Doctor Lewis
Dr. Lewis Biography

Dr. Lewis was born on March 26, 1893 in Somerville, Massachusetts, the son of Stephen and Laura Lewis. He had two sisters, Grace and Laura, and a brother, Wilbur. He graduated from High School in 1911 in West Somerville. He received his D.M.D. (Doctor of Dental Medicine) degree in 1914 and began his dental practice. In 1916 Dr. Lewis married Mildred M. Wentworth. They had two children, Bradford and Brenda.

Dr. Lewis’s wife, Mildred, met Paramahansa Yogananda before Doctor did. Paramahansaji arrived in America in September 1920 and was attending the International Congress of Religious Liberals as the Indian delegate. After addressing the congress, he accepted numerous invitations to speak before churches and philosophical groups. Mrs. Lewis attended one of the lectures and was invited to meet Swami Yogananda. She returned home to tell Dr. Lewis about the Swami from India.
He was very interested and asked many questions. Many were eager to know more about this mysterious Swami from India. Later a meeting was arranged for Dr. Lewis to meet with Swami Yogananda on Christmas Eve.

After showing Dr Lewis how to see the light of the spiritual eye, and giving him other spiritual instruction, Paramahansaji asked him if he thought other Americans would be interested in these teachings. Doctor replied that they would.

“Then,” the Guru replied, “after you practice what I have taught you, if these techniques of meditation appeal to you and benefit you, will you help others to know about them?”
“I certainly will,” Doctor said.

Dr Lewis said some time later about this meeting with his Guru: “As we sat together on the tigerskin rug enjoying God’s presence, and I looked into his face, I saw no show of consciousness of superior ability. He might well have expressed it; for to be able, by such great calmness and realization, to help another to feel the Divine Consciousness is no mean accomplishment. But instead there was present an expression of humbleness, love, and supreme satisfaction that another of God’s children was able, like himself, to enjoy the presence and bliss of the Lord, our common Father. Such humility has been and always will be a deep inspiration to me. To my mind, it is a characteristic of true greatness.”

Dr. and Brenda Lewis, 1923
Dr Lewis said, “That is why I have been interested in Self-Realization Fellowship, and that is why I have tried to help; because I knew that some good, some great good, would come from Paramahansa Yogananda. America has given me much, and I am thankful for it; but there is one thing that America did not give me, and that is the spiritual realization and understanding I received from India; they came to me from Paramahansa Yogananda.”

Doctor had promised to decorate the family Christmas tree; instead, his Guru had illuminated for him the inner spinal Christmas tree. Often afterward, when telling of this divine awakening, Doctor said, “It was my first real Christmas!”
With the help of Doctor and Sister Yogamata, Paramahansaji started a meditation group of Yogada students. Doctor was in charge of this group for many years when Paramahansaji started his lecture tours in 1923. Doctor and Sister Yogamata gave generously whenever help was needed. In addition to sponsoring his lectures, they also gave financial aid when Paramahansaji undertook the building of a little hermitage at Hardy’s Pond in 1922. Here the Boston group of Yogada students enjoyed many hours of meditation with the Guru.

During this time, Doctor was investing in the stock market. In those days, before the Security Exchange Commission, one could buy on margin, that is, not having to put up much money. Doctor had figured the market was going up as it was the roaring twenties, but it dropped precipitously and Doctor was out $500,000, which in today’s money would translate into millions. Mrs. Lewis said he was sweating blood. Several days later the market shot up and he got out debt free.
He noticed Master was calm and collected through the trying days and Doctor asked him, “How can you stay so calm at a time like this?” Master replied, “The same Father who protects me protects you. He is our common Father.”

Dr. and Mama Lewis, Borrego, 1956

Doctor told of an incident when he became aware in a divine way of the Guru’s need for financial assistance.
“I had started one day from my home, where Swamaji was staying at the time, and had not gone far when suddenly I felt I must go back and give him some financial aid. This was just as clear to me as if an audible voice had said, ‘Turn around and go back and help.’ I felt through intuition that Lahiri Mahasaya and Sri Yukteswar were both asking me to do something; and so strong was the feeling, I turned right around, went back, and gave him the assistance he required. When I did, his eyes filled with tears, because he knew that God had responded to his needs, and that the Divine Voice had silently spoken to me.”
Incidentally, the average person sitting out on those rocks at that time of year would experience hypothermia within 20 minutes, and yet these great yogis stayed there for five hours, a testimony to their advanced spiritual state.

Paramahansaji continued to spread his message in Boston and Dr Lewis assumed the leadership of the Boston Center when the Master went to New York City in late 1923. Paramahansaji then began a cross-country tour and in 1925 acquired Mount Washington Estates in Los Angeles, Ca and made it the headquarters of Self-Realization Fellowship. He continued his speaking tours for a number of years. The Boston Center continued to thrive with Dr. Lewis conducting the services.
Dr. Lewis traveled to Los Angeles to be present for the second Convocation of Self-Realization Fellowship members held in December 1937. Dr. Lewis spoke and his words were drawn from a well of love for Paramahansaji.

“I chose the subject, “My Guru,’ because that theme is nearest and dearest to me. All spiritual realization that I have or hope to have I owe to him, my guru, Paramahansa Yogananda. When I first sat at his feet, back in 1920, my heart was filed with honest doubt. But when he taught me and I saw the compassion in his eyes, I was overwhelmed. Something sprang up within me that had been sleeping, something that I had forgotten; and it has been present with me ever since. Ordinary human ties and friendships pale in the light of that divine relationship between master and disciple.

“Many times I came to Paramahansaji with my troubles, but I could not disturb his calmness. I remember that I said to him on one of these occasions, ‘How is it you are able to have such courage and conviction?’ He replied, ‘Doctor, remember: the same Father who protects me, protects you. He is our common Father.’ That thought has been a source of inspiration as I have plodded along the path.”
The Lewis’s became regular cross-country travelers, making two trips from Boston every year – one in the summer and one in the Christmas-holiday period. Also, Dr. Lewis was present for the dedication of the SRF Golden Lotus Temple in Encinitas in 1938; the temple in Hollywood in 1942 and the San Diego Temple in 1943.

In discussing the effect that the teachings had on his life, Dr. Lewis said: “I think Paramahansaji’s most potent weapon is the example of his wonderful character. Today he is dedicating a temple. I want to say that 23 years ago he also dedicated to God another kind of temple – a shrine within my soul. The light of that temple has been with me ever since and has been my deepest inspiration.”

Lewis’ House at 24 Electric Ave. in Boston where Yogananda lived with the Lewis family 1920-23
Move to Encinitas

In September 1945 Dr. and Mrs. Lewis left Boston to reside at the SRF Encinitas Ashram Center. In addition to his spiritual duties in Encinitas, in 1946 Dr. Lewis took over the supervision of the papaya grove operated by Self-Realization Fellowship. In 1946 Dr. Lewis was made a member of the Board of Directors of Self-Realization Fellowship. He was also made a vice-president in that same year.
The members from Encinitas and San Diego regularly attended the Thursday evening services Dr. Lewis conducted. Paramahansaji said, “On Thursday nights you should come to meditate in the Hermitage with Dr. Lewis, who is a very wonderful, spiritual man. In his company you will feel great happiness... He and his wife, during the 28 years that I have known them, have led exemplary lives. Doctor’s presence itself will be of great help to you. Dr. and Mrs. Lewis were among my first friends in Boston. Those who have been our friends in need we remember always. I have never forgotten those early days. Dr. Lewis has steadfastly followed this path with great zeal. So be sure to come on Thursday nights to hear him. He gives not only words, but the Spirit behind the words.”

In the spring of 1950 Dr. Lewis began conducting Sunday services at the San Diego Temple. He often shared uplifting stories about Paramahansaji. Drawing on his personal experiences, he was able to bring light and life to his talks on the value of the Guru’s teachings, and to illustrate the bond of unconditional love and friendship that exists between the guru and every sincere disciple. Doctor said, “The guru supports the disciple. He may be stern – the Master used to be terrifically stern with me – but when I needed his help, he always gave it to me. He didn’t coddle me. The guru gives strength and support, not coddling.”

Doctor then told the story of when he was to assist the Master in leading the All-Day Christmas Meditation. The night before, Dr Lewis had been stricken with a serious back problem, which left him unable to move and in a great deal of pain. Paramahansaji would come to his room bringing a heating pad or something else to ease the pain. He was just like a mother – concerned for his welfare. In the morning Dr. Lewis was still immobilized with pain. Paramahansaji said that he must attend the meditation. He helped Dr. Lewis get up and get to the meditation.
During the meditation Doctor was blessed with tremendous spiritual realizations. The great spiritual eye of divine perception was revealed to him, and his consciousness entered the light and beauty of the subtle astral realms. Doctor said, “If the Master had coddled me rather than supporting and encouraging me I would not have received the great blessing that came that day. If you can get into that light of God, no pain or anything else can touch you. In that consciousness there is nothing to be afraid of, nothing to worry about. There is nothing but peace and joy and security. Each of us has to be able to enter that light consciously. Regular meditation and devotion, following the path of Self-Realization, will bring you to that blessed state.”

Dr. Lewis was the master of ceremonies at the 1951 Convocation and he said: “Paramahansaji showed me the great light of God, and told me: ‘If you cling to this path and regularly meditate, this vision will be your own always.’ And so I followed his advice. I never missed in my practice of Kriya Yoga. Gradually the light of God came in. What I received, I received from the Master. He lifted me from the uncertainty of delusion into the light of Reality.
When that experience comes it changes the heart. Then we feel the real brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God. Self-Realization teachings give you the realization of the Infinite Light whence all things come. Do your Kriya regularly. You will realize the allness of God, and in His omnipresence nothing inharmonious can touch you. As the Master often says, ‘You can stand unshaken amidst the crash of breaking worlds.’" 

On March 7, 1952 at a banquet for the ambassador from India, Paramahansaji entered mahasamadhi (a great yogi’s final conscious exit from the body).

Dr. Lewis continued to serve Paramahansaji’s work with unchanging enthusiasm, as he did in everything he undertook. No matter how trying the circumstances, he kept on faithfully for Master. To the end of his days he kept a heavy schedule of classes and services, traveling back and forth each week between his home in Encinitas and the temples in San Diego and Hollywood. He was also called upon to preside at various ceremonies and to represent Self-Realization Fellowship at important public meetings. His administrative duties at the Encinitas Ashram Center and various special assignments were considerable. He also gave generously of his time to Self-Realization Fellowship students who sought counseling on the teachings. His heart and mind had long been dedicated to tireless service, and he continued his selfless activity. He had but one wish – to live constantly in the consciousness of his divine Guru and his supreme God, and to impart something of that spiritual ardor to those who came to him. The spiritual zeal that had kept him in harness all these years enabled him to fulfill his great desire to be faithful unto death. Greatest of all, Dr. Lewis remained faithful to his search for ever-higher heights of God-realization through Kriya Yoga.
Doctor often said that he would like to get a little place in the desert, where the atmosphere is dry. Well, it did come – in Borrego Springs. Each week Doctor and Mrs. Lewis would go to Borrego, leaving either late on Monday evening or early Tuesday morning. They would stay until Thursday afternoon and return in time for Doctor to give the Thursday evening lecture, which took place in the Hermitage in Encinitas. Summer and winter, this program went on. Doctor would have Wednesday as his long meditation day; Wednesday evening and Thursday, he would prepare for the Sunday sermon he gave at the San Diego Temple. Once a month, he also gave a Hollywood Sunday service and an evening meditation service at Lake Shrine.
Dr. Lewis made his exit from the body in the true yogic tradition, demonstrating with his last breath what devotion to God, Guru, and Kriya Yoga can do for loyal followers of the Self-Realization path.

Doctor entered Scripps Memorial Hospital in La Jolla for a rest and medical tests on April 7, 1960. Following is an account of Dr. Lewis’s passing given by Mrs. Lewis: “At 7 pm he said he would take a nap. He slept very peacefully until 7:30, when he awakened and told me, ‘I want to sit up straight.’ I arranged the pillows at his back as he assumed the lotus pose for his usual evening meditation. His hands were upturned, his eyes closed. I sat beside the bed, thinking that I too would meditate. I was aroused in 2 or 3 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. Then all was over.”

Dear Doctor, your fellow disciples can well believe Gurudeva’s beautiful words to you: “Be not afraid, child of the Eternal Lightning! March on with unperturbed, steady steps, elbowing your way through a million darknesses. Why, what is the body? What is this passing show? They are soon gone; but the candles that you are lighting and burning in your Father’s house will show you your path here and hereafter.”
By his example Doctor inspired many to seek the Divine. The sweet simplicity of his life, his untiring spirit of service, and his great love for God and Guru cannot be forgotten. May his life inspire us to use our lives to strive ever more earnestly, devoutly, with humility and love in our hearts, to seek and serve our Beloved God.