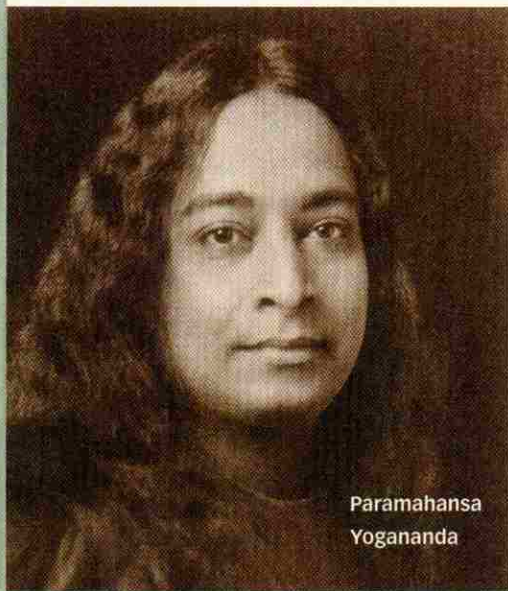


SPECIAL REPORT

Who Owns Yogananda?

A court decision between two spiritual groups ends with the promise of a harmonious future.



Paramahansa
Yogananda

TWO FEUDING SCHOOLS of spirituality say that they are ready to relinquish the past and work toward friendship and harmony, thanks in part to a recent court decision. At the end of October 2002, a 12-year legal battle between the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) and the Ananda Church of Self-Realization was brought to a close by the outcome of a final, four-week trial. "We have been saddened by the fact that we've been sued by the organization that our common guru started, and we're very, very happy that it's over," says John Novak, spiritual director for Ananda.

Until now the two groups were unable to overcome their differences because of their similarities. Paramahansa Yogananda, a leader in bringing yoga to the U.S., founded SRF in 1920. J. Donald Walters (Kriyananda), a disciple of Yogananda, founded Ananda in 1968, six years after being asked to resign from the SRF board of directors. The dispute started in 1990 when Ananda, who earlier began to publish some of Yogananda's writings and recordings, changed its name to the Ananda Church of Self-Realization.

This led to what SRF's board of directors felt was "tremendous confusion" about the identities of the two organizations. SRF acquired a trademark, wrote letters to Ananda, and ultimately filed a lawsuit and two appeals. "We're peace-loving people—for most people who devote themselves to a life of meditation and spiritual practice, the last thing you want to do is get into a conflict or a confrontation," says SRF spokesperson Brother Chidananda. But, Chidananda says, SRF saw the need to establish a "definite degree of clarity between the organization Yogananda created himself and any spin-off organization." Although each group says it has wished for harmonious relations all along, neither could agree on issues in the lawsuit even two weeks before the final court ruling. Both groups also say they are happy with the outcome—even though on the surface, SRF lost most of the lawsuit.

The court determined that SRF did not have sole rights to the term "self-realization" nor to the name and likeness of Paramahansa Yogananda. A judge also recommended that Ananda keep "ananda" as part of its name in addition to "Church of Self-Realization," to which the group complied. And though some of Yogananda's writings were already of the public domain, the court did recognize SRF's ownership of some of his writings and sound recordings. The court ordered Ananda to pay SRF about \$29,000 for its earnings from the distribution of sound recordings ruled to be owned by SRF. But Ananda does not have to pay any damages to SRF, since its use of the printed materials was for educational and religious purposes. More important than the court decision, however, is the walk-away agreement to which both organizations committed. "The world needs examples of harmony and cooperation among spiritual groups," says Novak. "It's time for this negativity to end." —Carolyn Edy

READERS SPEAK OUT

Which do you prefer, group classes or home practice?



DIANE PIREZ O'CONNOR
Livermore, California

I like to work out in a yoga studio. I enjoy having the assistance from another yogi and the social aspect of meeting other people who also practice. Financial reasons and the fact that the studio is about 25 minutes away haven't made it possible for me to continue attending this particular studio. Private yoga sessions are too expensive—they cost about \$100/hour—so I continue to work out on my own via videotapes I purchase and learning tips from *Yoga Journal*.



DENISE BOUCHARD
New Brunswick, Canada

I have a fairly regular home practice. I attend class once a week and enjoy it, but I mostly prefer my home practice, because I can work at my own speed and I am able to concentrate better—although I don't get the benefit of my teacher's knowledge and assistance. I sometimes have questions for my teacher I try to slide in when I go to class, but I find this is irritating to the rest of the class, because they want to do asanas for the one-and-a-half hours. For my part I like the 15 minutes or so of discussion we sometimes have before starting asanas. My teacher is aware of this and now tries to give information throughout the class.



LORI MALLOY
Bismarck, North Dakota

I enjoy doing my home practice twice a week. I don't do it alone, however. I always invite one or two of my yoga friends over, and we enjoy each other's energy and support our weaknesses. In the summer we move our home practice to a friend's house who has no children at home for peace. In this scenario no one has to be in the teacher's role because we follow the Primary and Intermediate Ashtanga Yoga Series on practice cards.

