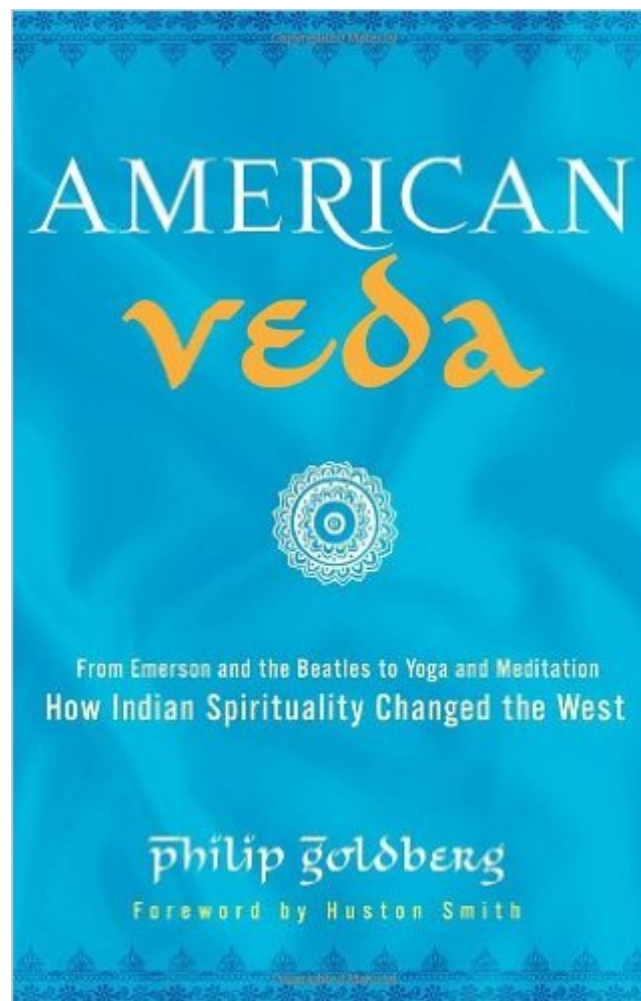


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American Veda: From Emerson And The Beatles To Yoga And Meditation How Indian Spirituality Changed The West



Synopsis

In February 1968 the Beatles went to India for an extended stay with their new guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. It may have been the most momentous spiritual retreat since Jesus spent those forty days in the wilderness. With these words, Philip Goldberg begins his monumental work, *American Veda*, a fascinating look at India's remarkable impact on Western culture. This eye-opening popular history shows how the ancient philosophy of Vedanta and the mind-body methods of Yoga have profoundly affected the worldview of millions of Americans and radically altered the religious landscape. What exploded in the 1960s actually began more than two hundred years earlier, when the United States started importing knowledge as well as tangy spices and colorful fabrics from Asia. The first translations of Hindu texts found their way into the libraries of John Adams and Ralph Waldo Emerson. From there the ideas spread to Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and succeeding generations of receptive Americans, who absorbed India's science of consciousness and wove it into the fabric of their lives. Charismatic teachers like Swami Vivekananda and Paramahansa Yogananda came west in waves, prompting leading intellectuals, artists, and scientists such as Aldous Huxley, Joseph Campbell, Allen Ginsberg, J. D. Salinger, John Coltrane, Dean Ornish, and Richard Alpert, aka Ram Dass, to adapt and disseminate what they learned from them. The impact has been enormous, enlarging our current understanding of the mind and body and dramatically changing how we view ourselves and our place in the cosmos. Goldberg paints a compelling picture of this remarkable East-to-West transmission, showing how it accelerated through the decades and eventually moved from the counterculture into our laboratories, libraries, and living rooms. Now physicians and therapists routinely recommend meditation, words like karma and mantra are part of our everyday vocabulary, and Yoga studios are as ubiquitous as Starbucks. The insights of India's sages permeate so much of what we think, believe, and do that they have redefined the meaning of life for millions of Americans and continue to do so every day. Rich in detail and expansive in scope, *American Veda* shows how we have come to accept and live by the central teaching of Vedic wisdom: "Truth is one, the wise call it by many names."

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All of Philip Goldberg's 19 books, from his earliest (The Intuitive Edge, Natural Sleep) through his collaborations with prominent psychotherapists (Making Peace With Your Past, Get Out Of Your Own Way) up to his latest (Roadsigns on the Spiritual Path) have contributed something useful to the community. But American Veda is his crowning achievement. It is the fascinating story of how Indian philosophy and Indian teachers have literally transformed American life, starting with the New England Transcendentalist writers (Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman) who discovered Vedanta in a handful of books, through the arrival on our shores of Swami Vivekenanda, Paramahansa Yogananda, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and other prominent gurus, to the present-day crop of teachers - both Indian and American-born - who have been influenced by these visionary pioneers. We are living at a time of a profound awakening of consciousness that is changing the world. Much of that awakening is due to the influence of Indian spirituality and its practical applications. If you are one of the estimated 20 million Americans who practice Yoga, if you meditate or enjoy kirtan chanting, if you have been turned on to the spiritual path by Autobiography of a Yogi or Be Here Now, read books by Eckhart Tolle, Deepak Chopra, J. D. Salinger or Joseph Campbell, or followed the healthcare advice of Dr. Dean Ornish, Indian teachers and teachings are a part of your life. As Huston Smith, the highly-esteemed scholar of world religions, said in his Foreword to Goldberg's book, "Vedanta quietly surfaces in the daily lives of Americans. Yoga, karma, meditation, enlightenment are now household words. How that came about needed to be documented, and Philip Goldberg has done just that.

American Veda is a thorough, comprehensive, balanced and informative report of the tremendous influence of Vedic thought in the United States; from the most obvious literary filters that came through in the 19th century and early 20th centuries (fine treatment of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman) to the more subtle reformation of key Vedic concepts into "Americanese" by the late 20th

and early 21st centuries. The author provides a good taste of the deeper esoteric models of mystical experience, without overwhelming the beginner reader who may be still lingering at lower stages of integration. Yet, for the more advanced learner the author gives plenty of historical material that is fascinating and helps thread the missing pieces of fabric. There is no doubt in my mind that any serious student of American spirituality should have this book on their shelf. As well, aspirants who are beginning their journey beyond the spiritual kindergarten of religion should read this book before venturing too far out beyond the shore. The author's comments on "fallen gurus" never come across as judgmental or biased. Now this is exceptional reporting at its best. Goldberg's chronicles of more recent integrations of science (i.e. quantum theory) and eastern structures of consciousness/reality are superb. I have been impressed by some of the more recent dialogue which is learning more about the limits of the brain; i.e. that this organ is not a creator but a transmitter/processor of thought. The author's use of the metaphor of the "tv. set" to describe the primary function of the brain is useful and accessible to the layperson.

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