

BABAJI



**AND THE 18 SIDDHA
KRIYA YOGA TRADITION**

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BABAJI'S QUEST FOR SELF REALIZATION

Nagaraj felt that his scholarship with regards to the scriptures was not bringing him any closer to Self realization, lasting happiness and fulfillment. He became increasingly dissatisfied. He was like a person by a wall, jumping up and down to get glimpses of a beautiful garden on the other side. As he matured, he came to understand that only a permanent change in consciousness, God-realization, could end his search for such fulfillment. His fame as a scholar, was becoming a source of distraction. The metaphysical disputations were not bringing him closer to the goal of enlightenment. Words, no matter how well reasoned, could not capture the Truth. Words could at best point the way to it – but to arrive at the goal, one needed to go beyond the words and reasonings. As yet he had found no guide or method to help him reach his goal.

Pilgrimage to Katirgama, Sri Lanka

It was during this period, at the age of eleven, that he made a long a difficult journey on foot and by boat with a group of scholar ascetics from Benares to the sacred shrine of Katirgama, Sri Lanka.

Katirgama is located near the southern most tip of the island of Sri Lanka (formerly known as Ceylon). The island is nearly two hundred and eighty miles long. Babaji's journey to Katirgama required many months. Nearly eight hundred years earlier, Gautama Buddha made a similar pilgrimage to the shrine of Murugan at Katirgama. Ever since, it has been the most revered place in Sri Lanka for both Tamil Hindus and Singhalese Buddhists. The temples in the Katirgama temple compound are administered by both Hindu and Buddhist priests. Members of both communities worship freely and together in all the temples there. In recent times, a Muslim mosque has also been established there. To this day Katirgama stands as an example of religious harmony, expressing the siddhas universal teaching of "unity in diversity".

The Katirgama temple

The main temple in Katirgama, established by Siddha Boganathar, unlike all other temples, contains no carved image of God. Instead, Boganathar installed a mystic yantra (geometric design) carved into a golden plate, representing within its form and mantra syllables, a crystallization of the great deity Murugan. To this day the yantra plate is guarded from public view. Only the priests of the temple may view it. Once a year, during an annual celebration which generally falls around the end of July, the yantra is carried from the shrine in a procession on the back of an elephant escorted by the priests and a huge crowd of devotees. The mystic power of this yantra was imparted by Siddha Boganathar for the benefit of all those who seek the assistance of Murugan (Ramaiah, 1982, vol. 3, p. 36). Down through the centuries Katirgama has been the scene of many miracles.

The temple lies deep inside a forest, besides a small river, known as the Manicka Ganga. In this forest, from time immemorial, saints, sages, and siddhas have practiced austerities, and today the atmosphere is charged with spiritual vibrations.

Katirgama was also the scene of the god Murugan's courtship of the mortal princess, Valli, a Vedda girl (the aborigines of Ceylon are called Veddas). It is at Katirgama that Kartikeya met and married her. Tradition has it that since then Lord Kartikeya or Murugan is still living there. Katiragam is an Apabhramsa or corrupted form of Kartikeya-grama, that is, "the village of Lord Kartikeya."

Babaji and Boganathar at Katirgama

Nagaraj met Siddha Boganathar at Katirgama, and seeing his greatness, became his disciple. Sitting under a large spreading banyan tree¹ with him for six months, Nagaraj performed intensive yogic "sadhana" (yogic practices), particularly various "dhyana kriyas" (meditation techniques) into which he was initiated by Boganathar. The "tapas" (intensive yogic practice) was done for long periods without a break, initially for 24 hours and later for days, weeks and

1. Several pilgrimages have been made by the author to the sacred spot where Babaji practiced austerities under the large banyan tree. Unfortunately, some twenty years ago an insensitive man cut down this tree. A few days later this man went mad and hanged himself. However, in 1985 a small shrine was built on this spot which is near the front gate of the Temple of Thaivani Amman, Lord Muruga's consort, in the Katirgama temple complex. The Thaivani temple priest daily makes offerings in the Babaji shrine.

up to 48 days at a stretch. During this period Boganathar watched and progressively initiated him into more advanced Kriyas. For the first time, with deepening meditation experiences, the truths studied and debated as a scholar became a reality for him. The various meditation Kriyas unchained his mind from the limiting processes of the thinking mind, allowing his consciousness to expand and realize its identity with an undifferentiated absolute reality. The I-consciousness receded and a Thou (Tao, or in Tamil, "*Thaan*") consciousness became established, in a series of experiences.

In the early stages of God-communion (*sarvikalpa samadhi*) his consciousness merged in the Cosmic Spirit; his life force withdrew from the physical body, leaving it completely motionless and cold as though it were dead. The samadhi experiences deepened gradually over the months with Boganathar. They reached a climax with a vision of Lord Kumaraswamy (Murugan) in his form as the eternal youth. He realized that he was now incarnating the consciousness of Lord Murugan.¹ Under Boganathar's guidance he thoroughly analyzed the ten systems of Indian philosophy and came to understand and appreciate the full significance of Siddhantham.

Quest for initiation from Agastyar at Courtrallam

In ancient times Siddhas such as Thirumoolar, Agastyar, Boganathar, and Roma Rishi realized that their capacity for experiencing and manifesting the Divine was not limited to the spiritual plane of existence. The Divine could and would descend further into lower planes of consciousness: the intellectual, mental, vital, and physical bodies. In such a descent, the Divine transforms them from limited, independent, habitual modes of being into modes which are fully conscious and harmonious expressions of the directing Godhead. Such a state is difficult to conceive of given the limits of our intellect, with its tendency to measure oceanic reality in teacup sized concepts, confusing the Real for its mental and intellectual representations. It is something like the problem one has standing at the foot of a skyscraper building, trying to imagine the view from the top floor. The Siddhas discovered that through a progressive surrender of their being, their ego, and their very lives, the Divinity would in some exceptional cases descend and transform them. Such a transformative process was expedited by the intensive practice of various

1. See Fred W. Clothey's *The Many Faces of Murukan: the History and Meaning of a southern Indian God* for an exhaustive study of the Lord Murugan.

Kriyas, including hatha yoga asanas, meditation, mantras, and bhakti yogas, but above all Kriya Kundalini Pranayama. The transformation became a race against time, given the natural tendency for catabolism (the breakdown of cells and tissues) to exceed anabolism (cell growth) after the age of about twenty-five. Up until the age of twenty-five or so in the average human being, anabolism exceeds catabolism. To maintain an anabolic rate superior to the catabolic rate and prolong the physical body's life long enough for the Kundalini pranayama and other techniques to help complete the process of Divine transformation, many of the Siddhas used "kaya kalpa" herbal and mineral salt mixtures prepared according to specific formulas.

Boganathar inspired his disciple, Babaji, to seek this objective of Siddhantha Yoga, and so directed him to seek initiation into Kriya Kundalini Pranayama from the legendary Siddha Agastyar at Courtrallam in the Pothigai Hills of Tamil Nadu, in what is now the Tinnevely District.

Babaji travelled on foot to Courtrallam, Tamil Nadu, southern India, and, on arriving there at the Shakti peetam, one of the sixty-four shrines throughout India dedicated to God as the Divine Mother, he made a solemn vow to remain at that spot until Agastyar would initiate him into the secrets of yoga.

Babaji, after fixing himself in a particular asana, or meditation posture, so as to steel himself for the coming ordeal, closed his eyes and began to pray. He prayed with all of his body, heart, mind and soul for days. He prayed that Agastyar would come and initiate him. Some pilgrims, recognizing the greatness of his quest, would at times feed him or give him water to drink. Despite rain, insects, heat and dust, his resolve was so intense, that he would not allow himself to leave the place. When doubts assailed him, he prayed with even more fervour for forbearance. When memories of his life, his scholarship, and his fame came to him, he compared them to the dust which blew around him. Nothing held any significance to him – even death. He would not allow the fear of suffering or death to catch hold of him. His love for Agastyar, as the personification of the Divine whom he was seeking, grew day by day, dispelling the clouds of despair, boredom and desire for relief, which threatened to engulf him from all sides. His physical body became more emaciated and weaker day by day. Babaji looked upon his body as if it were not his own. He had surrendered his life into the hands of God, and he knew that God would either grant his prayers to see Agastyar, or allow his

life to end. There was no more reason for him to continue living without the initiation of Agastyar.

On the forty eighth day, when Babaji was on the verge of complete collapse, with great longing, he simply repeated over and over again the name "Agastyar". Suddenly, the eminent Siddha, stepped out of the nearby forest and came up to where Babaji was sitting in prayer. Agastyar's heart was melted by the love of Nagaraj. Agastyar called Nagaraj's name in a soft voice and then embraced him. After giving him water and food, Agastyar initiated Nagaraj into the secrets of Kriya Kundalini pranayama, or "Vasi Yogam" as it is otherwise referred to in the writings of the Siddhas. This powerful breathing technique is the crystallization of some of the most important teachings of the Tamil Yoga Siddhas¹.

Agastyar emphasized the strict conditions under which it was to be practiced and its potential for awakening the higher levels of consciousness, spiritual enlightenment, and ultimately the transformation of all five bodies: the physical, vital, mental, intellectual and spiritual. He then directed Babaji to go to Badrinath in the upper ranges of the Himalayan mountains, and to *become the greatest Siddha the world had ever known*.

Soruba Samadhi at Badrinath.

Badrinath is situated in the Himalayan mountains at an altitude of 10,243 feet, a few miles south of the border of Tibet. It lies at the confluence of the Rishi Ganga and Alaknanda rivers. The area was once carpeted with wild berries or "badri", from which it received its name. Guarding it on either side are the Nar and Narayan mountain ranges, and in the distance is Neelakanth Peak, towering above to an altitude of nearly twenty-two thousand feet. Close by, on the bank of the turquoise blue Alaknanda river is a hot water spring, the Tapt Kund. Joshimath, the nearest town, is named after one of the four famous monasteries (maths) established by Adi Shankaracharya. It lies twenty-four kilometers south of Badrinath. Heavy snows block the path from Joshimath to Badrinath between mid October and the beginning of May. Only the most courageous of yogis are able to live at Badrinath year round. Badrinath has been sanctified for thou-

1. Kundalini Yoga involves the awakening of the primordial life force, "Kundalini Shakti" at the base of the spine, in the Muladhara chakra in the perineum region, and subsequently channeling it up through the six higher chakras to the Sahasrara chakra at the crown of the head. When this happens the person experiences cosmic consciousness and unbounded bliss.

sands of years, by the hermitages of saints, yogis, rishis and siddhas, as well as by the presence of a great temple dedicated to Sri Badrinarayan (Lord Vishnu).

References to the Sri Badrinarayan temple are made in the Vedas, indicating that, prior to Babaji's arrival there, it was a place of pilgrimage for thousands of years. It may have become a place sacred to the Buddhists with the missions sent out by the Buddhist emperor Ashoka in the 4th century B.C. (Fonia, 1987, p.112). Control of it returned to the Hindus in the 9th century A.D. due to the intercession of Adi Shankaracharya, near the end of his life. The stone carving of Sri Badrinarayan, depicts a youthful male figure sitting in lotus posture, with a striking resemblance to Babaji. It was installed there by the Adi Shankaracharya, who found it in the Alaknanda river nearby after being guided to it in a vision. According to the *Skanda Purana*, when the Adi Shankaracharya was climbing towards "Ashta Khand", a sacred place for meditation, an *akashvani* spoke to him: "Oh Shankar, the thing you wanted to attain through meditation, can be attained by you, by re-enshrining the idol of Lord Vishnu, which lays asleep in the Narad Kund. Avail yourself of this opportunity and be blessed for having done so". To fulfill these divine orders, Adi Shankaracharya dived into Narad Kund, and recovered the idol of Lord Vishnu. Narad Kund is that part of the river by a large boulder directly in front of the present temple. He re-enshrined it there and built a southern Indian style temple around it. Subsequent events indicate that "Ashta Khand" was Joshimath, where he subsequently attained the Divine light, and this Divine light was the "akashvani" (Fonia, 1987, p. 112).

Since that day, about 3200 B.C., on which Lord Krishna, according to *Srimad Bhagavatam*, commanded his disciple Uddhava to go to Badrikashrama and contemplate Him, people have been going on pilgrimage to this Holy place. It is the pious wish of every truly religious Indian to make a pilgrimage to Badrinath at least once in their lifetime. From time immemorial, even when travel in the Himalayan regions was much more difficult and dangerous, thousands of Indians, at great expense and personal risk, from all over the country have paid their heart's homage year after year to the Lord Badrinarayan.

The pilgrims feel that their evil karmas and tendencies are washed away by undertaking such visits to holy places. They attain Moksha (liberation) from the Wheel of Samsara (the round of birth and death). The test of this faith is also after the return from such a

pilgrimage; if after the pilgrimage, the pilgrim is filled with spiritual vibrations and can live a pure life of righteousness, devotion, truth, love and purity, then he has certainly been liberated, and the pilgrimage has served its supreme purpose. Some pilgrims, though their number may be small, do rise to such spiritual heights (Singh, 1980, p. 14-15, 18-20).

Babaji made the long pilgrimage to Badrinath and then spent eighteen "long, lonely months" practicing intensively all the yogic Kriyas taught to him by his gurus Agastyar and Boganathar.

After eighteen months of arduous yogic discipline, Nagaraj entered a state of *soruba samadhi* wherein the Divinity descended, merged with and transformed the spiritual, intellectual, mental, vital and physical bodies. The physical body ceased to age and sparkled with a golden lustre of divine incorruptibility.



Babaji and Mataji (Annai) at their Gauri Shankar Peetam Ashram near Badrinath, India.

This is a rare account of Babaji, who has retained his youthful form since the third century A.D., and of the immortal masters of southern India, the Siddhas, who initiated him into Kriya Yoga, a scientific art for realizing God, Truth and Self. It relates the inspiring story of Babaji's birth, childhood, quest for self-realization, transformation and mission in assisting humanity's "supramental evolution".

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E. Ayyappa, longtime disciple of Babaji.

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