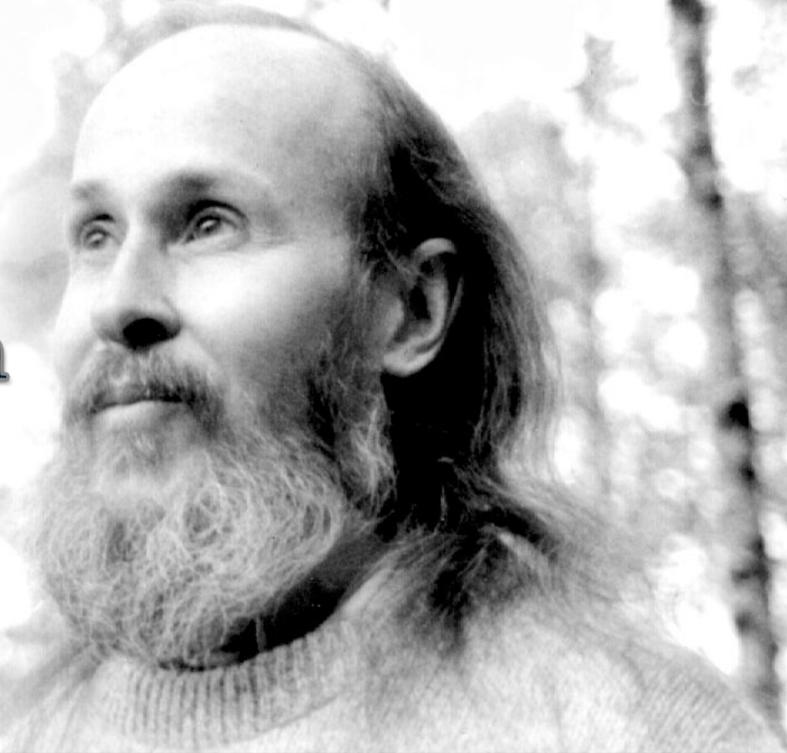


## An Interview with Marshall Govindan (Satchidananda)

### My darshan with Babaji in Badrinath



**Marshall Govindan** (also known as **Satchidananda**) is a disciple of Babaji Nagaraj, the famed Himalayan master and originator of Kriya Yoga, and of his late disciple, Yogi S.A.A. Ramaiah. He has practiced Babaji's Kriya Yoga intensively since 1969, including five years in India.

Since 1980 he has been engaged in the research and publication of the writings of the Yoga Siddhas. He is the author of the bestselling book, *Babaji and the 18 Siddha Kriya Yoga Tradition*, now published in 15 languages, the first international English translation of *Thirumandiram: a Classic of Yoga and Tantra*, *Kriya Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and the Siddhas*, and the *Wisdom of Jesus and the Yoga Siddhas*. Since the year 2000, he has sponsored and directed a team of seven scholars in Tamil Nadu, India in a large scale research project engaged in the preservation, transcription, translation and publication of the whole of the literature related to the Yoga of the 18 Siddhas. Six publications have been produced from this project, including a ten volume edition of the *Tirumandiram* in 2010. In 1997 he founded a lay order of teachers of Kriya Yoga: Babaji's Kriya Yoga Order of Acharyas, a non-profit educational charity, incorporated in the USA, Canada, India and Sri Lanka, presently with 28 members. The Order maintains ashrams in Quebec, Bangalore and Badrinath, India, Colombo and Katargama, Sri Lanka. For more information visit <http://www.babajiskriyayoga.net>

## Interview with Marshall Govindan

By Anjula Duggal, <http://levitatingmonkey.com>

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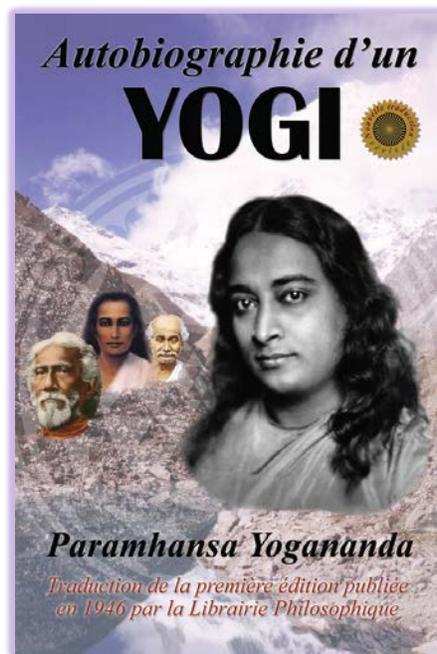
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## 1. What is Kriya Yoga?

**MGS:** Babaji's Kriya Yoga is a scientific art of God, Truth union and Self-Realization. It was revived by a great master of India, Babaji Nagaraj, as a synthesis of ancient teachings of the 18 Siddha tradition. It includes a progressive series of 144 techniques or 'kriyas' grouped into five phases or branches, originally taught and practiced over a period of twelve years, one technique per month. Paramahansa Yogananda taught that practice of *Kriya Kundalini Pranayama* can accelerate the natural progression of Divine Consciousness in human beings.

## 2. As a graduate of Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and George Washington University in Washington D.C., how did you initially come to be interested in Kriya Yoga?

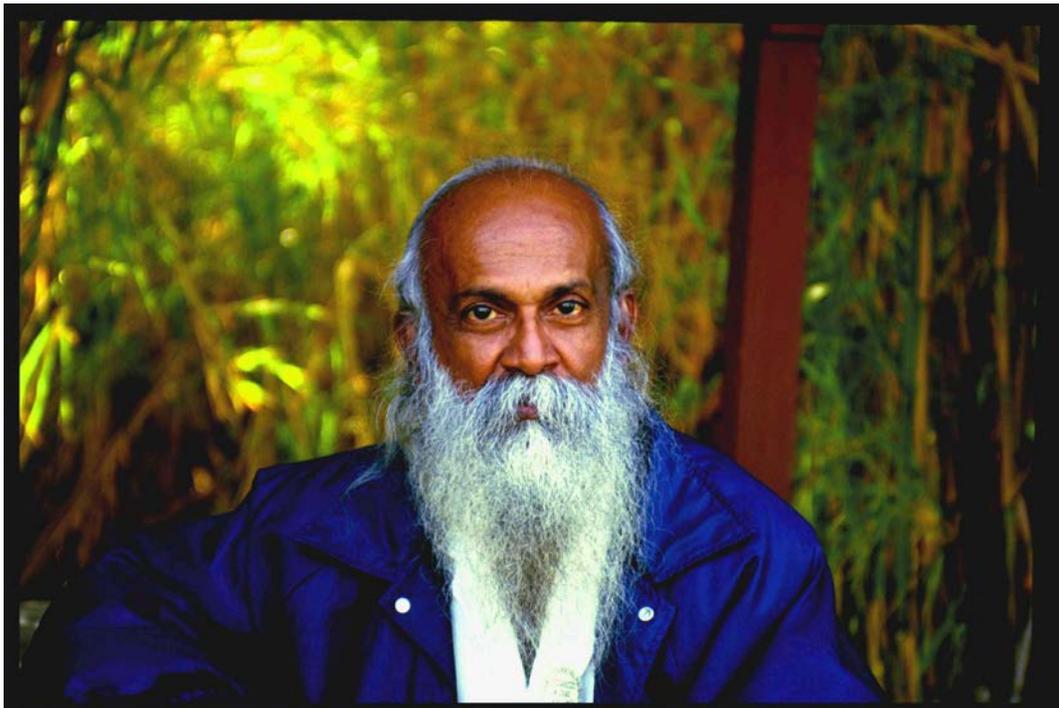
**MGS:** Throughout my adolescence growing up in West Los Angeles, I nurtured an interest in spirituality. But I was also inspired by John F. Kennedy's words: "ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." After beginning my studies at Georgetown in 1966, my interest in spirituality matured under the guidance of the Jesuit priest, Thomas O. King, a true mystic, who happened also to be the counselor at the end of the hall in my dormitory. But it was the *Autobiography of a Yogi* that led me to Kriya Yoga specifically. It answered many of my existential questions and inspired me to apply to the Self Realization Fellowship, to commit myself for life to their monastic order, with Father King's encouragement. The SRF asked me to wait for one year.



"Sri Yukteswar,  
Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya, Yogananda  
on our publication"

### 3. What lead to your initiation in the early 1970s by Yogi Ramaiah?

**MGS:** Six months after entering the probationary period with the SRF, half way through my senior year, I saw a two-line ad for “Kriya Yoga” classes in the local “Free Press,” newspaper. I started attending these in a one-room apartment off Dupont Circle. Two months later, in February 1970, I attended the lecture and class given there by Yogi S.A. A. Ramaiah. He had a magnificent aura and his lecture and class so intrigued me that I began attending them every month, when he would come down from New York City on the Greyhound Bus. In the spring I passed the written and oral examinations to enter the United States Foreign Service, which until that time had been my career objective. But after receiving the first and second initiations into Babaji’s Kriya Yoga from Yogi Ramaiah in his apartment ashram at 112 East 7<sup>th</sup> Street, in New York City, I began to feel conflicted about choosing career as a diplomat. I wanted to advance in this Yoga, I wanted self-realization. I suppose it was dharma or destiny pushing in on my well-intended plans. The effects of the anti-war movement and the counter-cultural revolution in which I was an active participant beginning in Paris in 1968, had also given me serious doubts about making a commitment to supporting American foreign policy in particular, and American materialistic culture in general. I finally made a decision after raising the issue with Yogi Ramaiah. I remember asking him “What should I do?” Join the Foreign Service, or join his mission of Babaji’s Kriya Yoga? To his credit, he gave no encouragement to either alternative. He said I could become a diplomat and come and visit him whenever I liked. My decision not to join the Foreign Service was based upon my appreciation that this was a once in a lifetime opportunity. Here was an authentic Master of Yoga and a genuine disciple of Babaji. If I was going to advance in the field of Yoga, I would need to dedicate myself to it whole-heartedly.

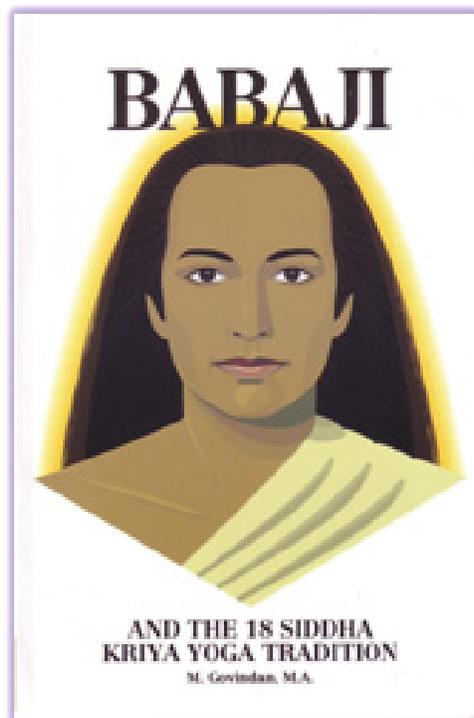


Yogi S.A. A. Ramaiah (1923-2006)

And perhaps I could best make a difference in the world not by representing the U.S. government, but by serving one person at a time through Yoga.

There was some subsequent irony to this decision. When I decided to join his mission, and before moving into a center he was setting up back in California, he wrote a letter in support of my application for exemption from military service to my draft board in Gardena, California. The board gave me the exemption. I was probably the only person exempted from military service as a “seminary student” in a yoga ashram! Three years later, after a year in his ashram in Tamil Nadu, India, when Yogi Ramaiah sent me back to Washington, D.C. to serve our Kriya Yoga center there, after taking the U. S. Civil Service exam, I was offered two positions as an economist: one in the Department of Labor, and the other with the Chief of Naval Operations in the Pentagon. After asking him to advise me on which position to accept, he said that it would be best to take the position in the Pentagon! So, I spent the next four years there, getting over the “duality” of my ambivalence towards military service, until he asked me to move to Montreal, where he needed me to take over the center he had established there in 1970. So, my career of “foreign service” was elevated from government service to Babaji’s Kriya Yoga.

**4. Talk to us about how your book, *Babaji and the 18 Siddha Kriya Yoga Tradition*, came about.**



Babaji and the 18 Siddha  
Kriya Yoga Tradition

**MGS:** In 1983, after 12 years of practicing the 144 kriyas for more than eight hours a day on the average, and helping Yogi Ramaiah to establish 23 teaching and sadhana centers around the world, he gave to me a list of rigorous conditions to fulfill, to prepare me for the heavy responsibility of initiating others into the advanced practices of Babaji's Kriya Yoga. After fulfilling these conditions, Yogi Ramaiah asked me to wait. On December 25, 1988, Babaji told me to leave Yogi Ramaiah's organization and to begin to teach his Kriya Yoga. In 1990, I began writing this book as a means of sharing the knowledge which I had acquired pertaining to Babaji and his tradition, during the past two decades. Because I had lived and breathed its contents for so long and so intimately, it was also my offering to my Guru, Babaji, in the form of all potential readers. I had a very demanding editor, Dr. Desh Sikka, Ph.D, an early student in Montreal, who obliged me to rewrite it five times: starting with the organization of the entire book, then that of each chapter, then that of each section, and finally every paragraph and sentence, tightening each one up, removing all extraneous words. That is why every page is so packed with information.

**5. Can you tell us about your two darshans with Baba Ji. (ie, When was it, what was context of the meeting, how did it leave you feeling, what were action steps post the meeting as it relates to Kriya Yoga)?**

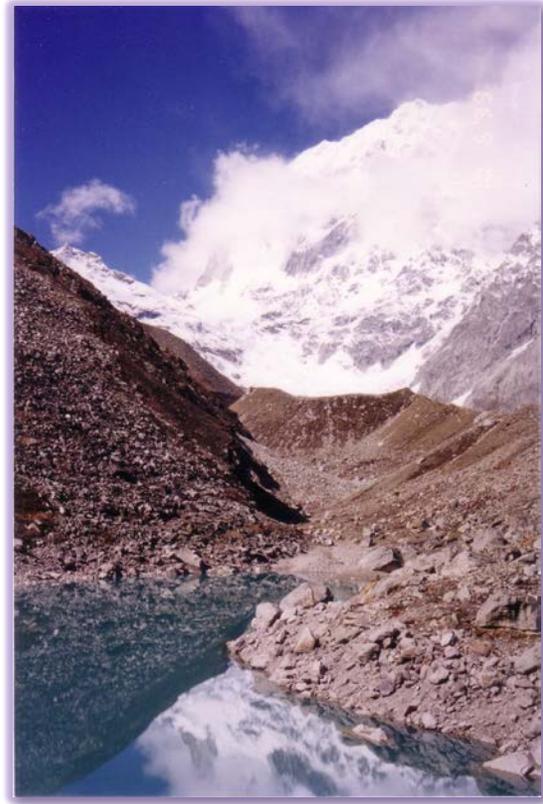
**MGS:** These occurred in early October, 1999, at Sapt Kund, also known as Saptopanth Tal, 20 miles above Badrinath, on the other side of Mount Neelakantan. For many years, I have meditated on going to Babaji's ashram there. It is known as Gauri Shankar Peetam. It has been described by V.T. Neelakantan, in his book *Babaji's Masterkey to All Ills*, and by Yogi Ramaiah in an early edition of his Kriya Yoga Magazine. Each of them were called there by Babaji, Neelakantan, on the astral plane, Yogi Ramaiah on the physical plane, in 1952 and 1954 respectively.

This entire area around Badrinath is steeped in legends. Arjuna is reported to have gone to Sapt Kund to bathe and cleanse himself after the battle of Kurushetra. Vyasa is reported to have written the Mahabharata in a particular cave at Mana, a village 3 km beyond the town of Badrinath. I have written about Badrinath itself in my book *Babaji and the 18 Siddha Kriya Yoga Tradition*.

Yogi Ramaiah had taught me how to communicate with Babaji. I started visiting Badrinath in 1986, with Yogi Ramaiah, after the Mahakumba mela in Haridwar. During my visit to Badrinath in 1998, Babaji told me to apply for permission to go into the restricted area above Badrinath the following year. No foreigners had ever been granted permission to enter this area because of its proximity to the border of Tibet and China. When our Chidambaram ashram manager Neelakantan managed to get permission for us to travel hike up there, with the help of a local businessman, Rohit, we found a local guide and hired three Nepalese porters. The six of us hiked up to this glacial lake, the source of the Alakananda River, in two days, reaching there on October 2. With the air containing only fifty percent the oxygen at sea level, the trek over the slippery ice and rock strewn glacier itself was extremely arduous.



Rohit and Govindan climbing to  
Santopanth Tal



Santopanth Tal, October 1999

After exploring the steep slopes around the sides of the lake for caves or places to erect a "lean -to" for shelter, as we had not brought tents, we decided upon a low stone wall, built up on three sides, about three feet high, which had been erected probably long ago by shepherds or pilgrims. I draped a large plastic tarpaulin over it, and fastened it sides down with stones. I could enter it by the fourth, open side. Neelakantan moved into a nearby cave, eight feet long, with a low entrance, and just wide enough for him to lay down in. The porters moved into the kutir and unpacked.

It was a glorious sunlit day, with sky bluer than anywhere else I'd ever seen. It seemed to be "popping" with pranic energy. In the afternoon, after lunch, I began to explore the area, praying that I might find Babaji's ashram. From reading V.T. Neelakantan's account of his visit to Sapt Kund, I had anticipated that Babaji's actual ashram would be hidden. As there were no trails, only boulders and rocks strewn and piled on top of one another on the steep slopes, exploring was not easy. I finally found a perch high above the lake, on a flat slab. From here, I could see almost the entire lake, as well as all of the surrounding mountains. Over the next few days I spent most of my time here practicing many of the 144 Kriyas which Babaji had taught to Yogi Ramaiah here 45 years earlier.

Later in the afternoon, I climbed down near the lakeside where I found a large cave underneath two large boulders. The entrance to the cave, was so low that I had to crawl into it, but once inside I

could easily stand up in its center. It looked as though it may have served up to a dozen persons at one time. It had apparently been used for a group because in several places, stone seats were evident near the inner wall. I sat down in the far corner on a large flat stone and closed my eyes. Babaji's powerful presence became evident and I was filled with rapture and light, a great expansion of being, and a very deep peace. I was home.

Later, upon leaving the cave, I discovered a fire pit, twenty yards down the slope, constructed from stone, in a square in the traditional manner of a mantra yagna peetam. In it were the charcoal remains of a yagna fire. Four feet away from it on four sides were flat stones on which one could easily sit facing the fire. I was thrilled to find it, just as Yogi Ramaiah had depicted it in his painting of Mataji washing the feet of Babaji. In fact, this painting which served as the basis of the painting made by my sister, Gail Tarrant, and reproduced on the rear cover my book *Babaji and the 18 Siddha Kriya Yoga Tradition* was a remarkably accurate representation of the actual Satopanth lake scene. In particular, the three peaks in the background, which include Mount Neelakantan, and the steep hills which border the lake on all sides, except the narrow area where Babaji and Mataji are sitting, were found to be the same as in these paintings.

Over the next few days I continued to sit most of day in rapture on my perch high above the lake. "What ineffable joy!" During my first meditation there, I clearly heard Babaji's voice say "Abide in me", and these words made such an impact on me that over the next days my consciousness "turned inside out", so to speak. "That", "The Presence", came to the foreground and everything else withdrew to the background. The physical world as witnessed through the senses appeared as images upon a movie screen. Perhaps the rarified atmosphere there, and the purification process of what I'd been through during the past few days, not to mention 30 years of intense sadhana, no doubt helped "set the stage". The show, however, was not about phenomena. It was the fusion of "consciousness" which had up to then been locked inside, with That Reality pervading everywhere. Such ineffable peace and tranquility. The absence of thought forms which are generally so common where ever one finds human habitation (and physical and mental pollution) was remarkable. The pure snow covered mountains towering above on all sides, stood like sentinels, guarding this sacred space. They pointed skywards, towards blue infinity. The intense sunlight enlightened and permeated everything. What rapture! Here, natural events, like the avalanches of snow and rock which occurred several times a day, took on new meanings. I marvelled at how the glacier upon which I sat and which surrounded me, had been built up over hundreds of thousands of years by the cumulative effect of such avalanches; and how their slow movement and melting had fed the Ganges and the dry, dusty plains of India for thousands of generations. How interconnected we all are across space and time.

"Effulgent self consciousness", I'd exclaim at times, afterwards, when the mind made attempts to describe the state. I drank deeply from the ocean of bliss pouring out of that deep glacier at Sapt Kund, one of the four major river origins of the Ganges.

On October 5, 1999, between 3:30 and 5 p.m., I had the first of two visions of Babaji. I was seated on my favorite perch, 100 yards above Saptopanth lake, when Babaji's radiant form appeared before me. He looked just like the photograph taken by V.T. Neelakantan nearly 50 years ago. With copper colored hair, fair brown skin, dark brown eyes, he was barefooted and wore only a pale yellow dhoti from his waist to his ankles. He walked towards me and embraced me. I felt diffused

with a powerful golden light. "I am very happy that you received and acted upon the messages that I sent to you telepathically", he said. "Despite all of the difficulties, and your heavy schedule, you have finally made it here. I had to remove many obstacles to your coming here. I tapped the officer in Joshimutt to give you a pass. I kept it from snowing here all winter so that you could make it across the glacier". He went on: "It is good that you did not bring a group, because the conditions would have been too difficult and their distraction would have prevented you from receiving the experiences I wanted you to have here." He then smiled when he said the following: "You have my blessings and the Order of Acharyas which you have founded in my name will gradually spread my Kriya Yoga throughout the world". Then he gave me several important personal messages to relate to others.

On the night before October 7, it snowed again, but this time very heavily. In the morning, about six inches of snow covered everything. There was a risk of being snowed in if it continued. Fortunately, it was sunny October 7, but the snow was not melting. I decided that it was time to break camp and to leave. We had been told that during the previous winter it had not snowed at all between Badri and Sapt Kund, and that only because of this highly unusual occurrence, were we able to make our way up to Sapt Kund. While part of me will always remain there and is there even now, the grosser vehicle could not have survived and was duty bound to "continue to deliver the mail" to so many persons. Babaji is in everyone, and now I see Him clearly so! And that is perhaps the message he wanted me to convey the most: "Seek Babaji to become Babaji", first in your own hearts, then in everyone and everything.