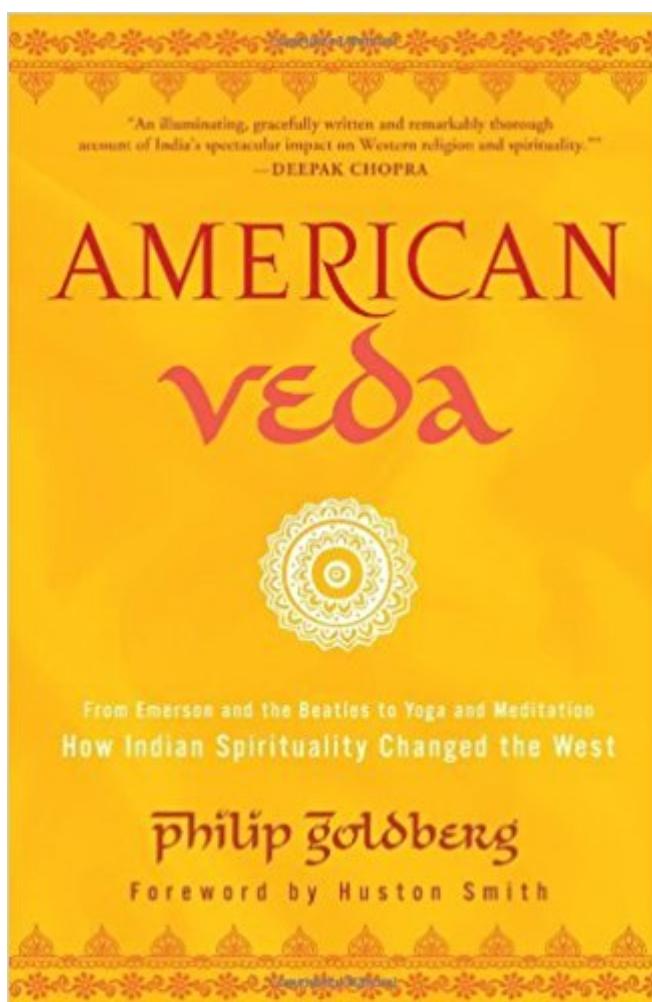


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American Veda: From Emerson And The Beatles To Yoga And Meditation How Indian Spirituality Changed The West



Synopsis

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, following the Beatles trip to India for an extended stay with their new guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 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."

Book Information

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Harmony; 1 edition (May 14, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0385521359

ISBN-13: 978-0385521352

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 80 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #54,260 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in Books > History > World > Religious > Hinduism #69 in Books > History > World > Religious > General #88 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Hinduism

Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Spiritual coach and author Goldberg (Roadsigns) is a knowledgeable and sympathetic chronicler of the past 150 years or so of Indian spiritual ideas' influence on American spirituality. Correctly starting with Emerson and American transcendentalism, Goldberg follows a trail that gets broader, more diverse, and more powerful until yoga is as American as Starbucks, and "spiritual but not religious" becomes a cultural catchphrase describing millions whose notions of the transcendent are more shaped by India's Sanatana Dharma (Eternal Religion) than by Yankee divines and Southern Baptists. Goldberg sorts gurus and systems of yoga, correctly understanding the spiritual aspects of what many Americans think of as a physical fitness discipline. He's on point in tracing the influence of the spiritual philosophy of Vedanta on a legion of influential artists and writers beyond the titular ones--think John Coltrane and the late J.D. Salinger. This book fills a void; scholars have mined the subject of Indian spiritual philosophy, but mostly for the academy, despite the broad impact of Vedantism on popular culture. Goldberg gets it. (Nov.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Starred Review Although Veda is not a household word for many Americans, yoga, guru, and karma are commonplace, and each is rooted in Vedic, or Indian, spirituality, which "evolved from the Vedas, the world's oldest sacred texts." A spiritual counselor and interfaith minister as well as an author, Goldberg delineates the Vedic tradition which encompasses Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, and involves meditation and yoga. Then traces its flowering in the U.S., from its profound impact on Emerson to the "Vedic bonfire of the 1960s," the Transcendental Meditation movement of the 1970s, and today's passion for hatha yoga. Because Veda, which translates as "knowledge," respects all religious practices, "recognizes a transcendent Oneness," and embraces science, it has particular appeal for Americans who identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious." In relaxed control of a veritable ocean of material, Goldberg provides lively profiles of influential Vedic gurus, including Krishnamurti, Vivekananda, Paramahansa Yogananda,

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and B. K. S. Iyengar, and such key followers as the Beatles, Joseph Campbell, Thomas Merton, John Coltrane, J. D. Salinger, Eckhart Tolle, and Deepak Chopra. From meditating movie stars, scandalous gurus, and psychedelic drugs to genuine spiritual breakthroughs and devotion to helping others, Goldberg's history of American Veda takes measure of a powerful, if underappreciated, force. --Donna Seaman --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This excellent book relates, probably for the first time in a single volume, the history of Hindu-inspired religious movements in America. Unlike the equally excellent volume by Lola Williamson, 'Transcendent in America,' which focuses in great depth upon three such movements (Transcendental Meditation, Siddha Yoga, and Self-Realization Fellowship), 'American Veda' has a wide scope that includes not only these three important groups, but also the Vedanta Society, ISKCON, and a host of other institutions and personalities, as well as the more diffused but nevertheless pervasive influence of Hindu thought upon the American ethos, consciousness, and cultural lexicon. From karma to gurus to yoga, it's all here. The author, a TM practitioner, writes as a sympathetic insider, but also with a sufficient degree of detachment and integrity to assure the reader that the material is presented in a way that is fair and reasonably unbiased. (Everyone has a bias, after all.) Bringing the many fascinating personalities that it covers to life in a way that is vivid, informative, and even entertaining, Philip Goldberg's book is neither hagiography nor hatchet job. Based on solid research, but also written in a highly accessible fashion, American Veda is a very good starting point for anyone who is interested in learning more about the influence of Hinduism in America. As one of the people who is mentioned in the book, I can also say that reading 'American Veda' is a wonderful way to contextualize one's own practice in the larger history of the movement of which it is a part. Goldberg "gets it." He understands what draws many of us to these movements, as well as the various challenges and drawbacks that they face. His writing rings true. I think his chronicle of what may yet emerge as a distinctively American form of Hinduism will continue to be a valuable reference work for many decades to come.

I've followed Philip Goldberg since he published his book "Intuitive Edge." in 1983. In this book, Philip expresses an insightful overview of the Perennial Philosophy and the world's great Wisdom Traditions — Vedantism, Neo-Platonism, Sufism, Buddhism, Taoism, Hermetic and Cabalistic philosophies — with a well-grounded awareness of how these mystical traditions have influenced human culture internationally.

There truly is NOTHING new under the Sun! Reading American Veda shows us that all that much of what we know as New Thought or New Age is really just very ancient philosophy that we have adapted to our modern life. Ancient East Indian philosophy (Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.) runs throughout much of our modern spiritual traditions. And while many like to believe all this is new, it's really not. It's not a secret; it isn't something hidden that you have to spend a lot of money on to find out about it. It's right there for everyone - we are all ONE. We are of ONE MIND. A great history of how the Eastern Philosophy of Hinduism threaded its way into the Western spiritual traditions of New Thought and New Age.

This is by far the best book I've read chronicling how extensively the Vedic tradition has influenced America. It's a pure delight - Goldberg's prose style really flows, and he treats all groups and movements with great respect. This book was obviously a labor of love for the author. I'm a longtime student of the Vedic tradition, and I gained new insights into how broadly it has penetrated America. American Veda should quickly find its way onto Sociology of Religion reading lists on many university campuses. In addition, "seekers" can use American Veda as a reliable guide book on their journey.

With Vedantic terms like "yoga," "karma," "mantra" and "meditation" so commonplace, it's surprising that the term "Vedanta" is relatively unknown in America and around the world. Reading Philip Goldberg's fascinating and comprehensive exploration of Vedanta's influence is surely one way to remedy that. In "American Veda," Mr. Goldberg reveals how Vedantic concepts such as the unity of existence and "One Truth, many paths" came to be incorporated in the fabric of American society. He shows us how this ancient philosophy has influenced and continues to influence not only the way we think about spirituality and religion, but also how its concepts have impacted modern health care, psychology and the arts. His extensive research turns up many interesting facts and stories that he expertly threads through the text. I knew, for example, that the Beatles' John Lennon and George Harrison were influenced by Indian thought, but had no idea that T.S. Eliot studied Vedantic texts, Sanskrit and Pali. Goldberg carefully chronicles the arrival, unique approach to the Vedas and impact of the many gurus and teachers--Indian as well as American-born. Although very readable, it can feel somewhat encyclopedic at times. In spite of being very much involved in yoga and meditation since the 1960s, Goldberg manages an unbiased, non-judgmental treatment of the subject--including the occasional scandal and controversy. The transparency is refreshing. This is a

valuable reference text that I hope makes its way onto the shelves of our public libraries and into the hands of anyone interested in spirituality, religion and especially Vedanta's influence in America.- by Anna Hourihan, publisher and editor of "Children of Immortal Bliss," an introduction to the Vedanta teachings of India.

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