

There was a trajectory to George's spiritual life, which began and ended with music. In 1966, he met maestro Ravi Shankar and thrilled to the sound of a sitar, to the lull of its sympathetic strings and the way it could stretch a single note to imitate the yearning of a heart in love. Later that year, George continued his sitar lessons in Srinagar, an extended village at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains surrounded by fields of golden saffron flowers. In this idyllic setting he practiced music and spent hours reading about India's millennial teachings. As a boy, George had been an indifferent student, but during that visit he was rarely without a book in his hands, including Swami Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* and Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

What he learned of India's spiritual culture amazed him. Unlike institutional religions that barely tolerate one another, here was a worldview that encompassed everyone and everything. All living beings are eternal souls, part and parcel of God, the texts declared. Our job is to manifest that divinity. This, the Hindu tradition said, is *sanatana-dharma*, the eternal religion, which dwells in all beings. "Through Hinduism I feel a better person," he told a reporter. "I just get happier and happier."

A few weeks later, he returned to London inspired by a vision of himself not as a working class boy from Liverpool who had become a superstar, but as an eternal soul who, if he applied himself, could see God face to face. Being merely a Beatle had lost its appeal.

Still, John, Paul, and Ringo were his closest friends, and in 1968 he induced his fellow Beatles and their partners to join him and his then wife, model Patty Boyd, on a retreat to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's ashram in Rishikesh. The group arrived in Delhi at three o'clock one morning in February 1968, and by noon their hired cars were weaving down Rishikesh's dusty streets crowded with cows and bullock carts. They got out and climbed a path leading to a bluff above the river's eastern bank. Before them, stone huts and wooden bungalows mushroomed out from groves of teak and guava trees. Looking out over the bluff, the group traced the Ganges River flowing from a source high in the mountains.

The Beatles' days in Rishikesh consisted of a casual breakfast, morning meditation classes until lunch, leisure time in the afternoons, and sometimes as many as three more hours of meditation in the evenings.