

Brother Craig Chapter, excerpted from

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Chapter 22

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—Craig Marshall

Brother Craig

I first met Craig Marshall many years ago, just before attending the Conference on Precession and Ancient Knowledge (CPAK).

Several of us were taking an early morning hike before the conference started. I was keeping silence, gazing out at the desert and the sky. Abruptly I heard a resounding voice right behind me say: “I think Yogananda is far more than most of us realize.” When I turned around, there stood a pleasant-looking gentleman. I nodded in agreement and answered, “yes, I believe you.” Though we exchanged few words I felt an unspoken kinship in his presence.

Because CPAK focuses on ancient knowledge and research into the vast Yuga Cycles of Time, we always took our college faculty and students. Although the yugas and other ancient knowledge are not discussed in most colleges, in our college we considered understanding where we have been and where we are going a fascinating and mind-expanding experience.

Students in our college have often told me being at this conference and later being able to study and discuss the yuga cycles was one of the highlights of their education.

For the past several years Craig has served as the moderator for CPAK. I had heard he had been a monk with Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) for thirty-five years before leaving the monastery. I wanted to know more about him, his life as a yogi and what he did for a living in Los Angeles, California, the place Yogananda referred to as “the Benares of the West.”

The High Civilization of Egypt

When I began our interview Craig was in his car somewhere on the L.A. freeway driving to an appointment. We talked on the phone, and I typed into my laptop. In addition to discussing ancient civilizations, Craig shared some stories from his life:

“I used to work in Egypt in my twenties as a photographer. I was attached to a number of archaeological expeditions through journalism, so I got exposed to Eastern teachings then. I remember one time seeing a stone from New Kingdom Egypt (1500 BC). There were inscriptions on the stone, which included the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph for “breath,” which was ROUA. The inscription said something like, ‘When breath is turned back on itself, it

becomes light,' and then, "When ROUA is inverted it becomes AUOR,' (the Egyptian root of the Greek word Auroa), meaning 'light'. The key here is the statement when the breath is turned back on itself it turns into light. The ancient Egyptians captured many truths in their language. For instance, the ancient word for Egypt was Khemet, which when later Arabicized as 'Al Khmet' became the root of the Greek word 'alchemy,' which means transformation. Craig found it inspiring that the actual name "Egypt" actually means "transformation."

"What's interesting about the Egyptian lifestyle is that all that's left are tombs and temples—all the temples on the east bank and all the tombs on the west bank of the Nile River. In earliest times, Egyptian writing was primitive; and then a magnificent and complete language, the hieroglyphs, burst onto the scene. It's always been a mystery how this came to be. In olden times, Osiris was considered lord of the underworld, and the main Egyptian deity, and his nickname was 'Wenefer' which means 'the westerner,' perhaps referring to Atlantis. Who knows?"

"The Egyptians were aware of the cyclical nature of all things, of birth, death, and reincarnation. Throughout Egyptian temples you see the symbol of the sun, represented by the scarab beetle, which are seen in masses, all walking towards the sun at sunrise. Thus, to this day, the scarab beetle symbolizes rebirth. The clothes and jewelry the Egyptians wore were not designed as fashion pieces. Everything was astrologically based, all symbolic, all related to the elements of creation. The ancients lived their lives connected to spirit. And even though pharaonic times were in a descending time period (according to the yuga theory), in all periods there are saints, sages and masters."

I asked Craig his perspective on Egypt, on the passage of time and consciousness:

He replied, "What does it mean to be higher or lower? It all has to do with consciousness. When we're scared or restless, we're part of the problem, not the solution. I felt a real spiritual magnetic call to Egypt. Part of the peace of Egypt is the desert itself. The peace there is incomparable, and the timeless Egyptian civilization has left behind in its symbols and architecture a feeling of depth and divinity. They understood something about integration that we have forgotten."

"The Egyptians, like most ancient cultures, believed in oneness rather than duality. The Egyptians worshipped both Horus and Set, even though Set was the so-called 'evil' one who killed his brother Horus. The Egyptians recognized that contrasting elements, both good and bad, are necessary for the drama we call life; they didn't judge those elements as good or bad but understood them in the context of a much greater, more expansive reality."

"I think Egyptian culture was unique because it was a crossroads culture. It was the caravanserai on the trade route between India and Europe. Jesus was in Egypt at least three times—when he was a baby escaping the Roman persecution spoken of in the Bible. It is also reported that he was there as a teenager, en route to India, and again on his return to the West, after the 'lost' years of his life. He was ten when he left his home and only came back when he was about thirty."

"The Egyptians understood that the word 'divinity' comes from the root 'division'—they understood that we as individuals are hybrids—we have a higher and lower self. When we focus on our higher selves, we can be conscious, inspired and intuitive. When we focus on our lower

selves, we can be fearful, get stuck and resist. The question is not whether we're higher or lower, but where we are at that moment. I think it's important to recognize that we are at a certain point in the cycles of yugas, but it's also important to remember that everything—even time itself—is a dream. As we read in the Indian scriptures, 'Seldom does even a sage realize that the kingdom of heaven is obtainable instantaneously.' We don't need to wait for it. We just need to wake up from the hypnosis of delusion.

"Because the saints, like all of us, can be inspired or uninspired, depending on whether they are focusing on their higher or lower selves at any given time, we can identify with them. It is an illusion to judge anyone as either a 'saint' or a 'sinner.' All of us are both, depending on where our consciousness is at any given moment. Sri Yukteswar once said, 'Forget the past. The vanished lives of all men are dark with many shames. Human conduct is ever unreliable until man is anchored in the Divine.' We can relate to this truth and have hope."

Before he became a monk in SRF, Yogananda's organization in Los Angeles, Craig worked as a waiter in the India Café, a restaurant connected with SRF's Hollywood Temple. It was during this time while learning about yoga and Yogananda's teachings, that he had, during meditation, the vision that inspired him to become a monastic.

For thirty-five years, until 2005, Craig served as a monk with SRF. He was one of SRF's more well-known and popular speakers. You can still view him on You Tube videos, wearing his orange swami robes and talking eloquently about the yogic lifestyle.

I asked Craig was it like to live for thirty-five years in the monastery then leave?

"When I was a monk someone asked me why I had become a monk? At the age of twenty-three I was very confused about my direction and getting anxious about the impending decisions I need to make, about job, family and related commitments. I was clueless and felt I didn't have the depth of understanding and clarity to make such life decisions. Yogananda spoke at length about the importance of environment. The monastery seemed a healthy and supportive environment to help me go deeper."

Yuga Cycles of Time

Along the way, something must have changed for you, what was it?

"I introspected that I had grown up and progressed beyond my youthful understanding of myself. It's the same thing with the Yuga Cycles of time—this is the core message they bring—that the earth goes through four stages, from a lower level of realization to higher levels.

"The SRF monastics are cloistered; it became clear to me that it was my time to be in the wide, wide world. I still go to services at Lake Shrine, to convocation; I go to the all-day meditation at Christmas; I have my own private daily practices; and I keep in touch with SRF monks, because they're life-long friends. In most ways, I feel that I'm more of a 'monk' than ever!"

How would you characterize heroes throughout time?

"The saints, the masters, the geniuses, and the heroes are not part of time because they are not conditioned by their environment. Instead, they are able to step out from their cultured

environment and step into their dharma, their life purpose, and their vision. At this point, they begin to influence the world rather than to be affected by it.”

Who are your heroes?

“Well, of course Yogananda. If you look at his life, he was radical, a free-thinker and an inspired visionary from the earliest years of his life. Building a teaching around a guru like that is challenging on many levels. The true guru treats every individual uniquely. Organizations can help people understand the big picture, but, as we mature, specific guidance comes increasingly from within, rather than from outside ourselves.

“Because we are all essentially hybrids, with higher and lower selves, integrating these selves without judging and punishing ourselves is a big challenge. Part of the challenge is that when Westerners practice Eastern techniques, there is a little bit of ‘wobble in the force.’ We’re living in a new age: We don’t need an Old Testament message, but rather a less judgmental Newer Testament. I remember about twenty-five years ago I began to strip certain words from my vocabulary.

What are those words and why did you remove them?

“Right, wrong, good and bad—because those terms are dualistic, and polarize conversations, and are the opposite of integration, which yoga encourages. As a young person, I was very judgmental, and I never knew why. My parents weren’t that way. For some reason, I had a double dose of it; it was very painful. That kind of dualistic thinking forced me to take it on as a project. Now, praise be, I have become a very, very open person.

“Recently, one of my personal consulting clients asked me a really good question. The question was, ‘What is the one quality that your clients could have that would allow them to get the most out of their work with you as a consultant?’ I told that person, ‘I’m very clear on the answer—it’s openness.’ And he said, ‘How do you define openness?’ And I replied, ‘It’s the capacity to unlearn, Unlearning is a core skill in transition times like those we are experiencing now on this planet.’”

Do you give advice?

“I really believe that advice is abuse—because it presupposes that people don’t have the answers within themselves. The best way to teach is through listening, questioning and storytelling. It’s said that the most beautiful words in any language are ‘Once upon a time...’ The reason is that our minds are hard-wired to learn from stories. The listener takes out of the story what they are ready to hear. So let me tell you a story. I was a swami and a minister for twenty-five years and I gave a lot of talks, sometimes to as many as 7,000 people. I often gave seven services a month in places all over the world. Thousands of people came up to me afterwards and told me what a great service it was. So I asked each person, ‘Really, what was so great about it?’ And never once did someone tell me something that I had said in my talk. Instead they told me something that they were inspired about, which was in response to something I had said. So I thought to myself, ‘Cool—I’m doing my job!’ My job is to motivate and inspire, and empower individuals to connect with their own inner realization. That’s why Yogananda called his organization Self-Realization Fellowship instead of God-Realization Fellowship!

“My job is not to reform the world. I know that not everyone would agree with this attitude. As I see it, there are two primary world views—one is that the world is fragile and is in a real muddle, and needs fixing rather quickly. The other world view holds that everything in the world is perfect always—because the world is meant to be a mirror of our collective consciousness and everything we’re thinking and feeling. Thus, only when we change ourselves will the world be different.”

What are you doing to earn a living?

“These days I’m doing more public speaking, workshops and personal coaching. People ask me how do I help young people? My answer is, When we’re young, we’re driven by their willpower and intelligence. I sometimes say to young people, ‘Go! Do your own thing, and let’s talk in twenty years.’

Life Begins at Sixty-Two

“The Chinese have a saying that your second life begins at sixty-two. Until then we’re much more a part of the problem than the solution. Life can be divided into stages, like a Broadway play, with each act having an archetypal purpose. The first act is the exposition of the characters and the situation. With the second act confusion sets in; resolution and climax don’t come until the last act. I guess that’s the way it’s supposed to be. We want to get our money’s worth out of this life! All stages have their riches and beauty. But it’s really difficult to be calm and intuitive when we’re young because we’re being driven by what’s going on in the moment and so respond superficially to our environment.

“Recently, I was giving a lecture in Las Vegas to five hundred honor students from beauty colleges throughout the country. Besides beauty, their profession focuses on communication and helping people develop a positive sense of self. I asked these young people how many considered themselves people pleasers? Seventy percent of the hands went up. We’re conditioned to please people. The problem comes when we don’t outgrow this stage. We need to start thinking and acting from the inside out, instead of simply reacting to what we think others want of us. If we don’t, we never develop our own intuition and a healthy sense of our higher selves.”

How do you feel American culture has affected us?

“We’ve grown up in a pop culture since the Second World War. It has been youth-oriented, positive, active, and yet somewhat superficial and materialistic. Eastern cultures, in contrast, are heavily influenced by age, older people and ancestors. I believe that our Western culture is stepping into a period of maturation, a time when elders will re-take their valuable roles as ‘wisdom keepers’ and offer guidance based on experience that a younger person can’t have because of their limited experience.”

How can older people do this?

“I would encourage mature people to take stock of what they have learned, and consider how they can help, either as a second career, as a volunteer, or even informally within their families. The idea is to help younger people learn valuable lessons in virtually every area of life. Mature people have understanding, contacts, resources of all kinds, and can serve as mentors,

sponsors, or facilitators, thus helping ‘fast-track’ younger people to achieve success, both personally and professionally.

“I believe that for many people, ‘seventy is the new fifty.’ It certainly feels that way to me. The key milestone in life is maturity, or becoming more conscious, more in touch with our intuition and higher Self, so that we can see a bigger picture and live in tune with natural law. Maturity leads to greater success in life. There is a wonderful detachment that comes with age, a detachment that allows true yogis to be ‘in the world, but not of it.’”

How do you see this concept evolving?

“The meeting of Western and Eastern culture that we’re experiencing today will lead to a marvelous integration, the energy and creativity of youth merging with the wisdom and perspective of age. I encourage everyone to align with their personal life-purpose. So many spend decades ‘working for the man,’ performing tasks that are not aligned with their passion and purpose in life. Many women spend decades raising kids, a service that is valuable, but sometimes, overdone. Both men and women have marvelous opportunities these days to have ‘second lives,’ a time to use their strengths and passions to be productive in truly inspiring ways. In yesteryear, people called retirement ‘the golden years.’ If that means golf, watching TV and getting old, it doesn’t seem very golden.

“Because I’ve done so much ‘un-learning’ in the last twenty years of my life, I now feel that I am a much more open, less programmed person. Now I can do EVERYTHING with greater awareness. And the openness and awareness that I’m experiencing actually open up more opportunities for me. I’m meeting new people, serving others in deep and meaningful ways, having more fun, and exploring more places—truly *living* life rather than just *experiencing* and *reacting* to life.

Finding Your Personal Dharma

What are things mature people can do in their third and fourth stages?

“I would suggest finding a mentor and joining a ‘mastermind’ group to explore what one truly wants out of life. We all have blind spots, and if we want to go on a heroic journey, we all need to outgrow our cultural programming. The key is focus. Yogananda gave a helpful formula—read for one hour, write for two hours, meditate (or reflect) for three hours. If people learn to write or journal—whatever can lead them into their innermost consciousness—then their intuition will be better able to guide them.

“It’s also important to honor the guidance that comes through feeling. Yogananda said that intuition is perfect reason *and* perfect feeling. In the West, we’re trained to be a thinking more than a feeling culture. When we learn to use our feelings as a moment-to-moment guide, we can make decisions that are more in alignment with our primary purpose and dharma.”

What is your life purpose?

“I learned my personal life purpose decades ago. I am a person committed to helping others take a stand for what means the most to them. I help others get clarity on their unique life purposes; with that knowledge people light up, become creative, magnetize new friends, and align with their deepest inspirations. It’s a very fulfilling way to live. Deepak Chopra has a saying that’s appropriate for the third and fourth stage of yoga: ‘According to Vedanta, there are

only two symptoms of enlightenment, just two indications that a transformation is taking place within you toward a higher consciousness. The first symptom is that you stop worrying. Things don't bother you anymore. You become light-hearted and full of joy. The second symptom is that you encounter more and more meaningful coincidences in your life, more and more synchronicities. And this accelerates to the point where you actually experience the miraculous.'

"I have no plans to retire because I would like my life to be a service until the day I croak. These days I'm traveling all over the world speaking on mindfulness and meditation. I'm being asked by individuals, organizations, corporations to come and talk to them about core subjects. I'm surrounded by inspired and conscious people. I'm truly living my dream."

You were close with George Harrison and Steve Jobs.

"Some people know that I mentored Steve Jobs and that I was close to George Harrison during the last period of his life. These are both fascinating people, and our conversations went into some very deep territory. Steve had different chapters in his life and was very controversial. Yet, he was always spiritual in his core. He called SRF and wanted to put the audio *Autobiography of a Yogi* (AY) on iTunes, which SRF subsequently did. When Steve died, the only book on his personal iPad was the AY. He even arranged that all the guests at his funeral would receive copies of the AY.

"For many years, Steve talked to me about personal things. George Harrison and I had a brotherly relationship. I hold in confidence what both of them said to me. I truly felt that we all learned a lot from each other. I've learned that all people need to follow their own dharmic path and be faithful to their personal life purpose. It is in finding their individual way that I help people find clarity. I remain amazed that we weren't given these core teachings in school."

What are some of the tools you use?

"I have a complete collection of standard mindfulness and meditation techniques—but in a very personalized way. I find out what people are receptive to and excited about, and I build programs that they will practice. Without practice, it's all intellectual and philosophical. I teach people how to trust their intuition and that both their thoughts and feelings are guidance systems. I encourage them to look for the subtle clues in their lives, clues which are constantly telling them where to go, what to do, everything they need to know."

How about your family?

"Did I tell you about my mom going to a psychic before I was born? My parents were married in 1931, at the height of the Great Depression. They wanted kids but none came along. In 1941 my dad joined the Navy and was gone for four years in the Pacific. My mother moved to California and built airplanes at Lockheed Aircraft. During this time she went to a psychic who told her, 'Your husband will be home from the war in 1945; you'll have a son and he'll be born in September, 1946. You're going to live north of LA and have lots of different jobs, but you'll end up in Hollywood and be very well-known.'

"As predicted, I was born in September and my mother became the top children's agent in Hollywood and was well-known. But the psychic story isn't over. In 1970 I became a monk; in that same year my mom read an article in the *Los Angeles Times* about the same psychic she'd seen years before. My parents went to see him. My father was so spooked that he couldn't go in.

My mom knocked on the door and said, ‘You won’t remember me, but back in the day you gave me a reading.’ The psychic interrupted her and said, ‘He’s become a monk, hasn’t he?’ She said yes he has. And the psychic continued, ‘He’s no Catholic because I see him sitting like this,’ and he folded his hands to represent me sitting cross-legged. The psychic shook his finger in my mother’s face, and ended by saying, ‘Don’t you dare try to get him out of there because he has such wonderful men friends that are going to help him more than you could ever understand or imagine.’

“To me, my mom’s experience is proof that there is a life plan for all of us; I believe we ‘laid it all out’ before we came here, then ‘drank the cup-of-forgetfulness’ in order to become unconscious enough to enjoy the journey of remembrance, to enjoy putting the pieces back together of our cosmic one Self—to RE-member our divine identities.”

Do you ever have beyond the veil experiences?

“Yogananda talks about *Whispers from Eternity*, but I would call them ‘winks’ from eternity. The wise ones learn that the whole thing is irony; to take it seriously is the primal delusion. It’s a great joke ... if we get it. I guess that we’re supposed to take life seriously in the beginning in order to experience the necessary contrast that creates the clarity of who we really are and what we really want. And we all want the same three things—love, peace and joy. But we are all destined to find these three things in our own ways during our own unique journeys. That’s why advice isn’t helpful. We all need to figure out our own unique path from within. There are certain generic tools such as meditation and the science of yoga, but all people have to develop their own personal practice in the ways that are most meaningful to them. The true masters do not produce disciples; they produce masters. The Great Ones are examples; their main role is to encourage mature disciples to follow their own inner guidance and personal dharma and achieve Self-realization.”