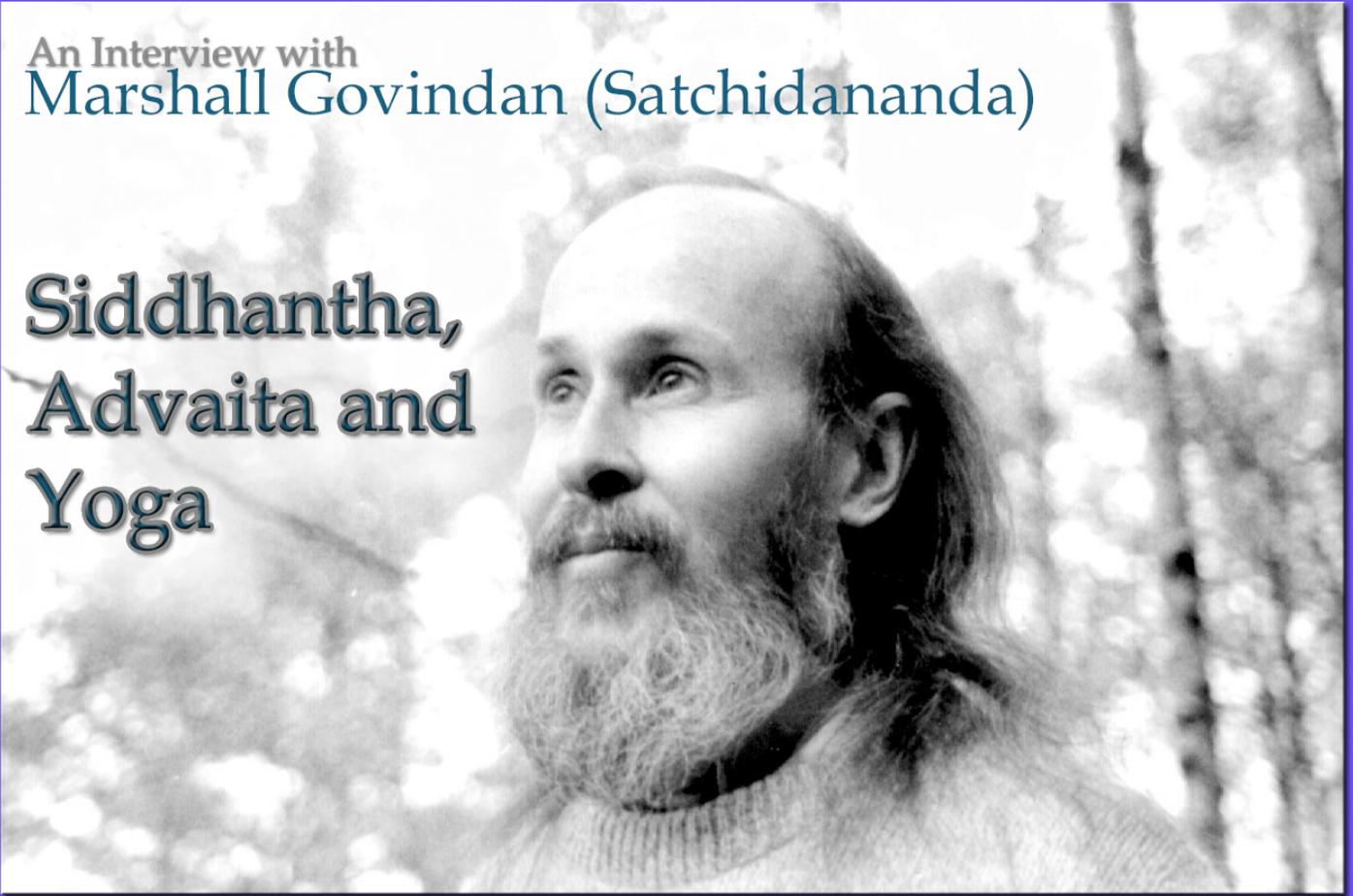


An Interview with
Marshall Govindan (Satchidananda)

Siddhantha,
Advaita and
Yoga



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.

Siddhantha, Advaita and Yoga

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Contents

Question: Why have you decided to make this interview? What is its goal?	3
Question: What is the relationship between Siddhantha, Advaita and Yoga?	3
Question: What is Siddhantha?	3
Question: Why is Siddhantha “new”?	5
Question: What does Siddhantha tell us about the soul and its relationship to the body?	7
Question: What is the Siddhas’ conception of God?	8
Question: What is the goal of Siddhantha?	9
Question: How is liberation from the fetters of the soul and the modes of nature realized according to Siddhantha?	10
Question: What is the cause of human suffering and how to overcome it?	11
Question: What is the difference between “monism” or “nondualism” (advaita) and “dualism” (dvaita) and “pluralism” (theism)?	12
Question: Why are these distinctions important?	12
Question: What is Maya and why is Siddhantha considered to be Monistic Theism?	14
Question: What is enlightenment and how does it relate to this discussion?	16
Question: Why did you say at the beginning of this interview that Siddhantha begins where Advaita ends?	17
Question: Why does a Siddhas consider him or self to be no one special, and thus provide little or no details on their personal life?	19
Question: What is the significance of the siddhis or yogic miraculous powers?	20
Question: What is the relationship between Babaji’s Kriya Yoga and Siddhantha?	21
Question: The “Five fold path” of Babaji’s Kriya Yoga reminds me of the various Yogas recommended by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, according to one’s own nature or essential character (svabhava):	22
Question: Why are the practices of the Siddhas kept secret if they are so beneficial? Why are they taught only during initiations?	23
Question: What is the value of the human body in relationship to one’s spiritual development?	24
Question: What is Neo-Advaita and why is it controversial?	25
Question: Why is it important to understand Siddhanta, Advaita and Yoga?	28

Question: Why have you decided to make this interview? What is its goal?

Answer: If you want to know what is true and to avoid suffering, you need to ask some fundamental questions including: Does God exist? If so, how can I know God? Do I have a soul? Why was I born? What is the purpose of my life? Why is there suffering in the world? The goal of this interview, the reason I am making it, is to help the reader to gain a better understanding of some of the answers to these questions from the perspective of the spiritual traditions which have informed me on my spiritual path. Most Western seekers lack the knowledge of these spiritual traditions and their requirements. No amount of words can reveal truth, but some words can point towards it, provide a glimpse, and then one must go beyond the words, into the silence to realize them internally by identity. This is the approach of all spiritual traditions. The spirit has no form, so it cannot be captured in words. Only in silence. But one should not make the mistake of many Western spiritual seekers today, in their haste to become “enlightened,” of ignoring or dismissing such questions. Spirituality does not mean “anti-intellectual.” It does not mean that one simply needs to find the most efficient technique, or the best teacher, or run away from the world.

Question: What is the relationship between Siddhantha, Advaita and Yoga?

Answer: My teacher, Yogi Ramaiah used to say that *Siddhantha* begins where *Advaita* ends. And that Babaji’s Kriya Yoga is the practical distillation of *Siddhantha*. But before answering this question, it will be necessary to discuss each of these.

Question: What is Siddhantha?

Answer: “*Siddhantha*” refers to the body of teachings of Indian Yogic or Tantric adepts, known as “Siddhas” or perfected masters, those who have attained some degree of perfection or divine powers known as “*siddhis*.” Aside from the “Siddhas” associated with Tibetan Buddhism, they are mystics who emphasized the practice of Kundalini Yoga to realize one’s potential divinity in all five planes of existence. They condemned institutional religion with its emphasis on temple and idol worship, ritualism, casteism and reliance upon scriptures. They taught that one’s own experience is the most reliable authoritative source of knowledge and wisdom and to acquire this one must turn within to the subtle dimensions of life through Yoga and meditation. Most of their writings go back 800 to 1600 years, as far back as the 2nd century, A.D. *Anta* means “final end.” *Siddhanta* means the final end, conclusion or goals of the Siddhas, the perfect masters. It is also derived from *citta* and *anta* meaning that it is the end of the thinking faculty, therefore this is the final conclusion reached at the end of thinking. While they existed all over India and even Tibet, the tradition to which we belong, and whose literature we have researched, translated and published since the 1960’s is from south India, and is known as “*Tamil Kriya Yoga Siddhantha*.” The writings of the Tamil Yoga Siddhas were in the form of poems, in the vernacular language of the people, rather than Sanskrit, which was known only to the top most caste, the priestly Brahmins, who opposed them. Nowhere in their writings do they sing praises to any deities. Theologically their teachings can be classified as “monistic theism.” But these do not attempt to create a philosophical system or a religion. They seek to provide practical teachings, particularly related to Kundalini Yoga, to realize Truth directly, and what one should avoid on the spiritual path.

Sectarian affiliation has no importance for Siddhas. They feel at ease among persons of all faiths. Their approach towards truth is to first experience it in *samadhi*, the mystical communion of cognitive absorption, and then to gradually surrender to it completely until it becomes their constant state of consciousness in the state of enlightenment. Their approach does not include attempts to build systems of philosophy or to construct religious belief systems. The Siddhas' poems show no trace of shared opinions or collective thinking; theirs is an "open philosophy" in which all expressions of truth were valued. Their poems and songs do not preach any doctrines; they only suggest a direction by which aspiration for a direct, intuitive, personal and profound realization of the Divine truth may be realized.

The *Siddhas*, however, used a forceful, vernacular language designed to shock people out of their conventional morality and egoistic delusion. They used the common language of the people, rather than the elitist Sanskrit, in order to reach their listeners. They urged their listeners to rebel against pretentious, empty orthodox beliefs and practices, including temple worship and rituals, caste, and petition like prayers. They taught that at a certain stage, once the process of surrender of the ego fully embraces the intellectual plane of existence, one's own experience, rather than scriptures, becomes the ultimate authority of one's truth. The Siddha is a free thinker and a revolutionary who refuses to allow himself to be carried away by any dogma, scripture or ritual. The Siddha is a radical in the true sense of the term, for he has personally gone to the "root" of things.



The 18 Tamil Yoga Siddhas (Saraswati Mahal Museum, Tanjore, India)



Siddha Tirumular, author of *Tirumandiram* (Ceiling painting in Chidambaram Nataraja temple, India)

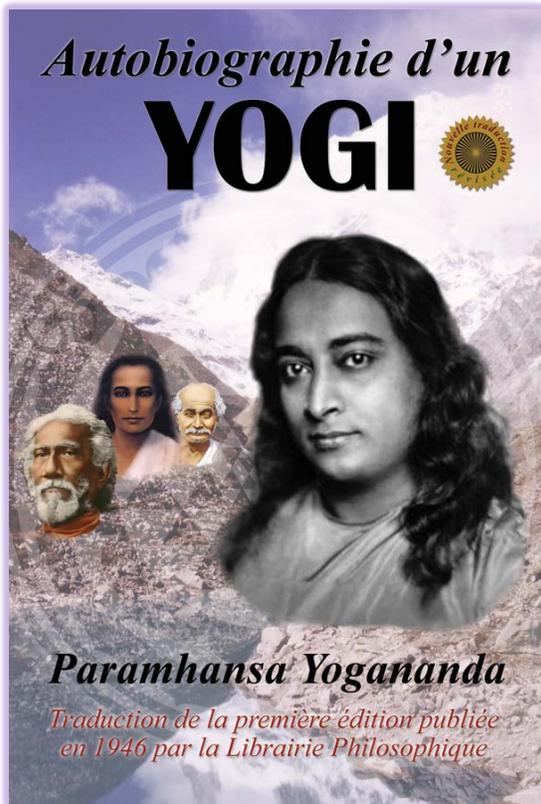


Tamil Yoga Siddhas, Kriya Yoga Ashram,
Kanadukathan, Tamil Nadu

Question: **Why is Siddhantha “new”?**

Answer: Tirumular, probably the oldest of the Tamil Yoga Siddhas, states in his *Tirumandiram*, (5th century A.D.) that he is revealing a “new Yoga” (*nava yoga*), containing all of the elements referred to as “kundalini yoga” by Siddhas later, and which will bring about a complete transformation of the human condition, including the physical body. During the first millennia of the common era, the siddhas invented kundalini yoga, as a powerful means of Self-realization (samadhi). It was a product of their experimental efforts to find more effective ways to know the truth of things, beyond the heavily intellectual, ritualistic, devotional, or ascetic paths, and to transform human nature. It is “new” today because it *Tirumandiram* and the writings of the 18 Tamil Yoga Siddhas were unknown outside of Tamil speaking south India and Sri Lanka until they were first translated by us, and either ignored or misunderstood by Tamil scholars and pundits because of their deliberately obscure “twilight language.” Because the Siddhas condemned the orthodox Brahmin pundits and priests, they also earned the ire of members of this community, who condemned them as magicians or worse. Consequently, their writings were not preserved in institutional repositories like temples and manuscript libraries, but only by hereditary families of physicians, *Siddha Vaidhyas*, who kept their writings secret, applying them only for medical purposes. Because of the widespread ignorance of their teachings and the popular association of the Siddhas with “magicians” by the orthodox community, until recently, they have not been held in esteem in some circles of Indian society. I can vividly recall the

sarcastic and emotional reply of one famous teacher of Vedanta, a renowned Swami and member of the Brahmin community, whose mother tongue was Tamil, when in 1986, I asked him his opinion of the writings of the Tamil Yoga Siddhas. And I recall the typical response from many persons in North India when I mentioned that our guru was Babaji Nagaraj. If they had read the *Autobiography of a Yogi*, they would ask “Is he still alive?” If not, and we mentioned that he had been alive for centuries, they would say something like: “Oh, he must have very bad karma, to be obliged to stay in this world of suffering for so long.” Even the leading members of other lineages of the Kriya Yoga tradition have been unable to appreciate what is “new” with regards to Babaji and the Siddhas. Sri Yukteswar said with regards to Babaji: “He is beyond my comprehension.” That is, his state could not fit within the paradigm of Vedanta, in which he was schooled. Yogananda and others could only conceive of him as an “*avatar*,” an incarnation of God Himself, and “Christ-like,” though Babaji has never referred to himself in such terms. In his *Autobiography*, on the first page of the chapter where he introduces the reader to Babaji, Yogananda mentions that like the Siddha Agastyar, he has been alive for thousands of years. Yogananda failed to grasp how close these two Siddhas really were, and that like Agastyar, Babaji was a human being who became a Siddha, not God, who became an *avatar*. Avatars are exceedingly rare. They are not found within the Saivite tradition, but only among the Vaishnava tradition, with its ten successive avatars, including Rama and Krishna. All of these responses reflect perspectives which are limited to the philosophical perspectives of the speakers, whether it be Vedantic, Samkya, Christian, or Vaishnava.



The bookcover of our publication “Sri Yukteswar, Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya, Yogananda”



Siddha Agastyar

Sri Aurobindo is one of the few sages in modern times who could appreciate who the Siddhas were, including Tirumular, Babaji and Ramalinga.



Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)

Question: **What does Siddhantha tell us about the soul and its relationship to the body?**

Answer: Any metaphysics has to deal with three things God (*Pati*), soul (*pasu*) and world (*pāsam*) and the inter-relation between them. The body of course is part of the world. Siddhantha, as elaborated in the Tamil literature of south India teaches that by emanation from Himself, God Siva created everything -- the world, all things in the world and all souls -- and that each soul is destined to ultimately merge **in advaitic union with Him**, just as a river merges into the sea, or a wave originates from and returns to the ocean.

God Siva created and is constantly creating, preserving and reabsorbing all things, emanating from Himself the individual soul of man, all the worlds and their contents. He is the Beginning and the End, the Author of Existence. He is both material and efficient cause, and thus His act of manifestation may be likened to sparks issuing forth from a fire or fruits emerging from a tree.

The individual soul: is in essence *sat chit ananda*, that is being, consciousness and bliss or unconditional joy. This essence of the soul is not different from that of God. It is not a thing, not an object. It is the Seer, not the Seen. It is the subject. It is an effulgent being, a body of light, *anandamaya kosha* – and it is created, evolves as a seemingly separate being and ultimately merges in undifferentiated union and oneness with God Siva, which oneness may be called identity.

But monistic Siddhanta also teaches that the soul is, in a temporary way, different from God. This difference exists with respect to the soul's individuality, not its essence. The body of the soul, *anandamaya kosha*, composed of pure light, is created, and it is limited. It is not Omnipotent or Omnipresent at its inception. Rather, it is limited and individual, but not imperfect. That is what makes for evolution. That is the whole purpose behind *samsara*, behind the cycles of birth and death, to lead this individual soul body into maturity. Of course, the various faculties of mind, perception, discrimination, which are not the soul but which "surround" the soul, are even more limited, and it would be, as stated above, folly to equate these with God Siva, to say they were the same as He. Ultimately, after many births and further evolution which follows earthly existence, this soul body does merge in God Siva. This merger is called *vishvagrasi*. Then, of course, the soul cannot even say, "I am Siva," for there is no "I" to make the claim. There is only Siva.

The world and the soul are, in truth, but various forms of Siva Himself, yet He also transcends His creation and is not limited by it. Also, the world and the soul cannot stand independent of God, a fact which makes it clear that they are evolutes and not eternal entities. When world and soul are absorbed in His Divine Form at the time of *mahapralaya* -- the end of a cosmic creational cycle -- all three *malas* (*anava*, *karma* and *maya*) are removed through His grace, and the soul ceases to exist as an individual, losing its separateness through union and fulfillment in Siva. After *mahapralaya*, Siva alone exists, until creation issues forth from Him in yet another cosmic cycle.

Question: **What is the Siddhas' conception of God?**

Answer: They referred to God as "Śivam" without any limitations or attributes. Śivam is grammatically and philosophically an impersonal conception. As Siddhas say, the ideal name for Sivam is 'It', adu, Thatness', Suchness', or Parāparam; "Goodness," absolute Being Consciousness and Bliss: *sat chid ananda*. **Śivam is not a personal God. It is a practice, an entryway. It is a foundational consciousness or awareness. This attainment of awareness or Śiva-consciousness is *mukti* or liberation.** Even though Tirumular speaks of the religious aspect of God, he believed in a Supreme Abstraction, a "Great Aloneness". His expression for this is *taṇi-urra-kevalam* (*mandiram* 2450). A deeper study of the concept of Śivam would reveal that it took two channels in Indian thought, one theistic with a personal or devotional relationship to God based on the method of bhakti, and the other Tantric, i.e., absolutist, based on *Kundalini Yoga* and *jñāna*. The bhakti method is a pluralistic one as reflected in the Śaiva Siddhānta school; the absolutistic method is the monistic one as reflected in the **Tirumandiram**.

In their poems they referred to the five cosmic actions of the Sivam as His blissful dance, all through his Sakti, or power, because of his love for souls.

1. Creation: of the world so as to provide to souls the means to grow in wisdom and to ultimately realize their unity in diversity;

2. Preservation: as souls become entangled in ignorance, delusion and karma, they are protected as sustained by various means and relationships, for their edification;
3. Dissolution: when souls are removed from incarnation in this world, they obtain a temporary respite from their suffering in the world, during which they prepare for their next incarnation;
4. Obscuration: the power which veils the soul's Oneness with Sivam, and which in effect obliges souls to seek wisdom, the Truth beyond the veil mental delusion, *maya*;
5. Grace: the removal of the three fetters or blemishes of the soul: ignorance, delusion and karma. Actually Sivam's grace and love for all souls is bestowed in all five cosmic actions, helping each soul to grow in maturity, leading to liberation.

Through cosmic cycles of involution and evolution this dance goes on through aeons of time. Its ultimate purpose remains a mystery until the soul is liberated and reunites with the secret Self, Sivam.

Question: **What is the goal of Siddhantha?**

Answer: According to the Tamil Siddhas or the realized souls, the ultimate goal of life is "complete surrender," which includes the realization of *vettivel*, "vast luminous space," cosmic consciousness, and then a progressive transformation of our human nature at all levels into a divine body, or *divya deha*.

The Tamil Siddhas relied on the individual's effort for the attainment of liberation as well as Divine Grace. This effort, this aspiration is represented by the upward pointing triangle; the grace is represented by the downward pointed triangle. Their combination, the double intersecting triangle, forms the basis of their most important yantra, a geometric object of concentration, and the integration of the spiritual and material levels of existence. The Siddhas insist on the value of Tantric Yoga as a means for the attainment of freedom and immortality within this world rather than in some heavenly afterlife. Liberation, *mokṣa*, or *vīdu* (in Tamil) is a mystical state referred to as *Yoga-samādhi* by Tirumular.

Inside the Yogic samādhi is the infinite space;

Inside the Yogic samādhi is the infinite light;

Inside the Yogic samādhi is the omnipotent energy

Yogic samādhi is what the siddhas are fond of. (mandiram 1490)

It is not freedom or liberation from the cycle of incarnation, but freedom or liberation from the *malas*, or three blemishes or fetters of the human soul which bind it like three strands in a rope and limits its inherent qualities of *sat chid ananda*:

1. *Anava*: Ignorance of one's true identity, and consequent egoism;

2. *Karma*: the consequences of past actions, words and thoughts;
3. *Maya*: delusion, including its agents: partial knowledge, partial power, desires, time and destiny.

It is also freedom from the *gunas*, the modes or constituents of nature:

1. *Rajas*: the principle of dynamism, which is stimulating, mobile, active;
2. *Tamas*: the principle of inertia, which is heavy, lazy, fatiguing, doubtful, confusing;
3. *Sattva*: the principle of balance and lucidity, which is calm, illuminating, wise, knowledge.

Question: How is liberation from the fetters of the soul and the modes of nature realized according to Siddhantha?

The Siddhas prescribed direct action to purify the blemishes, to free one self from the fetters. This includes all of the elements of Kundalini Yoga with its emphasis on powerful breathing exercises, mantras and the opening of the psycho-energetic centers, the chakras, as well as Classical Yoga, with its emphasis on the cultivation of detachment, “letting go” of attachments and aversions, known as the yoga of the eight limbs: restraints on one’s social behavior, the observance of self-discipline, the practice of *asanas*, and *pranayama*, control of the senses, concentration exercises, meditation and *samadhi*, or cognitive absorption. Kundalini Yoga is based upon the recognition that consciousness follows energy and energy follows consciousness. By controlling one, you control the other. So for example, if your mind is so dispersed on anxious that you cannot meditate, you should first practice yoga postures and breathing exercises to calm and control the mind. *By letting go of desires and fears, one also removes the energetic blockages in the nadis (energy channels) and chakras (psycho-energetic centers).* Meditation weakens the stains of egoism and its accompanying desires and fears, as well as the stains of karma and delusion. But they are only uprooted completely by repeatedly returning to the source, in the state of consciousness known as *samadhi*, wherein one realizes identity with that which is beyond names and forms. Selfless service, or karma yoga is also prescribed as a means of overcoming egoism and nullifying the consequences of past actions, or karma.

Human nature is always subject to the play of the three *gunas*, and the *tamasic* inertia and *rajasic* passions constantly threaten the *sattvic* personality. Even the mind of a wise man can be carried away by the senses and their associated *samskaras* or habits. Perfect security can only be found by establishing oneself in something higher than the *sattvic* qualities of calm and understanding: in the spiritual Self, that which is beyond Nature in her three modes.

Unlike the *tamasic* and *rajasic* personalities whose freedom is characterized by aloofness, and lonely isolation from others, **the person of spiritual Self-realization finds the Divine not only in himself, but in all beings.** His equality integrates knowledge, action and love and the yogic paths of *Jnana*, *karma*, and *bhakti* . Having realized his unity with all in the spiritual dimension, his equality is full of sympathy. He sees all as himself and is not intent on his lonely salvation.

He even takes upon himself the suffering of others, and works for their liberation, without being subject to their suffering. Wanting to share their joy with everyone, such liberated souls embody the Siddhas' teaching of *arrupadai*, "showing the path to others:" what one must do, and what one must avoid doing. The Siddha, or perfected sage, is ever engaged with a large equality to doing good to all creatures and makes that his occupation and delight (Gita V.25). The perfect Yogi is no solitary person reflecting on the Self in an isolated ivory tower. He is a many sided universal worker for the good of the world, for God in the world. Because such a perfect Yogi is a *bhakta*, a lover of the Divine, he sees the Divine in everyone. He is also a *karma yogi* because his actions do not carry him away from the bliss of union. As such he sees that all proceeds from the One and all his actions are directed to the One.

Question: What is the cause of human suffering and how to overcome it?

In the Yoga Sutras, the Siddha Patanjali describes five *kleshas* or causes of suffering:

1. Ignorance of our true identity, the soul, *sat chid ananda*, seeing the impermanent as permanent, the impure as pure, the painful as pleasurable, and the non-Self as the Self;
2. Egoism, born of ignorance, the habit of identifying with what we are not: the physical body-mind complex, its senses, emotions and thoughts;
3. Attachment is clinging to what is pleasurable
4. Aversion is clinging to suffering; fear, disliking;
5. Clinging to life, or fear of death.

Patanjali tells us: in their subtle form, these causes of suffering are uprooted by tracing them back to their origin by repeatedly returning to the various stages of Samadhi. In their active state they are destroyed by meditation. *Yoga sutras II.3-11*.

He tells us that the practice of "Kriya Yoga" has as its purpose the weakening of these causes of suffering and the cultivation of cognitive absorption (*samadhi*, or Self-realization). *Yoga-sutras II.2*



Siddhar Patanjali (Ceiling painting in Chidambaram Nataraja temple, India)

Question: What is the difference between “monism” or “nondualism” (advaita) and “dualism” (dvaita) and “pluralism” (theism)?

Definitions of Monism and Pluralism

Webster's Dictionary defines *monism* as "the doctrine that there is only one ultimate substance or principle, that reality is an organic whole without independent parts." This is the opposite of *dualism*: "the theory that the world is composed of two irreducible elements (matter and spirit), or...the doctrine that there are two mutually antagonistic principles in the universe, good and evil."

Pluralism is defined as "the theory that reality is composed of a multiplicity of ultimate beings, principles or substances."

Question: Why are these distinctions important?

Answer: These are subtle distinctions which may not seem to relate to one's daily religious experience. Thus, we may be inclined to dismiss such matters as of concern only to theologians, *satgurus*, *swamis*, *yogis* and philosophers. Yet, they are the very core of religion and cannot be regarded as trivial. They affect everyone, for they define distinct perceptions of the nature of the soul (and therefore of ourselves), of the world and of God. They offer different spiritual goals: either to merge fully and forever in Him (a state which transcends even states of bliss) or to remain eternally separated from God (though such separation is seen positively as endless bliss). One view, monism, is unity in identity in which the embodied soul, *jiva*, actually is and becomes God (Siva). The other view, pluralism, is unity in duality, two in one, in which the soul enjoys

proximity with God but remains forever an individual soul, or three in one because the third entity, the world, or *pasha*, does not ever, even partly, merge with God.

Furthermore, depending upon which of these perspectives one adopts, the view of the world changes. The nondualist (*advaitan*) sees the world as “unreal,” as illusionary, and consequently unimportant. One avoids becoming entangled in the world’s affairs, which is dismissed as illusionary. There is no God. There is no soul. It is neither theistic nor atheistic. It is monistic: meaning that there is only One. There is only One reality, referred to as *Brahman*, an impersonal “That.” The goal is *moksha*, freedom from the illusion (*maya*) which prevents one from realizing that there is only One. Upon awakening from the illusion of *maya*, one realizes continuous awareness of this nondual reality. The prescribed means involve “Self enquiry” or “Self remembrance.” This may involve the contemplation of such phrases as “Who Am I?” or “I am That,” or “I am Brahman,” or the study of the *Upanishads*, the Vedantic commentaries on the *Vedas*. It may also involve taking formal vows of renunciation in a monastic order, such as the *Dasami*, the swami orders founded by the leading exponent of Advaita, Adi Sankara in the 9th century.

The dualist (*dvaitan*) on the other hand recognizes that the world is real, and distinct from the soul or spirit. Classical Yoga, based upon the dualist Samkhya philosophy teaches that to become liberated from suffering in the world one needs to repeatedly enter into the state of consciousness known as samadhi, cognitive absorption. In this state, one becomes aware of what is aware. One transcends egoism’s false identification with the body and the movements of the mind. The causes of suffering are gradually eliminated as a result. Instead of the intellectual approach of Advaita and Vedanta, it teaches that the Truth can only be known by entering into the samadhi state of conscious, wherein the mind becomes silent. It prescribes a progressive *sadhana*, spiritual practices to prepare one to enter samadhi. This is the approach of Classical Yoga, Tantra, some devotional (bhakti) schools of Vedanta. Self-realization is the goal of Classical Yoga, and perfection, involving transformation of human nature, is the goal of Tantra. It is based upon an understanding of *Samkhya*’s principles (*tattvas*) of Nature, and it to seek to remain balanced amidst Nature’s constituents (*gunas*), seeking to remain as the Seer, or Witness, rather than identified with the body-mind-personality. One’s own experience is the ultimate authority, rather than scripture. “Jiva is becoming Siva” summarizes the monistic theistic approach of Siddhantha and Kashmir Shaivism. Identity of the individual soul, the *jiva*, with That (Siva) is the ultimate end, as it is in the nondualist perspective

The pluralist is what one finds in theistic religions, such as the monotheistic religions of the West (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) and dualistic traditions of Vedanta (those of Ramunuja acharya and Madhwacharya) and the Saiva Siddhantha pluralist *realist* philosophy of Meykandar prevalent in south India. “Realist” because Meykandar taught that God, the soul and the world are eternally separate. *In all of these the belief in a personal God prevails. The world is not only real, but evil. The soul needs to find a way out of the world and into heaven, where God will be found. Belief in and devotion to the Lord, scriptures, rituals, prayer, and institutional religion are the means, with emphasis on faith.* Furthermore, the Western religions do not include a belief in reincarnation, and are commonly eschatological, meaning that they are awaiting an apocalyptic end of the world and a “Judgment Day,” in which the righteous souls will be raised to heaven, and other souls will be condemned to hell for eternity.

Philosophical Differences between Monism and Pluralism

Stated most simply, the monistic school holds that, by emanation from Himself, God, whom they referred to as “Siva” or “That,” created everything -- the world, all things in the world and all souls -- and that each soul is destined to ultimately merge in *advaitic* union with That, just as a river merges into the sea. The pluralistic school of Meykandar postulates that God Siva did not create the world or souls, but that they have existed eternally, just as He has, and that the ultimate destiny of the soul is not *advaitic* union in God Siva but nondual association with Him in eternal blessedness or bliss, a union compared to salt dissolved in water. In one view, there is manifestation from Siva in the beginning and merging back into Siva in the end, and only the Supreme God, Siva, is eternal and uncreated. In the second view, the differences between the three, God, soul and the world are *eternally real*. The pluralist realist argues that because God is perfect, he could not create *imperfect* souls and the *imperfect* world with all of their suffering. There is no beginning for the soul, but eternal coexistence of the soul with Siva from the *kevala* state, which goes back to the absolutely primordial time, to the *shuddha* state, which extends forever into the future. In the monistic view, God Siva is everything; even this physical universe is a part of Him, though He transcends it as well. In the pluralistic view, God Siva animates and guides the universe, but it is not a part of Him. The crux of the difference, then, is whether there is one eternal reality in the universe or three, whether the soul is eternally separate or is, in essence, one with Siva. This debate between monistic theism and pluralist realism is presented in detail in the last volume of our publication *Tirumandiram*.

Question: **What is Maya and why is Siddhantha considered to be Monistic Theism?**

Answer: Siddhantha, like Classical Yoga and Kashmir Shaivism and Tantra begins from the perspective of what one experiences on the relative plane of existence, in the world, with all of its limitations and sources of suffering. It does not dismiss the world as “unreal” or illusionary *maya*. *Maya* even has a different meaning in Siddhantha than in Vedanta. *Maya* refers to subjective delusion in Siddhantha. In Advaita Vedanta, *maya* refers to the power of objective illusion, by which the one reality appears to be many. Advaita or nondualism begins and ends from the perspective of the absolute plane of existence. Only Brahman exists. Everything else is only apparently real. Siddhantha recognizes that few persons have the necessary power of concentration, dispassion and virtuous character to follow the path of *Advaita*, maintaining this perspective from the absolute plane, even if they understand its teachings intellectually. Therefore Siddhantha recommends a progressive path known as *sanmarga* which begins from the perspective of the relative plane, and has as its end, the absolute plane. Thus it begins with “theism,” the perspective of the embodied soul in the world, and ends in “monism,” the perspective of unity in identity, continuous nondual awareness of That. It is therefore “monistic theism,” as is Kashmir Saivism, which probably developed parallel to Siddhantha. This path of *sanmarga* includes the following four phases to prepare for nondual awareness:

1. *Charya* is performing service in the shrines or temples, such as cleaning, gathering flowers for worship, assisting the activities of the holy place, self service. It is the path of the servitor, and one dwells in the proximity of the Lord.

2. *Kriya* is the second path, and here it means ritualistic worship, and one becomes “the Lord’s child.” The devotee is close, even intimate with the Lord.
3. *Yoga* is the third approach, and it calls for contemplation and other spiritual practices such as Kundalini Yoga and Astanga Yoga. One becomes the friend of the Lord. One attains the form and insignia of the Lord, manifesting his qualities and powers. The first three paths are considered to be preliminary.
4. *Jnana* is the fourth path, direct realization, which results in complete union with the Lord. But individuality is not lost. The essential aspect common to both Siva and jiva is consciousness, *chit*, the former being highest, and the latter, that which is prevalent in humans. In Yoga-sutra I.24 Patanjali tells us who is Siva, the Lord, *Ishvara* (Isha + svara, Siva + one’s own Self):

Ishvara is the special Self, untouched by any affliction, actions, fruits of action or by any inner impressions of desire.

At the deepest, purest level of your being, that is who you are, and to realize *That* you must purify yourself from the causes of suffering (ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, clinging to life), the egoistic *perspective* that “I am the doer,” the habits of which karma is formed, and desires. What initially appears to be two, the soul and God, upon realization, is seen to be only One. This reminds of the paradoxical exhortation of Jesus, who said: “Love your enemies!” If you love your enemies you have no enemies.

While these stages are at the foundation of the predominant religious culture of south India, very few persons get beyond the above first or second stages. The *Sivavakkiyam*, like other Siddha’s literary works, admonishes the reader not to get stuck in the “half way houses” of the first two stages above: temple worship, rituals, organized religion, scriptures, and caste, but to seek “direct realization” *jnana*, through the practice of Kundalini Yoga.

While it is dualist in approach (theistic with the relationship between the soul and God) on the relative plane of existence where souls must deal with ignorance of their true identity, *maya* (mental delusion with regards to time, passions etc.), karma and the *gunas* of human nature, it is monistic on the absolute plane of reality.

This paradox can be seen more clearly with the following analogy which underlines the importance of *perspective*. When one begins to seek Truth, or God or Reality, it is like a person who is walking towards a mountain. From a distance, the mountain, like God, Truth, or Reality, appears to be so big that it is unknowable. This is from a particular perspective in time and space. Eventually one finds a path, perhaps one of many, up the mountain. These paths are analogous to various religions, philosophies, spiritual practices, or even science. As one climbs the path, one becomes more and more familiar. One gains knowledge about it. One’s *perspective* changes as one approaches and climbs the mountain. When one reaches the top of the mountain however, one’s *perspective* changes completely. There is no longer any difference between oneself and the mountain. Neither the Seer nor the Seen has changed however. The seeker and the mountain remain as they have always been. Only the perspective of the seeker has changed.

If, according to Advaita, only Brahman, That, is real, then what about *maya* itself? Is it not unreal also Adi Sankara, the foremost exponent of Advaita, anticipated this objection by

declaring that maya, understood as objective illusion, or the power by which the One appears as many, *is inherently indeterminate*. This is a far from satisfactory defense. To consider maya, as Siddhantha does, as subjective delusion, and real on the relative plane of existence is far more satisfying and helpful in the process of becoming liberated from its power.

This is why it is so important to distinguish the relative plane of existence (the world and one's actual state of mind) with the absolute plane of existence where everything is seen as One, ignoring the conditions and consequences of each. Many persons who follow what critics refer to as "Neo-Advaitan" teachers ignore this distinction and consequently believe that mere knowledge of the nondual state is sufficient and that there is nothing to do to realize it and nothing to do to maintain one's awareness of it. This also indicates why there is no word for philosophy in Sanskrit. There are six main philosophical *perspectives* however, known as *darshans* which include *Vaisheshika, Nyaya, Samkhya, Mimamsa, Vedanta* and *Yoga*

Question: What is enlightenment and how does it relate to this discussion?

Answer: The term "enlightenment" of course is an English word, which until recent decades was not used in any of the Advaita traditions except for Buddhism where it was used to describe the ultimate state of existential freedom attained by the Buddha, known as "Nirvana". I don't recall ever seeing it used in traditional Advaita literature, (Vedanta, Shankara, Ramana Maharshi). I am under the impression that it has come into vogue because of recent Western teachers, who have been described as "Neo-Advaitans." I have not seen it used in the literature of Classical Yoga traditions nor in the Hindu tantras.

I suspect that much of the recent debate among these so-called "Neo-Advaitan" teachers over "What is Enlightenment?" and even a "post-enlightenment phase" concerns the purifying of residual manifestations of egoism: pride, anger, fear, sloth, and lust. This may occur precisely because we in the West lack not only the experience, but also the terminology in English to describe the various degrees of enlightenment. My own teacher, when asked questions on this subject, being a yogi and a Tamil scholar, but not an intellectual, referred his students to the writings of the Siddhas, (which were at that time largely untranslated) and otherwise, those of Sri Aurobindo.

The closest term I have seen related to "enlightenment" in the Tamil literature of south India is *vettivel* which refers to the vast luminous space of consciousness, the blissful samadhi state, transcendental awareness, the awareness of being itself. It is a "place" where thoughts drop off, one by one, until one's consciousness exists merely as an empty expanse. It stands for the absence of subjectivity and objectivity. It stands for the emergence from time. It is the eternal now. It is a place where one transcends past, present and future. It is a state which is not accessible to sensuous perception; a state without distinctive marks, a stainless sky. *Vettivel* is emergence from time, liberation, true freedom. It is "that Truth, the Sun lying concealed in the darkness"

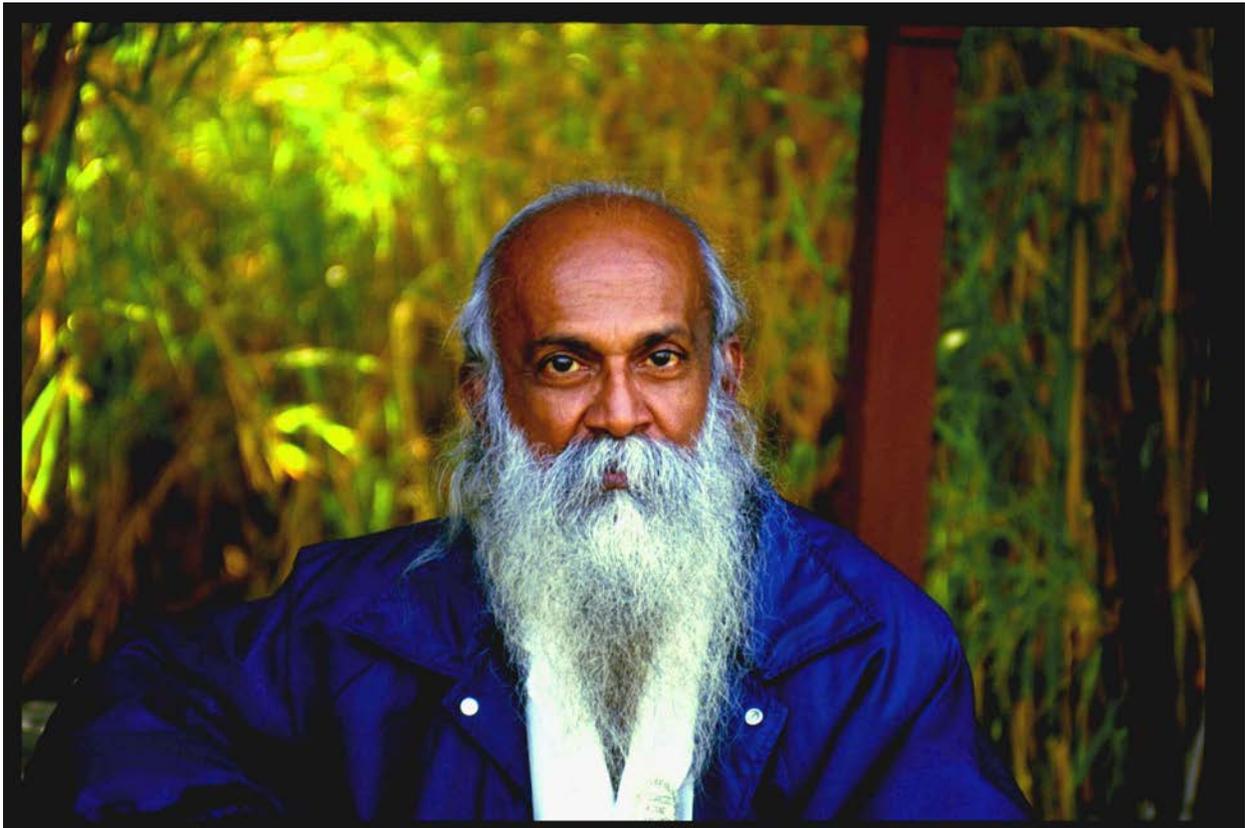
*It is formless, blemishless, Self-effulgent and omnipresent,
Ever-blissful, beyond expression, and the inner light of those who have known it,*

The One dividing itself into Brahma, Vishnu and Siva creates, sustains and destroys the whole universe.

Like a column of light that is Liberation, It is,

May the feet of the Godhead protect. – Aphorisms of Wisdom 28, verse 1, by Paambatti Siddha, in The Yoga of the 18 Siddhas: An Anthology, page 475-476.

While no amount of words can capture it, one may realize it by the guidance of the guru in the practice of *kundalini yoga* as prescribed by the Siddhas, including the following elements: learning it in person of the guru (“at the feet”), by awakening the energy in the *muladhara* chakra and directing it mentally upwards through the other five chakras above until it reaches the *sahasrara*.



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

Question: Why did you say at the beginning of this interview that Siddhantha begins where Advaita ends?

Answer: Yogi Ramaiah answered this question succinctly when he described Siddhanthan’s goal as “complete surrender.” While the Advaitan may surrender the perspective of the ego to the perspective of the soul in the spiritual plane of existence, the Siddhas realized that perfection in a diseased physical body, or with a vital body filled with desires and emotions, or a neurotic mind, is no perfection. They realized that “enlightenment” or “complete surrender” or “liberation,”

cannot be limited to the spiritual plane of existence. They envisioned and realized humanity's evolutionary potential, and at the vanguard of its *perfection*, developed the means to realize a progressive process of purification (*shuddhi*) involving surrender of the ego's perspective and false identification:

1. In the spiritual body, the *anandamayakosha*, wherein one realizes *sat chid ananda*, Shiva-Shakti, or Self realization; one becomes a saint, with intimate communion with the Divine. The ordinary egoistic perspective of a saint is replaced at least in part, by an awareness of the Presence of the Divine. One identifies with the "Seer" or "Witness," but the mind, the vital and the physical are neither transformed nor even supportive of the surrender. However, if the mystic's surrender or communion is limited to the spiritual plane of reality only, he may still be bound by a need to make philosophical or theological distinctions until he begins to surrender his ego in the intellectual plane. Nor will most saints remain on the physical plane long enough to complete the process of surrender, for various reasons ranging from physical health, to aspiration to "get away from this world of suffering."
2. In the intellectual body, *vinjananmayakosha*, silence rules, thinking largely ceases, and one develops the *jnana siddhi*, the ability to know things intuitively, by identity, and communicate this knowledge with facility; one is a sage, guided primarily by intuitive wisdom, one has surrendered the pride of knowing, but one is still distracted by the mind, vital and physical nature. The ego still lingers until the surrender encompasses all planes of existence. There is always the risk of a fall, and desire, aversion, clinging to life can still create suffering. As Saint Augustine put it: "Lord, help me to surrender, but not yet." That is, part of our lower human nature, in particular the mental plane, the seat of fantasy and desires, and the vital plane, the seat of the emotions and desires, resists the transformation which surrender entails.
3. In the mental body, *manomayakosha*, wherein one develops some of the *siddhis* associated with the subtle senses; beginning with clairvoyance - the ability to see things at a distance in time or space, or clairaudience - the subtle sense of hearing, or clairsentience - the subtle sense of feeling. One may make prophecies, manifest the capacity to heal the sick, and know the past of others by intuitive insight, as one can enter into deep states of communion with the past, future, or any aspect of an object upon which one concentrates. One becomes a Siddha, having surrendered the pride of person, and the search for new experiences, but one may still have troublesome emotions and desires in the vital body which is not yet surrendered.
4. In the vital body, *pranamayakosha*, wherein it surrenders all of its desires and emotions, and changes its allegiance completely from the ego, towards what Sri Aurobindo called "the psychic being" or soul, which then completes the process, and one manifests other extraordinary *siddhis*. One becomes a great or *Maha Siddha*, after surrendering the ego at the level of the vital plane of existence, capable of manifesting *siddhis* or powers, which involve nature itself. This may include materialization of objects, levitation, control of the weather, wish fulfillment and invisibility. While they have lived principally in India, Tibet, China, and southeast Asia, by their own accounts, the *Maha Siddhas* have traveled all over the world. But the physical body has still not surrendered to the higher nature, the descent of supreme consciousness into its very cells.

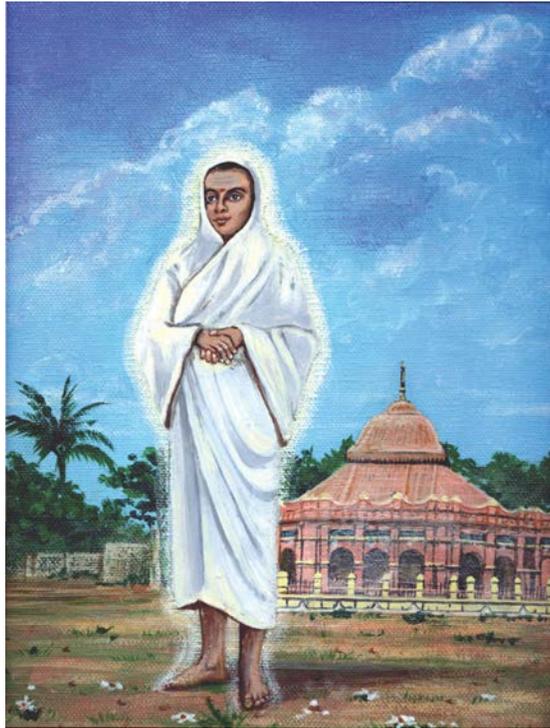
5. In the physical body, *annamayakosha*, which becomes a divine body, a *divya deha*, glowing with a golden light of immortality. A few rare *Siddhas* are able to surrender their egos at the level of the physical plane, wherein the limited consciousness of the cells of the body give up their ordinary metabolic purposes, and become fully integrated with the Supreme Consciousness. These great Siddhas are capable of manifesting *siddhis* or powers, which involve material nature itself. Their physical body glows with a golden light of this consciousness becomes impervious to disease and death. Even for the most serious of Yogis, this is difficult to conceive of if one remains tied to the old paradigm of opposition between spirit/consciousness versus the body and the world. One becomes a Babaji or a Boganathar or an Agastyar, and one's perfection is no longer limited by the ignorance of the physical human nature; one is invulnerable to disease and death. If one leaves the physical plane it is not because the physical nature forces one to leave. Throughout the writings of the Siddhas we see many descriptions of this level of divine transformation.

Question: Why does a Siddhas consider him or self to be no one special, and thus provide little or no details on their personal life?

The Siddha Patanjali tells us that until the old habits of identifying with the body and mind are completely uprooted, by repeatedly returning to the source of consciousness, the ego is still able to delude even at times the saint or Siddha. They may for example, use their powers to attract public attention. However, once the surrender occurs even at the physical level, the ego is banished forever. One is literally “nothing special,” because one is only identified with That, which permeates everything: pure consciousness. Certain Siddhas through the ages have reached this state and these Siddhas placed no emphasis or importance on their person, their powers, their biography, or their activities- because those were not “theirs.” These enlightened beings were instruments of the Divine force and Light and all action and rest that moved through them were due to that Divine Power. It is therefore no coincidence that we know with so little certainty what the Siddhas did, or what were the details of their *personal* lives, but we do know their wisdom teachings. It is the wisdom they attained, which they have taken pains to leave for us. It is this consciousness, this wisdom, this experience of the ultimate Reality that they considered to be of utmost importance, because it shows the way back to the “Kingdom of Heaven.” By emphasizing the person of the teacher over the teaching itself, religions such as Christianity and Buddhism are formed. Buddha was not a Buddhist. Jesus was not a Christian. The teachings of Jesus, his parables, were replaced by a religion about his person, despite the fact that history provides no historical details about him or his life. Buddha, who as a Hindu, sought to replace ritualism with teachings of how to avoid suffering, because an object of worship.

The Siddha may be called upon to remain in the same physical body for some indefinite period of time, or even to transmigrate into another body or to dematerialize, or to ascend as Jesus did, or to be in more than one, visible body at the same period of time, in two separate places. There is the well-documented example of Ramalinga Swamigal, of the late nineteenth century, whose body cast no shadow in the sun, whose body could not be harmed, or photographed, despite repeated attempts when he posed with a group before expert photographers, and whose body disappeared from the earth, quite dramatically, in a flash of violet light. Since then, Ramalinga Swamigal has been reported to have reappeared on occasions to assist devotees in need. Children and devotees in southern India to this day continue to sing many of the more than forty thousand poems and songs

he wrote, extolling the path of "supreme grace light." We also have the example of Kriya Babaji, described in the *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and *The Voice of Babaji: A Trilogy of Kriya Yoga*, and that of the Siddhas Agastyar, Boganathar and Sri Aurobindo, who left detailed accounts of their own process of surrendering at the level of the physical body and various forms of immortality. As Mircea Eliade states: the *Siddhas* are those "who understood liberation as the conquest of immortality."



Ramalinga Swamigal at Vadalur, Tamil Nadu"
(With permission of M. Govindan)

Question: What is the significance of the siddhis or yogic miraculous powers?

The "siddhis" are described in details in the third chapter of the *Yoga-sutras* by Patanjali. They are the result of *samyama*, or communion, defined by him as a combination of concentration, meditation and cognitive absorption (samadhi). Like anything they can become an obstacle, if they become a means of fulfilling some egoistic attachment. However, when viewed from the perspective of Siddhantha, they are byproducts of a process of divinization of human nature, in which the lower nature driven by the ego is replaced by or surrendered to, a higher nature, driven by the secret, highest Self, *Ishvara* or *Purushottama*. This process has been described in detail in the writings of the "Eighteen Siddhas" and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The writings of the "Eighteen Tamil Yoga Siddhas," particularly those of the Siddhar Boganathar and Tirumular, provide rich and inspired first person accounts of this process. They also describe the methods of Kundalini Yoga, especially related to the breath, to empower and accelerate this process.

This process was also described in voluminous detail by Sri Aurobindo. However, he envisioned it as a means to accelerate the evolution of humanity as a whole, once the “Supramental” had descended within a sufficient number of advanced practitioners of an “Integral Yoga.” He summarized this Yoga in three words: “aspiration, rejection, and surrender.”

Question: What is the relationship between Babaji’s Kriya Yoga and Siddhantha?

Answer: Babaji’s Kriya Yoga is a distillation of Siddhantha. It’s five fold path combines the cultivation of dispassion and meditation in Classical Yoga as described in Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras, with the Kundalini Yoga of the Siddhas. This five fold path includes:

Kriya Hatha Yoga: including "asanas," physical postures of relaxation, "bandahs," muscular locks, and "mudras," psycho-physical gestures, all of which bring about greater health, peace and the awakening of the principal energy channels, “the nadis”, and centers, the "chakras." Babaji has selected a particularly effective series of 18 postures, which are taught in stages and in pairs. One cares for the physical body not for its own sake but as a vehicle or temple of the Divine.

Kriya Kundalini Pranayama: is a powerful breathing technique to awaken one’s potential power and consciousness and to circulate it through the seven principal chakras between the base of the spine and the crown of the head. It awakens the latent faculties associated with the seven chakras and makes one a dynamo on all five planes of existence.

Kriya Dhyana Yoga: is a progressive series of meditation techniques to learn the scientific art of mastering the mind - to cleanse the subconscious, to develop concentration, mental clarity and vision, to awaken the intellectual, intuitive and creative faculties, and to bring about the breathless state of communion with God, "Samadhi" and Self-Realization.

Kriya Mantra Yoga: the silent mental repetition of subtle sounds to awaken the intuition, the intellect and the chakras; the mantra becomes a substitute for the "I" - centered mental chatter and facilitates the accumulation of great amounts of energy. The mantra also cleanses habitual subconscious tendencies.

Kriya Bhakti Yoga: the cultivation of the soul’s aspiration for the Divine. It includes devotional activities and service to awaken unconditional love and spiritual bliss in the spiritual body; it may include chanting and singing. Gradually, all of one's activities become soaked with sweetness, as the "Beloved" is perceived in all.

Question: The “Five fold path” of Babaji’s Kriya Yoga reminds me of the various Yogas recommended by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, according to one’s own nature or essential character (svabhava):

1. Karma yoga for those who feel called by their own nature (*svabhava*) to serve selflessly through their actions;
2. Bhakti yoga for those who feel called by their own nature to love the Lord, or to love others, or to love the Lord in others;
3. Raja yoga for those who feel called by their own nature to seek Truth by turning inwards in meditation;
4. Jnana yoga for those who feel called by own soul’s nature to seek Truth through the cultivation of Self knowledge and wisdom;

How can one decide which of these is best for oneself?

Answer: We can see that there is a constant law of variation and that each individual acts not only according to the common laws of human spirit, mind, will, life, but according to this own nature or essential character (*svabhava*), the law of self becoming of the Soul. Nature works out the becoming of each one’s being according the possibilities of his or her becoming. According to what we are, we act, and by our actions we develop, we work out what we are. Each man or woman fulfils different functions or follows a different bent according to the rule of his or her own circumstances, capacities, turn, character, powers. The Gita emphasizes that “one’s own nature, rule, function, should be observed and followed, - even if defective, it is better than the well-performed rule of another’s nature.” Action should be rightly regulated, evolved from within, in harmony with the truth of one’s being, rather than by some external motive, such as social expectations, or mechanical impulsion, for example, fear or desire. To know ones own nature requires detached self-study and discernment. Once it is identified, one can decide which of the above paths will best help one to fulfill the potential of one’s essential character, leading to Self-realization. Until then some regular practice of all of them will create the balance needed to clearly see one’s *svabhava*. Until then, one may also feel a personal need to follow one or more of these paths or yogas. For example, if one feels physically weak, or nervous, more of asanas or pranayama; if one feels a lack of love in one’s life, more of *bhakti yoga*, the cultivation of love and devotion; if one has many doubts and questions, more of *jnana yoga*, the study of wisdom literature and Self-remembrance.

When after Self-realization, the soul has become identified with the hidden Self, *Ishvara*, however, it becomes the agent, the instrument of the divine, assuming its higher divine nature of becoming. It is able to change its natural working into a divine action in any area of life, whether it be service, business, leadership, research or art.

The person of spiritual Self-realization becomes a “Divine worker,” finding the Divine not only in himself, but in all beings. His equality integrates knowledge, action and love and the yogic paths of *Jnana*, *karma*, and *bhakti* prescribed in the Gita. Having realized his unity with all in the spiritual dimension, his equality is full of sympathy. He sees all as himself and is not intent on his lonely salvation. He even takes upon himself the suffering of others, and works for their

liberation, without being subject to their suffering. Wanting to share their joy with everyone, Divine workers embody the Siddhas' teaching of *arrupadai*, "showing the path to others:" what one must do, and what one must avoid doing. The perfect sage, according to the Gita is ever engaged with a large equality to doing good to all creatures and makes that his occupation and delight (Gita V.25). The perfect Yogi is no solitary person reflecting on the Self in an isolated ivory tower. He is a many sided universal worker for the good of the world, for God in the world. Because such a perfect Yogi is a *bhakta*, a lover of the Divine, he sees the Divine in everyone. He is also a *karma yogi* because his actions do not carry him away from the bliss of union. As such he sees that all proceeds from the One and all his actions are directed to the One.

Question: Why are the practices of the Siddhas kept secret if they are so beneficial? Why are they taught only during initiations?

Answer: Initiation is a sacred act in which an individual is given their initial experience of a means to realizing some truth. That means is a *kriya* or "practical yogic technique," and the truth is a portal to the eternal and infinite One. Because this truth is beyond name and form, it cannot be communicated through words or symbols. It can be experienced however, and for this one needs a teacher who can share his or her own living experience of the truth. The technique becomes a vehicle by which the teacher shares with the practitioner the means to realize the truth in oneself. For this reason most of these practices, or *kriyas* are not described with their essential details in the writings of the Siddhas. They are reserved for personal training by a qualified teacher.

During the initiation there is always a transmission of energy and consciousness by the initiator and the recipient, even if the recipient is not aware of it. The transmission may not be effective if the student is full of questions, doubts or distractions. So, the initiator attempts to prepare the recipient beforehand and to control the environment so that these potential disturbances are minimized. The initiator takes into himself or herself, in effect, the consciousness of the recipient, and begins to expand it beyond its habitual mental and vital boundaries. There is a kind of melting of ordinary mental and vital boundaries, between the initiator and the recipient, and this greatly facilitates movement of consciousness to a higher plane. By so doing, he opens the recipient up to the existence of his own soul, or higher Self, which until then, remains veiled in the case of most individuals. By so raising the consciousness of the recipient, the latter has their initial glimpses at least of their potential consciousness and power. This is what is meant by the raising of the kundalini of the disciple. It is most often not done in a dramatic way in an initial session, but rather gradually over a period, depending upon the diligence of the student in putting into practice what he or she has learned.

For the initiation to be effective two things are essential: the preparation of the student or recipient, and the presence of an initiator who has realized his or her Self. While most spiritual seekers emphasize the latter, and seek a perfect guru, few concern themselves with their own preparation. It is perhaps a fault of human nature, to seek someone who will "do it for us." That is, give us Self-realization or God-realization. While the guru or teacher may point you in the right direction, the seeker must himself commit himself to following those directions. While the seeker may be intellectually committed to following these, all too often, human nature causes one to waver in distraction, doubt or desire. So, even if one finds the perfect teacher, if one has

not cultivated the qualities like faith, perseverance, sincerity and patience, the initiation may become as futile as sowing seeds on a concrete sidewalk.

Traditionally, for this reason, initiation was restricted to only those who had prepared themselves, sometimes for years in advance. While the first initiations may be made available to a larger number of qualified aspirants, only those who had cultivated the qualities of a disciple, as described above, were given the higher initiations.

There is an essential sacred transmission of consciousness and energy which occurs between the initiator and the recipient which empowers the techniques. That is why initiatory traditions have managed to pass the direct experience of truth from one generation to the next so effectively. Their strength lies in the power and the consciousness of those who have done the practices intensely and so realized their truth. The teacher also remains a source of inspiration and guidance for the student. For all these reasons, the techniques are kept secret, reserved for the context of personal initiation by a qualified teacher.

Question: What is the value of the human body in relationship to one's spiritual development?

Answer: The Siddhas refer to three great blessings in life: First, to be born as a human being, which is exceedingly rare. Only when one is incarnated on the physical plane can the soul grow in wisdom, and purify itself of the blemishes or fetters. Second, to find the spiritual path, which is also very rare, with all of the distractions to the five senses, and the confusion of the mind and intellect. Third, to find one's spiritual preceptor, the guru, whose teachings and example guide the soul to liberation. Once found, progress towards the goal can become rapid if one keeps the physical body healthy and applies oneself to the spiritual discipline and teachings prescribed by the guru and his tradition.

The Siddhas viewed the body as the temple of God, and so they made every effort to maintain its health and even to extend its life, so that one would have sufficient time to complete the process of complete surrender to the Divine, which was their ultimate goal. As tantrics, they sought to transform, to perfect their human nature. Perfection, they realized, could not be limited to the spiritual plane. Enlightenment in a diseased body or neurotic mind and desire filled vital body was no perfection. Recognizing that the physical body was ignorant of its potential, and therefore subject to metabolic decay and disease, and using the remarkable powers mentioned above, the Siddhas undertook a systematic study of nature and its elements and from what they were able to grasp they developed a highly systematic medicine they developed a system of medicine known as "Siddha" with many uniquely effective remedies which is still widely practiced in south India. They wrote many medical treatises on longevity, which today form the foundation for one of the four systems of medicine recognized by the government of India.

Recognizing that they were in a race against time, to complete the physical body's transformation before its demise, they also developed unique herbal and material formula known as *kaya kalpa* to extend the life of the body. But they believed that only kundalini pranayama (breathing) exercises could ultimately complete this process.

The Siddha Tirumular, provides some insight into this question of longevity in his definition of medicine:

Medicine is that which treats the disorders of the physical body;
Medicine is that which treats the disorders of the mind;
Medicine is that which prevents illness;
Medicine is that which enables immortality.

The Siddhas discovered why the body ages and developed steps to prevent aging. They, for instance saw that the span of all animal life is inversely proportional to the rate of breathing. That is, the slower the breathing, the longer the life. And conversely, the faster the breathing the shorter is the life. Animals, like the sea tortoise, whale, dolphin and parrot, which take the fewest number of breaths per minute have lives that are much longer than humans, whereas the dog and the mouse, which breathe five times faster than the human's average, have one fifth their longevity. The Siddhas suggest that if one breathes faster times or less per minute, he/she should live for a hundred years. It is when breathing becomes agitated or habitually much faster than this, that one's life span is reduced.

Question: What is Neo-Advaita and why is it controversial?

Answer: The modern Advaita movement has undergone a split between two factions: one remains committed to a more traditional articulation of Advaita Vedanta, and the other has departed in significant ways from this traditional spiritual system. Over the past fifteen years, the Traditional Modern Advaita (TMA) faction has launched sustained and wide-ranging criticism of Non-Traditional Modern Advaita (NTMA) teachers and teachings. This split is similar in many ways to what has occurred during the past 20 years between traditional Yoga teachings and those who are teaching Yoga primarily as a business enterprise. There are today more than 200 self-proclaimed NTMA teachers according to a recent article. Professor Philip Lucas has written an excellent article, entitled "Not So Fast, Awakened Ones: Neo-Advaitin Gurus and their Detractors," in *The Mountain Path*, the journal of the Ramana Maharshi Ashram, Volume 49, no. 1 (January-March 2012) and republished in an expanded version in the academic journal *Nova Religio, The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, volume 17, no. 3, February 2014, page 6-37, published by the University of California Press, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/nr.2014.17.3.6> .

I highly recommend this article because it is relevant to all students of Kriya Yoga, who may be wondering whether the offerings of NTMA may be an effective alternative to the sadhana of Babaji's Kriya Yoga. It will also be instructive to any seeker of nonduality, monism or Truth.

I would like to first summarize the four main areas of criticism being made by the Traditional Modern Advaita faction against the Neo-Advaitan teachers and teachings, according to Professor Lucas, and share with you the comments I have made on this article.

The first area involves the allegation that Neo-Advaitan teachers disavows the need for sadhana, or spiritual effort in the process of Self-realization.

The second area of criticism involves the allegation that Neo-Advaita ignores the necessity of moral development and the cultivation of virtues as a pre-requisite from authentic spiritual realization.

The third area of criticism is that Neo-Advaitans lack knowledge of the texts, language and traditions associated with Advaita. Consequently, too many such teachers begin teaching within a short time of their first “awakening” experience, without being established in the state of *sahajasamadhi*, (continuous nondual awareness) necessary for effective teaching.

The fourth area of criticism pertains to the *satsang* format used by Neo-Advaita teachers and the readiness of their participants. Critics charge that these teachers are only concerned with psychological empowerment, self-help, and the experience of community, and offer “instant enlightenment” experiences rather than ongoing assistance in the task of ego purification.

A fifth area of criticism is the charge that Neo-Advaitan teachers make no distinction between the absolute and relative planes of awareness and existence. Consequently, they give little or no support for a life of engaged spiritual discipline, and development in the physical, emotional, mental and intellectual dimensions or engagement in society. All of their focus is on the ultimate state of spiritual realization. This gives rise to the delusion that one is liberated and disengagement from ordinary life.

In sum, Neo-Advaitan teachers have removed the essential requirements of the Advaita approach to liberation, critics charge, and have substituted a kind of pseudo-spirituality which is not effective, and may be harmful.

His article also discusses the “economic model” of religion, and the phenomena of “adaptation” of religion when it moves from one culture to another.

I, personally have heard several teachers and students of Advaita claim that they no longer do sadhana, that “You don’t need to practice Yoga,” or that it is not needed because they are already “enlightened” or for some other reason. The second area of criticism resembles the tendency of Yoga teachers and students in the West to ignore the first “limb” of yoga: the *yamas*, or social restraints: non-harming, not lying, chastity, not stealing, greedlessness. The third area of criticism is similar to ignoring one of the second limbs of Yoga, the “*niyama*” of “self-study,” part of which involves the study of the wisdom texts which serve as mirrors of one’s true Self. The fourth area of criticism is similar to the abridgement of the remaining limbs of Classical, eight limbed Yoga in the West to only *asana*, as a means of physical fitness, weight loss or stress management, mundane preoccupations particular to the Western culture. The fifth area is particular to Advaita itself, because it is almost entirely an intellectual approach, with no visible means of distinguishing or verifying who is “enlightened.” Consequently a *wannabe* teacher of Neo-Advaita can easily learn to mimic the manner of speaking and teaching of TMA teachers such as Ramana Maharshi or Nisgaradatta Maharaj.

After reading Professor Lucas’s article in the Mountain Path two years ago, I wrote to him. He asked me to send my comments on his article. After doing so, he expressed his agreement with my comments. As he is a Professor of Religion at Stetson University, in Florida, a few miles from where I live in the winter, we met for dinner recently, after I had sent to him some comments on his article. Here are the comments on his article which I sent to him:

1. The “economic model of religion” helps to explain much of this divide, particularly in the West, where there is a *spiritual market* for “instant” and “easy” “enlightenment” among persons who

have come to expect “instant” and “easy” everything. Humans are by nature, lazy, and so they will seek the “easiest” and “quickest” means possible, effectively creating the *demand* for teachers who will in turn *supply* to them an “easy” and even “instantaneous” experience of “enlightenment.” “Just attend my satsang,” or “attend my transformation seminar,” or “read my book,” “and you too can become enlightened” is the kind of hype that many novices will succumb to in the *spiritual marketplace*. The fact that it may cost them something, even a lot of money, only serves to enhance the perceived value of such promise in the eyes of neophyte consumers. The fact that they have little or no idea as to what “enlightenment” actually is, makes the work of such teachers all the easier. But as the shoppers and consumers in this marketplace begin to notice that their belief that they are “enlightened” does nothing to resolve the problems associated with their human nature, or even their existential crisis, some of those who are sincerely seeking “enlightenment” will move onto the *mature market offerings of TMA* (Traditional Modern Advaita). Many others will remain satisfied with the fleeting glimpses of it proffered in the satsangs of NTMA (Non Traditional Modern Advaitan) teachers, rewarded with emotional and social compensations.

2. Westerners, particularly Americans, are generally ignorant about religion, other than what they may recall from Sunday school. The average American is unable to distinguish “theism” from “monism” from “atheism” from “agnosticism” from “gnosticism.” And because of America’s Constitution, which bars religious education in public schools, most of them do not even think about the issues which Eastern religions such as Advaita all address: existential suffering. So they are unprepared to even consider much of what TMA requires.
3. The word *guru* has lost its aura of respectability in the West, ever since scandals broke the reputation of nearly ever Hindu and Buddhist guru who visited the West during the last quarter century. Consequently, Westerners, with very few exceptions, rarely seek a guru. While Indians generally still do. This fact I believe, explains the reason, to a large extent, for the divide which you have described between NTMA and TMA. This phenomena has occurred on a much greater scale in the domain of Yoga. The scandals associated with many Indian Yoga gurus who brought a spiritual if not Hindu Yoga to the West during the 1960’s and 1970’s lead to their replacement by what *the Yoga Journal* proudly proclaims as *American Yoga*, which is proudly anti-guru, individualistic, commercial, competitive, therapeutic, athletic or body-centered, non-religious, and fragmented.
4. You asked the question: “How many elements of the Advaita system can be jettisoned before its efficacy as a means of spiritual liberation is unduly compromised?” This really begs the question: “Who in modern times has become “spiritually liberated” or “enlightened” and what distinguishes them from others? I would argue that very few persons indeed have done so. Your article failed to address the question of how can one judge whether someone is enlightened or not? It would have been very helpful to have at least made the distinction between “enlightening” *experiences*, as commonly reported, and the permanent *state* of enlightenment. While it may have been beyond the scope of your article, given that the subject matter is “enlightenment” and the debate over how to attain it, some criteria for judging what it

is and what is not would have been helpful. In the literature of Classical Yoga, such as the *Yoga sutras* of Patanjali and the Shaiva and Buddhist *Tantras* the various levels of samadhi, “Self-realization,” and “Enlightenment” are described. By addressing these points you could have begun to answer the question at the beginning of this paragraph.

Question: Why is it important to understand Siddhanta, Advaita and Yoga?

Answer: They are road maps to spiritual liberation or freedom from the suffering inherent in human nature. They inform ones practice or sadhana. In the West, most persons remain ignorant of their teachings, and simply attempt to do various practices, without understanding their philosophic purposes or goals. So when Westerners get bored or dissatisfied with one practice, they look for another. They collect techniques. It is like getting into a series of automobiles and cruising around with no road map and nowhere to go. In India, until recently, most educated persons are knowledgeable of some aspects of the philosophical schools or *darshans*, but don't practice any spiritual techniques or yoga. Practice, informed by the underlying teachings ensures progress towards the realization of ones *sankalpa* or intention. By understanding Siddhantha, Advaita, Yoga and other spiritual paths, one can decide what goal one wants to pursue and create the firm intention necessary to realize it. Even if your goal is no goal at all, simply to be, as long as you are in the world, you will have to act, so your actions need to be informed by wisdom if you wish to avoid suffering and to cause suffering to others.

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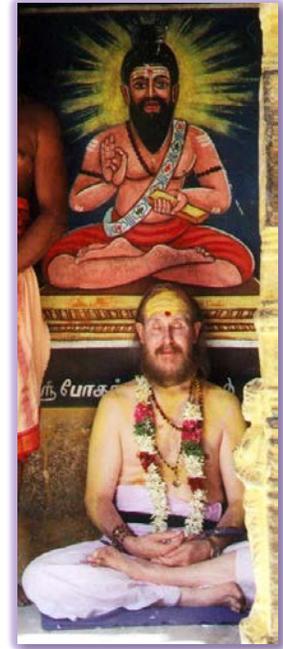
For more information on this subject read the following books published by Babaji's Kriya Yoga and Publications, and available in our online bookstore at:
<http://www.babajiskriyayoga.net/English/bookstore.htm>

1. Tirumandiram, by Tirumular, 2013 edition, 5 volumes
2. Babaji and the 18 Siddha Kriya Yoga Tradition, 8th edition
3. Kriya Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and the Siddhas, 3rd edition
4. The Yoga of Boganathar, volume 1 and 2
5. The Yoga of Tirumular: Essays on the Tirumandiram, 2nd edition
6. The Wisdom of Jesus and the Yoga Siddhas
7. The Yoga of the 18 Siddhas: An Anthology
8. The Poets of the Powers, by Kamil Zvebil

And:

The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India, by David Gordon White, published by the University of Chicago Press, 1996

The Practice of the Integral Yoga, by J.K. Mukherjee, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publications Department, Pondicherry, India, 605002. 2003



Letters on Yoga, volumes, 1, 2, and 3, by Sri Aurobindo, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publications Department, Pondicherry, India, 605002.

The Integral Yoga, by Sri Aurobindo, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publications Department, Pondicherry, India, 605002.

The Divine Life, by Sri Aurobindo, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publications Department, Pondicherry, India, 605002.

“Not So Fast, Awakened Ones: Neo-Advaitin Gurus and their Detractors,” in *The Mountain Path*, the journal of the Ramana Maharshi Ashram, Volume 49, no. 1 (January-March 2012)
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