



Wee Kirk o'the Heather

Forest Lawn Memorial-Park

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May 16, 1952

Self-Realization Fellowship
3880 San Rafael Avenue
Los Angeles 65
California

Gentlemen:

The absence of any visual signs of decay in the dead body of Paramhansa Yogananda offers the most extraordinary case in our experience. Had the muscle protein and blood stream of the deceased not been comparatively free of bacteria, deterioration of the body could have set in as early as six hours after life had departed. No physical disintegration was visible in Paramhansa Yogananda's body even twenty days after death.

The body was under daily observation at the Mortuary of the Forest Lawn Memorial-Park Association from March 11, 1952, the day of the last public rites, until March 27, 1952, when the bronze casket was sealed by fire. During this period no indication of mold was visible on Paramhansa Yogananda's skin, and no visible desiccation (drying up) took place in the bodily tissues. This state of perfect preservation of a body is, so far as we know from mortuary annals, an unparalleled one.

Officials of Forest Lawn viewed the body of Paramhansa Yogananda an hour after his death on March 7, 1952. The body was then taken to his home on Mount Washington in Los Angeles, where many friends gathered to gaze at his form.

For protection of the public health, embalming is desirable if a dead body is to be exposed for several days to public view. Embalming of the body of Paramhansa Yogananda took place twenty-four hours after his demise. In normal room-temperature, the enzyme action of the intestines of deceased persons causes distention of the tissues in the abdominal region about six hours after death. Such distention did not occur at any time in the case of Paramhansa Yogananda. When

Nothing in Los Angeles gives me a finer thrill than Forest Lawn

Bruce Barton

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our Mortuary received his body for embalming, it presented no signs of physical deterioration and no putrefactive odor -- two very unusual absences when a death has occurred twenty-four hours earlier.

Paramhansa Yogananda's body was embalmed on the night of March 8th, with that quantity of fluid which is customarily used in any body of similar size. No unusual treatment was given.

In cases of persons that are embalmed and exhibited to friends for a period of two or three weeks, it is necessary, to insure presentability, for the embalmer to apply, on the face and hands of the deceased, a creamy pore-sealing emulsion that temporarily prevents the outward appearance of mold. In Paramhansa Yogananda's case, however, no emulsions were used. They were superfluous, inasmuch as his tissues underwent no visible transformations.

After embalming on the night of March 8th, the body of Paramhansa Yogananda was returned to the Self-Realization Fellowship headquarters on Mount Washington. At the final public rites there on the afternoon of March 11th, the glass sealer lid of the bronze coffin was fastened securely and was not again removed. His body was never touched again by human hands.

The body in the casket was taken about 10 p.m. on March 11th to our Mortuary for daily observation. The reason for this procedure was the hope of Self-Realization Fellowship officers that two disciples of Paramhansa Yogananda's from India might arrive in Los Angeles sometime in March, when they could be brought to the Mortuary to view the body.

In any sealed casket, into which air cannot enter and from which air cannot escape, the internal moisture of the dead body, whether embalmed or unembalmed, soon forms a white mold on the skin unless the protective cream, not used in this case, is used. The natural characteristic of the muscle protein is to break down into amino acids and then into ptomaine acids. When ptomaine acids become active, deterioration of tissues is rapid. Paramhansa Yogananda's body was apparently devoid of any impurities by which muscle proteins could be resolved into ptomaine acids. His tissues remained intact.

At the time of receiving Paramhansa Yogananda's body, the Mortuary personnel at Forest Lawn expected to observe, through the glass lid of the casket, the usual progressive signs of bodily decay. Our astonishment increased as day followed day without bringing any visible change in the body under observation. Paramhansa Yogananda's body was apparently in a phenomenal state of immutability.

On the late morning of March 26th, we observed a very slight, a barely noticeable, change -- the appearance on the tip of

May 16, 1952

Page three

the nose of a brown spot, about one-fourth inch in diameter. This small faint spot indicated that the process of desiccation (drying up) might finally be starting. No visible mold appeared, however.

The hands at all times remained normal in size, revealing no signs of shriveling or pinching at the fingertips -- the place where desiccation is ordinarily seen very early. The lips, which wore a slight smile, continuously retained their firmness. No odor of decay emanated from Paramhansa Yogananda's body at any time. Although the casket was closed by the heavy glass lid, it was not hermetically sealed. Any odor from the deceased, had it been present, would have been immediately detected by persons standing near the coffin. The volatile nature of odors renders it impossible to conceal their presence, except in rare circumstances that did not here obtain.


As word had been received that the two disciples from India would not be coming to America until 1953, the officers of Self-Realization Fellowship agreed, on March 27, 1952, that entombment of Paramhansa's casket should now take place. The inner glass lid was therefore sealed by fire to the lower part of the casket; the massive bronze cover was then placed on top and secured with mastic sealer and with bolts. The process of sealing by fire was accomplished on March 27th and 28th. The casket was removed on March 28, 1952, to a crypt in the Great Mausoleum in Forest Lawn Memorial-Park, to remain there until such time as permanent enshrinement of the body can be arranged for by the Self-Realization Fellowship.

The physical appearance of Paramhansa Yogananda on March 27th, just before the bronze cover of the casket was put into position, was the same as it had been on March 7th. He looked on March 27th as fresh and as unravaged by decay as he had looked on the night of his death. On March 27th there was no reason to say that his body had suffered any visible physical disintegration at all. For these reasons we state again that the case of Paramhansa Yogananda is unique in our experience.

On May 11, 1952, during a telephone conversation between an officer of Forest Lawn and an officer of Self-Realization Fellowship, the whole amazing story was brought out for the first time. Previously the Fellowship officer had not known the details, as he had not been in touch with the Mortuary Director but only with the Administrative Department of Forest Lawn. In the interests of truth, we are glad to present this written account for publication in Self-Realization Magazine.

Yours sincerely,

FOREST LAWN MEMORIAL-PARK ASSOCIATION, INC.


By 
Harry T. Rowe, Mortuary Director

Self-Realization Fellowship
 May 16, 1952
 Page Four

STATE OF CALIFORNIA,)
) ss.
 COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES.)

On the 16th day of May, 1952 before me, Maxine Chapman, a Notary Public in and for said County and State personally appeared Harry T. Rowe, known to me to be the Mortuary Director of Forest Lawn Memorial-Park Association, Inc. and acknowledged to me that as such Mortuary Director he signed the foregoing letter dated May 16, 1952 addressed to the Self-Realization Fellowship at 3880 San Rafael Avenue, Los Angeles 65, California.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal this day and year first above written.


 Notary Public in and for said
 County and State
 My Commission Expires February 4, 1956