

THE WISDOM OF JESUS AND THE YOGA SIDDHAS



By Marshall Govindan

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Babaji's Kriya Yoga and Publications, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

Questions

Who was Jesus? One of the most influential human beings of all times? The founder of Christianity? A *messiah* or savior sent by God to redeem humanity of its sins? What were His teachings? Is our knowledge of Jesus limited to what is recorded in the Bible? What has modern historical research to say about what Jesus did and taught? Have there been other spiritual masters in India whose teachings are similar to those of Jesus? If so, what light can they shed on the teachings of Jesus?

With the discovery of many new source documents in the Sinai Desert and near the Dead Sea, and with the advent of modern methods of textual analysis by scholars who are independent of institutional bias, today most Biblical scholars will agree that the books of the Bible's New Testament are written at several levels of authenticity:

- What were likely the actual words of Jesus, quoted in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, but recorded several decades afterwards.
- What were likely interpolations - words attributed to Jesus by unknown sources.
- What was said about Jesus or about his teachings by others, for example, Paul in his "letters," which make up most of the rest of the New Testament, and which served as the basis for early Church dogma.

Within Christianity and in the popular understanding of Jesus and his teaching, how much have these interpolations and early Church dogma distorted or obscured the actual words and teachings of Jesus? What do the actual words of Jesus say about who Jesus was and what his teachings were? What do the actual words of Jesus not say? Answers to these questions are a prerequisite to making comparisons between the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of the Gnostics and other mystics, such as those of the Yoga Siddhas. Previous attempts by some, including Swami Prabhavananda's *The Sermon on the Mount According to Vedanta*, and Paramahansa Yogananda's *The Second Coming of Christ* made comparisons with Christianity's dogma reflected in the King James version of the Bible. They did not consider the work of biblical historians who have suggested numerous inaccuracies in this English version of the Bible, in comparison with the original Greek. They do not take into consideration the many findings that modern critical historical research has brought to light. Yogananda interpreted who Jesus was, by distinguishing "Jesus" the person from "Christ" the state of "consciousness," which he had attained. Most of his interpretation was based upon statements allegedly made by Jesus, for example, the "I am" statements, in the Gospel of John, which most critical scholars now consider to be interpolations and words not spoken by Jesus. This present work presents a comparison between the teachings of the Yoga Siddhas, with those of the teachings that are considered now to be the most authentic teachings of Jesus, based upon the results of modern, critical, historical research.

Others have attempted to compare what Jesus did with what other saints, prophets and sages have done. Some have speculated that Jesus went to India or Tibet, where he was initiated into their sacred traditions. Holger Kersten, for example, in his *Jesus Lived in India*, assembled many arguments, based upon very little evidence that Jesus not only went to India prior to his crucifixion, but returned there and died in Kashmir. He concluded however, that we really do not know what Jesus did.

As we will see, modern historical scholars have been able to form a broad consensus about what Jesus taught, but history provides little evidence of what Jesus actually did. Nothing is recorded about the so called

“missing years” of Jesus between the recorded incidents in the temple in Jerusalem, when, at the age of twelve, he spoke authoritatively to the scribes and Pharisees, and his appearance at the age of 30, when he begins his mission, by the Sea of Galilee. Therefore, we must look elsewhere to understand the influences that transformed Jesus, the carpenter’s son from Nazareth, into the Messiah, or savior of the Jewish people, and the Christ, revered by millions ever since.

But there are other sources, which by comparison with what Jesus said and taught and how he lived, clearly indicate what those influences were. Examples include the writings of the Gnostics, discovered at Nag Hammadi, in the Sinai, in 1945, the Jewish Essenes, discovered at Qumram in 1948 and thousands of ancient documents which trace the development of early Christianity, and which portray its competing divisions.

Several scholars have studied the Yoga Siddhas of India: Eliade, Briggs, Zvelebil, Ganapathy, White, Govindan, Feuerstein, in particular. A critical edition of the most important work of the Tamil Yoga Siddhas, the *Tirumandiram*, by the Siddha Tirumular (written between the 2nd century B.C. and the fourth century C.E.) was produced by the Tamil scholar Suba Annamalai in 2000, from thirteen existing manuscripts. A new English language translation and commentary of this critical edition of the *Tirumandiram* is currently being prepared by a team of scholars lead by Dr. T.N. Ganapathy. Most recently, the research of the Yoga Siddha Research Centre in Chennai, India, lead by Dr. T.N. Ganapathy, has brought out a series of books providing, for the first time, translation and commentary of the Yoga Siddhas, or “perfected” yogis of South India, who were contemporaries of Jesus. Their teachings and miraculous powers were remarkably similar to those of Jesus. This makes possible an intriguing comparison between the teachings and miracles of Jesus and those of the Yoga Siddhas.

The writings of the South India Yoga Siddhas have been largely ignored until recently. They were not well preserved by the orthodox institutions because of the Siddhas’ severe condemnation of the caste system, excessive emphasis on temple worship and scriptures, and the authority

of the Brahmins, the priestly caste, which monopolized religious affairs in India. The writings of the Siddhas were in the vernacular language of the people rather than Sanskrit. Knowledge of Sanskrit was limited for the most part to the Brahmin caste, whose priests and scholars dominated the religious and educational systems. The Siddhas condemned this monopoly of the Brahmins, and taught that the Lord could only be known by *Jnana Yoga*, wisdom born of self-knowledge, meditation and other spiritual practices, particularly through *Kundalini Yoga*. Many in the orthodox caste, the Brahmins, reacted by burning the writings of the Siddhas and sought to prejudice popular opinion against the Siddhas by ridiculing them. The writings of the Siddhas were written in what is referred to as a “twilight language,” which deliberately obscures its deeper meaning to all but Yoga initiates. This great gap in scholarly understanding of the Siddhas writings, however, has recently begun to be filled by a series of books, produced by a team of leading scholars working for the Yoga Siddha Research Centre in Chennai, India. The Centre has collected, preserved, transcribed and begun to translate thousands of palm leaf manuscripts written by the Yoga Siddhas, which had been all but forgotten in several manuscript libraries of southern India.

Remarkable Similarities

Even a cursory comparison of the teachings of Jesus and those of the *Siddhas* by anyone familiar with the two reveals remarkable similarities:

- Jesus taught in parables, metaphor, paradox, and parody, conveying profound teachings in a way that illiterate listeners could easily understand and remember. He was an iconoclast, who sought to move His listeners to realize the spirit, not merely the letter of the Jewish law and worship practices.

The Yoga Siddhas taught in the form of poems, in the vernacular language of the illiterate people, in a way that they could easily understand, memorize and recall. Several layers of meaning could be attributed to both the teachings of Jesus and the Siddhas. The deepest layers could be understood only by the initiate, who had been taught by a spiritual master how to

access the inner reality through such practices as meditation and silence.

- Jesus severely condemned the Pharisees and the merchants in the temple, physically assaulting their shops. When challenged by the Pharisees on what authority did he speak, he replied: “I shall destroy this temple, and within three days, raise it up!” His resurrection from the cross proved His point, that the real temple is within oneself.

The Yoga Siddhas also condemned emphasis on temple worship and idol worship. Nowhere in any of their writings do they sing in praise of any of the popular *Hindu* deities or images of God. They taught that the human body is the true temple of God and it is only through a process of inner purification that one can come to know the Lord.

- Neither Jesus nor the Siddhas intended to create a new religion. They taught that God is present in the world. They taught how to realize God through self discipline and self awareness, and through our connection to others.
- Jesus taught forgiveness of sins or transgressions. One of his most important parables, that of the prodigal son, exemplifies this.

The Siddhas taught how to “detach” from the influence of *samskaras* (subconscious tendencies), which collectively are referred to as karma (the consequences of actions, words and thoughts). Forgiveness and dispassion are synonymous at a deep level of understanding, and central to both the teachings of Jesus and such Siddhas as Patanjali.

- Jesus repeatedly referred to himself modestly as the “son of man,” but later, the writers of the Gospels, as well as Paul referred to him as “son of God.”

The Siddhas distinguished, the “lower self,” the body-mind-personality, held together by egoism (*asmita*), from the higher

self, pure consciousness, incarnated as an individual soul, but bound by many imperfections.

- In what scholars consider to be the most authentic parts of the New Testament, the three synoptic Gospels, Mark, Matthew and Luke, Jesus says little about himself and when He does, it is always modestly.

The Siddhas also have little to say about themselves in their writings. They spoke of freeing themselves from ignorance, egoism and delusion. Consequently, they enjoyed an expanded consciousness and became instruments of the Divine, working “miracles.”

- Jesus taught that the Lord, whom he referred to as the Father, not only existed, but that He loves you. He also taught that to know Him, one must overcome egoism and attachment to the things of this world.

The Siddhas also taught that by a progressive process of self study, discipline and purification, one can realize the Lord. They did not fear the Lord. They loved Him. To them, God was Love and Love was God. Surrender to the Lord was the means of their progressive transformation. They realized the Lord as Absolute Being, Consciousness and Bliss within themselves.

- Jesus repeatedly emphasized that “the Kingdom of Heaven is within you.” The theme of Jesus’ teachings in the synoptic gospels as well as the Gospel of St Thomas is “the Kingdom of Heaven.” But in the Epistles of Paul, as well as the Gospel of John, which are considered by the vast majority of reputable scholars to contain only interpolations (statements put into the mouth of Jesus by unknown sources) the theme is Jesus himself, his mission and his person.

The Siddhas repeatedly taught that the Lord was to be found within oneself, as Absolute Being, Consciousness and Bliss, and that this state could only be realized through the cultiva-

tion of *samadhi* (God consciousness). This is not a creation of the mind. It is the realization of the Divine Witness within, and the cultivation of a divine life, from the perspective of this God consciousness. They taught that the Lord is, unlike our soul, unaffected by desires and *karma*. Being one with everything, the Siddhas retained no more inclination to be of special personage. The Siddhas rarely spoke of their person, and they never encouraged the worship of their person, but rather of that omnipresent Reality within them.

- Jesus used the metaphor of Light to represent consciousness of his true identity; “when thine eye is single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” (Luke 11.34)

The Siddhas referred to the Supreme Being as all pervasive light or as the supreme grace light. They referred to the Supreme Being as *Shiva Shakti* (Conscious Energy), and taught that it could be realized within oneself as the sublime, divine *kundalini* light energy within the subtle body.

- Jesus was reported to have ascended bodily into heaven 40 days after he rose from the dead. During these 40 days he appeared to his disciples. Doubting Thomas verified his corporeal nature by touching his hands. The body of Jesus was not buried.

The Siddhas sing repeatedly of their total surrender to the Lord, a surrender, which includes the very cells of their physical body, which creates a transformation begetting immortality.

- Jesus was reportedly opposed and crucified by those who ruled the temple founded by David in Jerusalem - the priests and Pharisees. They saw him as a threat to their privileged position. Jesus sought to liberate the Jews not from the Romans, but from their spiritual ignorance, fear, and domination by the priests. He taught them through his parables, and initi-

ated chosen disciples into how to know God by turning within, in esoteric practices.

The Siddhas have been opposed to this day by the vested interests of Hinduism, the Brahmins, who control the temples and serve as intermediaries between the common person and the “gods” of the Hindu pantheon. The Siddhas are condemned and ridiculed as “miracle workers,” fakirs and worse, by the Brahmins, who fear their popular appeal among the masses. The Siddhas and other yogic adepts initiate the most qualified students into the esoteric practices of Kundalini Yoga and meditation.

- Jesus emphasized love and the inner experience or communion with God, rather than the law of the Old Testament.

The Siddhas rejected the Vedic scripture’s emphasis on external fire sacrifice and ritual; they emphasized the inner path to the Lord through love and *Yoga*.

- Jesus performed many miracles as a result of his powers, or *siddhis*.

So did the Siddhas. The ordinary person dissipates their energy through the senses, attracted by desires. When one realizes the Presence of the Lord within, one gains access to unlimited power and consciousness. Unmanifest and potential, it is known as *kundalini*. When it is awakened, one becomes an instrument of the Divine.

- Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness in meditation and prayer, and as a result acquired great powers.

The Siddhas performed similar *tapas* (penance) with resulting *siddhis* (powers). Even the number 40 is of particular significance with regard to a period of practice of penance in the yogic tradition.

- Both the Siddhas and Jesus exhibited great social concern. Jesus left John the Baptist, and returned to the urban areas and

consorted with tax collectors and other disreputable types. He encouraged counter-cultural movements against established tradition.

The Siddhas sought to show the path to the Lord to everyone, by teaching what one must do, especially through Yoga and hygienic living standards and medicine, and also what one must avoid.

- Jesus accepted Mary Magdalene as a disciple when he allowed her to wash and to anoint his feet. He initiated his most worthy disciples, like Thomas, into esoteric teachings, which enabled them to realize the Supreme Being, beyond the creator God.

The Siddhas showed their surrender to their Gurus by washing, anointing or touching their feet. They initiated their disciples into advanced techniques of Yoga to expand their consciousness and bring about Self realization.

- Jesus was not merely a teacher or rabbi to his disciples, but a God-man, who remained an enigma to all of his direct disciples. They struggled to comprehend his teachings, his parables, and referred to him variously as a prophet or the Messiah, the anointed one who would deliver them from the yoke of Roman tyranny. Their confusion led to the formation of a multiplicity of sects in early Christianity, until the fourth century C.E., when the Church, in alliance with the Roman emperor, seeking to unify Christianity and the Roman Empire, defined Christian dogma and creeds, and declared as heretics those who did not adhere to its dogma.

The Siddhas were Gurus (dispellers of darkness) who showed the path to the Lord, and were also revered as ones who embodied divinity. They extolled the authority of one's own inner spiritual experience, rather than the authority of the *Vedas* (scriptures). For this reason, the orthodox condemned them. The Siddhas continue to be an enigma for most Hindus.

In this work we will explore and compare these and other areas, which will shed great light on the questions “Who was Jesus?” And “How can I best understand His teachings?”

Why Should Christians Study Yoga?

The short answer is that the study and practice of Yoga will make a Christian a better Christian. Also, because it will provide valuable spiritual experience, mental peace, energy and good health, all essential in realizing the goals of both persons of faith and rationalists. Just as the Buddha was not a Buddhist, Jesus was not a Christian. The Buddha was certainly a yogi, who undertook to find the cause of human suffering, and the remedy for it, through philosophical enquiry. Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life? In that way Yoga can be considered to be the practical side of all religions. It contains no dogma, no limiting beliefs. It is not a religion. It may be considered to be an “open philosophy” for it accepts various approaches to Truth.

It is widely recognized to be one of the six main systems of philosophy in India. As such it fits perfectly into Pope John Paul II’s recommendation that Christians study philosophy, including the Eastern philosophies, in order to become better Christians. His Papal Encyclical “Faith and Reason” provides the long answer to the above question. In it Pope John Paul II argues that:

“In both East and West, we may trace a journey which has led humanity down the centuries to meet and engage truth more and more deeply. It is a journey which has unfolded—as it must—within the horizon of personal self-consciousness: the more human beings know reality and the world, the more they know themselves in their uniqueness, with the question of the meaning of things and of their very existence becoming ever more pressing. This is why all that is the object of our knowledge becomes a part of our life. The admonition “Know yourself” was carved on the temple portal at Delphi, as testimony to a basic truth to be adopted as a minimal norm by those who seek to set themselves apart from the rest

of creation as “human beings,” that is, as those who “know themselves.””¹

Yoga is a means to “know thyself.” From the grossest to the most subtle levels, Yoga gives us the means to reach the highest and most ethereal subtleties of material substance. Yoga can take us beyond the grasp of our senses, the thoughts of our mind, and even beyond our most subtle consciousness to the Force-Love beyond it. Yoga examines the fundamental principles and laws of the cosmos, their purpose and their demand on divine evolution. It examines how the principle of grace works in life through the physical instrument, through the mind, the physical nervous system and vital organs.

Yoga can teach us how to embrace the suffering of our life and to overcome it. The Siddhas were neither pessimistic nor illusionist. They saw the world as a mixture of division, darkness, limitation, desire, struggle, pain and splendor, beauty and truth. They recognized the mind as an instrument of the soul imprisoned in it. The view “I am” is a force of creative power possessed by the soul to lift it from this prison. The profound realization of “I am” is a powerful means to knowing ourselves truly as children of God. According to the Siddhas, we share consciousness with God. But rare is the person who understands and imbibes this Truth. God is behind all that exists as the Eternal Witness. But that Supreme Consciousness can perfectly express itself in this manifest world only in one who has integrally harmonized Truth within itself. A Siddha is one who has done so, drawing body and soul into a new identification with absolute perfection. This occurs only after having discarded all identification with the mind’s imperfect state of physical manifestation and consciousness. A Siddha has surrendered to the Supreme Consciousness at all levels, from the spiritual to the physical. Jesus could be identified as one such a being. He stepped out of the imperfect human form to enter a new Consciousness and Being.

Yoga teaches that the imperfect reality of human existence is seen only by the mind, the limited mind of desire, division, darkness, struggle, and pain. And to overcome it, the mind itself must reach a psychic aspiration towards perfection lying beyond itself. The mind of a man must

seek union with an Ideal of perfection and harmonize itself totally with it. This process requires complete surrender to the Supreme Being, Consciousness and Bliss.

The Objectives of This Book

This book is addressed to the following readers:

1. Christians who are interested in comparing Eastern spiritual teachings with those of Christianity.
2. Students of spiritual Yoga, otherwise known as Classical Yoga and Tantra, as well students and practitioners of meditation and other spiritual disciplines.
3. Serious Biblical students, including those interested in the question “What did Jesus really teach, before the formation of Christian dogma?”

The objectives of this book are to

1. Demonstrate that what Jesus taught, for example through his parables and sayings, was amazingly similar to what the Yoga masters, the Siddhas, taught.
2. To explore the implications of these parallel teachings for those seeking to apply them in their own life, not so much to know about God, as to how to know God through higher states of consciousness.
3. To show how the discoveries of ancient manuscripts, and their analysis by independent critical scholars using scientific methods, provide much insight into the original teachings of Jesus.
4. To demonstrate why the “sayings” of Jesus, circulated orally during the first decades following his crucifixion before being recorded, are probably the most authentic source of his teachings that we have available today. These are limited to a few dozen parables, aphorisms and sharp retorts, which were repeated in the oral tradition for two or three decades before they were eventually recorded by the anonymous writers of the Gospels.

5. To show how the original teachings of Jesus, as recorded in his “sayings” and parables, became obscured once Christianity was defined in terms of dogmas and creeds.
6. To explore the question “Who was Jesus?” based upon those statements that many modern critical scholars have concluded are the most authentic.
7. To explore the questions “Where is the Kingdom of God?” and “How may I reach it?” based upon those statements that many modern critical scholars have concluded are the most authentic.
8. To explore the question “Why are the teachings of Jesus so contrary to ordinary human nature?”

THE WISDOM OF JESUS AND THE YOGA SIDDHAS

BY M. GOVINDAN

This book is addressed to serious Biblical students, Christians who are interested in comparing Eastern spiritual teachings with those of Christianity, and students of spiritual Yoga, otherwise known as Classical Yoga and Tantra, as well as students and practitioners of meditation and other spiritual disciplines.

The discoveries of ancient manuscripts, and their analysis by independent critical scholars using scientific methods, provide much insight into the original teachings of Jesus.

The “sayings” of Jesus, circulated orally during the first decades following his crucifixion are probably the most authentic source of his teachings that we have available today. These “sayings” are limited to a few dozen parables, aphorisms and sharp retorts, which were repeated in the oral tradition for two or three decades before they were eventually recorded by the anonymous writers of the Gospels.

Remarkably, what Jesus taught through his parables and sayings exactly parallels the yogic teachings of the Yoga Siddhas.

For those seeking to apply the wisdom of these sayings in their own life, the implications are clear. Seek not to know about God; instead, seek to know God through higher states of consciousness.

The Objectives of this book, “The Wisdom of Jesus and the Yoga Siddhas” are:

- To show how the original teachings of Jesus, as recorded in his “sayings” and parables, became obscured once Christianity was defined in terms of dogmas and creeds.
- To explore the question “Who was Jesus?” based upon those statements that many modern critical scholars have concluded are the most authentic.
- To explore the questions “Where is the Kingdom of God?” and “How may I reach it?” based upon those statements that many modern critical scholars have concluded are the most authentic.
- To explore the question “Why are the teachings of Jesus so contrary to ordinary human nature?”



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