogananda with Dr. Lewis at the Chicago World's Fair 1933

A highly advanced soul, very close to Yogananda, was Dr. Lewis (1893-1960, Boston). Yogananda wrote him: "Let only God consciousness reign between us; let the everlasting spiritual tie be stronger than ever."² Their meeting in this life was a renewed friendship in God. And it will go on in the next, as Yogananda once told Dr. Lewis: "We have lived a good life together. It seems only yesterday that we met. In a little while we shall be separated, but soon we'll be together again."

Dr. Lewis came down to the material plane in March 1893, just two months after Yogananda. It was about the same time when also Rajarsi and Oliver Black incarnated. Those four men came down as a group of friends, it seems.

A birthday sidelight: Yogananda for many years avoided celebrating his birthday, and kept the date a secret – until 1939, when his younger brother Bishnu came to visit him from India. From Bishnu the disciples finally learned of Yogananda's birthday date, and his birthday was celebrated for the first time in the West. But, alas, Yogananda didn't reveal the year of his birth! Thus his birthday cake used to be decorated with only one candle, which he blew out while having his wish ("I still have a little strength of breath. I must take care I don't blow the cake away!"^[2]). Through the years it became a tradition at Yogananda's birthday gatherings that Dr. Lewis would try to cajole his Guru into revealing his age, but Yogananda always refused. "My age is infinite!"^[2]

Dr. Lewis was a married man, with a wife, Mildred, and two children: Bradford and Brenda. Their family lived in Boston, where Dr. Lewis was a dentist and had his practice.

After Yogananda arrived in America, in Boston, on September 19, 1920, he soon met Alice Haysey (Sister Yogamata), who invited her friend Mildred Lewis to come and meet him at their community church. After meeting him, Mrs. Lewis wanted her husband to meet Yogananda too. Dr. Lewis did, on Christmas Eve, 1920. "What is that 'single eye' the Bible speaks of?"^[2] It was a question which had haunted Dr. Lewis for a long time. "Can you show it to me?"^[2] Yogananda on the spot showed him the heavenly glory of the spiritual eye and the 1000-petal lotus. Dr. Lewis was ecstatic. He became the first American Kriyaban, and Yogananda's friend for a lifetime. But he almost got into deep trouble with Mildred (go read in "Treasures Against Time"^[2]).

Yogananda writes in his Autobiography that he lived in Boston "in humble circumstances,"^[2] while trying to start his mission. Dr. Lewis at times invited Yogananda to stay in his home in Boston.

When Yogananda in 1923 left for his lecture "campaign,"^[2] he asked Dr. Lewis to remain in Boston, to lead the meditation group there, and to raise money to support his tours.

Throughout the years, Yogananda and Dr. Lewis remained in contact, outwardly and inwardly. Dr. Lewis later came "twice annually from Boston to Encinitas."^[2] In 1929 Yogananda returned to Boston to give a lecture there. In 1942 he returned there again,

with Swami Premananda. he recounts in the Autobiography: “Sir?,” Dr. Lewis said to me, smiling, “during your early years in America you stayed in this city in a single room, without bath. I wanted you to know that Boston possesses some luxurious apartments!”²

In 1945, Yogananda asked Mr. and Mrs. Lewis to move to Encinitas.

For Dr. Lewis life now changed significantly. A time of increased spiritual responsibility began: he lectured at the Encinitas and San Diego temples (later also in Hollywood), giving up to 7 lectures a week. He also was put in charge of the Encinitas Colony (probably Gyanamata's health didn't allow her to do the job anymore.) In addition, he was in charge of the monks' training in Encinitas. Yogananda also authorized him to give Kriya Initiations, which he did until his passing. To get rest, he spent one day a week in silence, in Rajarsi's Borrego house in the desert.

When Yogananda passed away in 1952, Rajarsi became the SRF president, and Dr. Lewis the vice-president, remaining in that position until his passing. (Swami Kriyananda in 1960 was elected to follow him. The president by then was Daya Mata. After Kriyananda, Tara Mata was made vice-president, then Mrinalini Mata.) Dr. Lewis remained throughout very active in his ministry.

His passing was truly spectacular. It was April 13th, 1960. Dr Lewis was in hospital. In the evening he took a short nap. When he awoke he told Mildred, “I want to sit up straight.”² She arranged the pillows at his back, and he assumed the lotus pose.

She recounts: “His hands were upturned, his eyes closed. I sat beside the bed, thinking that I too would meditate. I was aroused in two or three minutes by a tremendous sound. It resembled the suction sound of a huge pump, or the breath sound of a giant Kriya. With the sound came a great flash of spiritual white light, whose brilliance might be compared to that given forth by a million electric light bulbs. Doctor's blue eyes opened; piercing flashes of blue light came from them. Then they were locked at the Christ center in the forehead. His head lowered somewhat, but his body remained erect. For an instant, the face of Swami Sri Yukteswarji appeared, enveloping Doctor's face.”²

In that moment, in lotus posture, with a straight spine, with a tremendous Kriya sound, the flash of a white light, looking into the spiritual eye, and with the divine presence of Sri Yukteswar, Dr. Lewis made his glorious exit from this world stage.

There can hardly be a better proof for Yogananda's promise: "For those who stay in tune to the end I, or one of the other masters, will be there to usher them into the divine kingdom."

2) Mr Jose Cuaron of Mexico City



SRF International Headquarters entrusted Mr. Cuarón with the task of translating SRF books and lessons into Spanish , distributing them, and conducting annual tours of Latin American countries, founding SRF groups and giving initiations in Kriya Yoga . Some of these tours included visits to our country. For example, Mr. Cuarón gave classes to Uruguayan students in 1958 and conducted Kriya Yoga initiations in 1967.

Señor J. M. Cuaron, the leader of the SRF center in Mexico City, related the following incident to me.

“I was badly in need of a job, but for a long time could find no work anywhere. Then one day an excellent offer came from a company in Matamoros. Taking that job would

mean moving away from Mexico City; I therefore wrote Master to request his permission to put the SRF center in someone else's charge.

My letter was, to me, a mere formality; I was sure Master would congratulate me on my good luck. Imagine my surprise, then, when he replied by telegram: 'No. Absolutely not. Under no circumstances whatever accept that job.' I admit I was a bit upset. But even so, I obeyed him.

"One month later the news came out in the papers: The company that had offered me that job was exposed for fraud. Its officers, including the man who had taken the post I'd been offered, were sent to prison.

He hadn't been aware of the firm's dishonesty, just as I would not have been. Because of the position he held, however, he was imprisoned with the rest. It was only by Master's grace that I was spared that calamity!"

Yogananda once said to SRF's center leader in Mexico City, Señor J. M. Cuaron, "I lost sight of you for a few incarnations, but now I will never lose touch with you again." Señor Cuaron thereafter would sometimes remind him, "Remember your promise!"

"I won't forget," Master would reply. "I will never lose touch with you again."

3) Swami Premananda



The Self-Revelation Church of Absolute Monism in the United States of America had its beginning in 1920. In that year Swami Yogananda Paramhansa came to Boston, Massachusetts, to represent India at the Congress of Religions. While in this country he formed numerous groups of followers. At Swami Yogananda's suggestion, some of his followers in Washington, D.C., later invited one of the students at his school in Ranchi, India, to be their leader.

The young man, known then as Brahmachari Jotin, came in 1928 to organize the church. He was in complete charge of its spiritual and administrative activities for fifty years.

As the membership grew, rented quarters became inadequate. On October 23, 1938 the group met for the first time in the chapel that Brahmachari Jotin had built for them at 4748 Western Avenue, N.W., in Washington. The chapel had been built without any appeal for funds from the members. When the Golden Lotus Temple was completed in 1952, the chapel became the Church of the Children.

As Brahmachari Jotin became better known, he received an increasing number of invitations to speak in synagogues, seminaries, and Christian churches of practically all denominations. He was also in great demand as a speaker for business and civic organizations such as the Lions and Rotary Clubs. In 1941, Brahmachari Jotin was consecrated as a Swami by his Guru, Swami Yogananda Paramhansa, the Guru-Preceptor of the Church. He took the name of Swami Premananda, which means Love of Supreme Wisdom. In 1951 Swami Yogananda granted Swami Premananda the title of Yogacharya.

4) J Oliver Black



Oliver Black (1893-1989) is not a very well-known disciple, even though Yogananda described him as second in Self-realization, right after Rajarsi. Third was Gyanamata. He was thus in extremely lofty company: we are speaking of a saint of highest stature. That must be the reason why he, as a family man and founder of his own spiritual community, was listed until his death in 1989 amongst official SRF ministers authorized to give Kriya initiation.

Oliver Black was born in Grover Hill, Ohio, in 1893, the same year Yogananda was born, who was only 8 months older. As Rajarsi, Oliver Black was a self-made man, a millionaire industrialist selling automobile parts in Detroit. He was an energetic and highly talented person, who started on a very small scale: in his garage, with an investment of only \$500. By the time Oliver Black retired from his business in 1952, it was valued \$35 million dollars a year.

He and his wife Ethel had two children: a son Robert, who was killed while a pilot in World War II, and a daughter Phylis. His wife died in 1970.

Oliver Black met Yogananda in 1931 at a private party. It was instantaneous recognition: "I instantly recognized him for the spiritual giant he was."² Oliver's life of discipleship began that day, and bore wonderful fruit: "He changed the whole direction of my life."²

It must have been a deeply fulfilling time for Yogananda: he met Rajarsi, Oliver Black, Daya Mata all in that same period, a time when Gyanamata moved to Mt Washington... all these shining stars in his spiritual heaven.

Oliver Black described his inner state at that time in colorful words: “When I first met him (at 38 years) I was afraid to get half a mile away from a drug store. I was a regular hypochondriac. Took pills for laxatives, aspirins for headaches, and probably would have taken tranquilizers if they’d had them. I was a victim of inner pressures too, like all of my colleagues. Besides running a successful company, I studied and taught a small philosophy class. We were trying to find an answer to man’s existence.”²

The outward search for truth was now over. “Yogananda taught where to find it. You might say he handed me a blueprint, and I’ve been following it ever since.”²

However, the change Oliver Black made was not as big as Yogananda would have liked. His dharma was different than Rajarsi’s: for many years Yogananda encouraged Oliver Black to withdraw from his business, and start teaching other truth-seekers. “Yogananda kept telling me to get out of business, but I just wouldn’t listen.”

True, Oliver Black was the leader of the SRF center in Detroit, but his guru had much greater plans for him. In May 1951, he wrote him: “With your organizational power you can do something much greater, much more lasting, much easier, and much more secure than present-day business organizations in which one works to pay taxes, ruining his health and happiness. Detroit, being in the center of the United States, has a great opportunity to draw true seekers, both from the East and West. I would like nothing better than for you to establish a sub-headquarters there.”

In August, 1951, Yogananda gave Oliver Black in a ceremony the spiritual title of “Yogacharya,”² together with Rev. Bernard Cole and about five others. That was also the time when Yogananda gave Rajarsi his sannyas vows, the orange robe, and his monastic name. There is a photo which shows that ceremony (Bhaktananda is seen on it too). Researchers can find it on the internet.

After his last meeting with Oliver Black, Yogananda lovingly remarked, “Did you see God in his eyes?”²

Yogananda passed on soon after that, in March 1952. It was a year of dramatic change for Oliver Black. Yogananda had repeatedly told him that if he did not leave his business willingly, something would happen to force him into the spiritual direction. And so it happened. In 1952, through a hostile stock-market takeover, Oliver Black lost most of what he had built up with so much effort, and most of his wealth. He still remained a moderately wealthy man, though. But now he retired from his business”|finally!

A new phase started in his life: he created a Yoga school (Yogacharya Oliver Black's Self-realization yoga), in which he taught Yoga asanas, and trained other teachers-again with huge success.

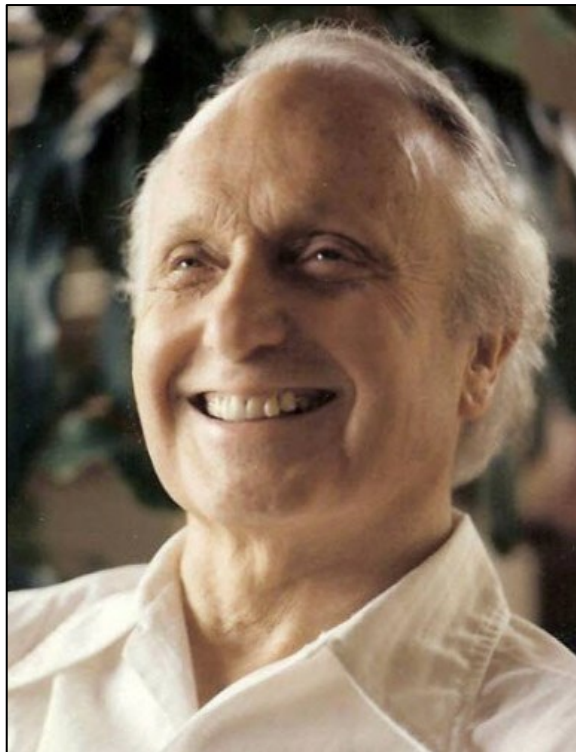
In 1966, his weekly Sunday meditation and lecture services were attended by 200-300 people! His hatha yoga teachers were reaching thousands of students! And his yearly “Festival of Yoga”² in Detroit was attended by over 3000 seekers. His was the most successful yoga and meditation activity in the United States at that time!

Oliver Black's main focus, of course, was teaching meditation, and the deeper aspects of yoga. He initiated all of his yoga teachers in the highest techniques of meditation. But for some reason, in the early 70ies his success began to fade.

By 1971, he had sold off all his properties except for a beautiful, forested 800-acre land near Gaylord, Michigan, which became his full-time yoga retreat, called “Song of the Morning Ranch.”² There he lived and taught, together with Bob Raymor, another direct disciple of Yogananda. The retreat still functions today, though Yogananda's Kriya message seems not very central there anymore.

Oliver Black was known for his luminous face, his infectious laughter, his divine love and friendship. He uncannily knew people's thoughts, and many a miracle is told from his life. He lived up to 96 years- ever remaining young, healthy and active.

His passing was beautiful. It happened on September 16, 1989. He died as only an advanced yogi can. Throughout his last day, he went into meditation. Then came the time for his final exit: he arranged himself in the lotus posture, and sat quietly. His gaze was turned upward, fixing the point between the eyebrows. His soul at that moment left the body gloriously. The body gently fell backward, remaining in the perfect lotus pose, while his soul was streaming upwards. Oliver Black had consciously entered the realm of Bliss.



5) Reverend Bernard Cole

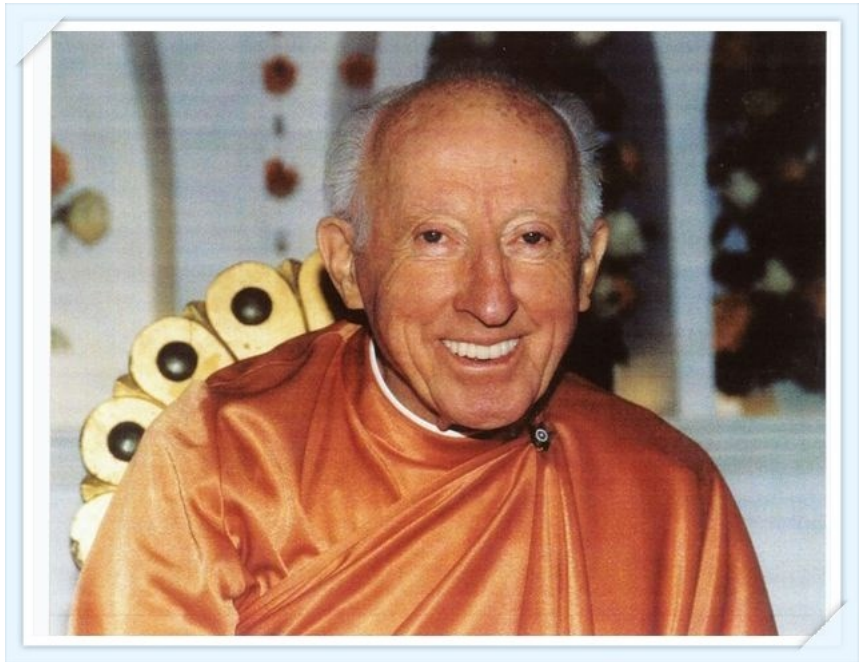
Reverend Bernard, 1922 – late 1970s): he was unmarried when Yogananda made him a Yogacharya, but his mindset was that “I would have married in any case.” After Yogananda’s passing, he left SRF because of “organizational issues within SRF and the dogmatic limitations of the framework in which his guru’s teachings were being placed. One such tradition was the monastic vow of celibacy. Marriage was simply not allowed for resident teaching members of SRF... To marry meant he would no longer be allowed to represent the Self-realization teachings of his guru.”



6) Reverend K Michael

More touching was the experience of another disciple, Rev. Michael, who, feeling deep love for Master, would often repeat the words mentally, "I love you, Guru."

One day Master responded to his silent offering. The two of them happened to meet in the hermitage garden at Encinitas. With a gaze of deep tenderness, the Guru said, "I love you, too."



7) Mildred Hamilton

From Wikipedia: “Mildred (Mother) Hamilton, 1925, Seattle. Hamilton was made the center leader for Self-Realization Fellowship in Seattle, WA, and ordained a minister in 1950 by Yogananda.[15] He gave her the title Yogacharya in 1951 – one of six worldwide.[16] After Yogananda went into Mahasamadhi (Yogi's final exit from the body), she continued as center leader until 1958 when she was dismissed from her role as a center leader in SRF.[independent source needed] After that she continued on her own and held meetings in her disciples' homes and centers in the Northwest and Canada. She was a lifelong disciple of Yogananda's and never formed her own organization. Hamilton also had great reverence for Swami Ramdas who she says helped her gain complete Realization of God after Yogananda's Mahasamadhi. She died on 31 January 1991.”



Mother attained Mahasamadhi on 31 January 1991.

A story from Mother about one of her visits to Yogananda

My love for my Guru was so great that I would have walked from here to Los Angeles to be with him. I wouldn't miss an opportunity, ever. I worked and worked and worked each time I had the opportunity to go, until I finally made it.

And I may have told you this before, but the last time I was there—we didn't have any money—and just at the last minute I wanted to go so badly the money was provided and we were able to go.

So I was telling the Master this, how grateful I was that God had arranged it so I could be with him, and he called one of the sisters and whispered in her ear. Pretty soon, she came back and put something in his hands. And he gave me \$20.

I said, "I can't accept this from you, sir.[...] I wasn't telling you, to ask for money. I was just telling you to show how good God had been so that I could come and be with you."

He said, "Take it."

And I said, "No, sir. I don't want it."

He said, "I want you to take it." And I refused and refused.

And finally, he said, "Mildred, take it!"

So I said, "Yes, sir."

And this is Mothers message to any sincere seeker of God...

This is my constant prayer for you at all times, that you be lifted up and that you can come face-to-face with the Lord within yourselves.[...] Release this imprisoned splendor within yourself so that it may shine for all the world to see, and that those who contact you will become changed as a result of having known you. You will find that your life becomes totally different, that you are totally different people, and that you find joy and happiness no matter what you have to go through. I find that so in my own life. No matter how much pain I have, still I am never separated from God. He is always with me. I sit and talk to Him and He answers me in my own consciousness. And it is a beautiful, a wonderful experience, one that I hope that each one of you will have. And I ask God's blessings upon you all.