

It was astonishing to see how this world-renowned artist distanced himself from stardom to better cultivate his inner self. How many celebrities have ever done that? His dedication meant even more since he wasn't just any celebrity. He was a Beatle. Not only were the Beatles the most successful pop group in history, they were also the postwar generation's wise men. If a Beatle said chanting Sanskrit names of God was okay, a lot of people around the globe were inclined to at least give it a try.

It may be difficult for someone who did not grow up in the sixties to understand the significance of a Beatle committing to India's spiritual teachings. A large percentage of baby boomers, as the generation born after World War II came to be called, took their cues about beliefs, behavior, and politics, as well as wardrobe and hairstyle, from what the Beatles did and sang. In 1964, when the Beatles first came to New York to appear on the popular Ed Sullivan television show, yoga played no role in American life. Only a handful of people were vegetarians, and even educators who should have known better commonly confused Hinduism with Buddhism. If Americans had any impression of Hinduism at all, it was usually distorted by British missionary prejudice. By publicly declaring his appreciation for yoga, meditation, karma, dharma, reincarnation, and other concepts identified with India, George helped reverse nearly three hundred years of anti-Hindu ignorance and bias.



*Ravi Shankar*