

[Shiva's Own Bala Yogi](#)

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He Meditated Eight Years, 23 Hours a Day

The large bare room is slowly beginning to fill. Centered near the far wall is a small, simple platform covered with a tiger skin. A few devotees are singing guru bhajans sweetly. Almost unnoticeably, a small man enters the room through a back door. His hair is matted and his beard long and wispy. His hips and legs are under-developed from years of seated meditation. His hands are withered and bent in the mold of a single mudra held for hours on end. He takes his seat and enters into deep meditation. This is the man everyone came to see. His name is Shiva Bala Yogi.

The bhajan continues for an hour and builds in intensity. Some people go into ecstatic trance. Others meditate. Some watch. Finally, the yogi's body shifts a little. He opens his eyes and smiles like the sun. By some unspoken command, the room falls silent. After a pause, some people ask questions. He answers, frequently through an interpreter. Tonight there is a special feast. Swamiji is feeding himself. He is everywhere and in all.

It all started for Shiva Bala Yogi on August 9, 1949, when he was only 14 years of age. On this momentous day, Lord Siva Himself initiated the young boy into what was to become twelve years of deep yoga tapas (austerity). When the tapas was completed in 1961, 100,000 people gathered to greet the yogi into a life of spiritual service. Since then he has initiated more than three million spiritual aspirants into meditation, and plans to initiate 30 times more. He has already established more than 50 ashrams in India and Sri Lanka and is just finishing his third, annual, three-month yoga mission in the USA where the count of his devotees is increasing day by day. Swamiji speaks Hindi, Kanada, Telegu, Tamil and a little English. He is striving "to awaken humanity's dormant spirituality through initiation into meditation, to heal physical and mental disturbances, to advise all those seeking spiritual guidance and to lead willing aspirants into union with God."

The Early Years

Before his tapas, Swamiji seemed just an ordinary village boy - poor and simple. His name was Sathyaraju. Because of the mystic transformation that occurred within him during his tapas, he became Shiva Bala Yogi Maharaj.

"Siva is my Guru," explains Swamiji. "Bala is Siva's spouse, Parvati. Yogi is me, myself. And Maharaj means Guru."

For twelve years his disciplines consisted of 23 hours of daily meditation for eight years and 12 hours of daily meditation for four years. During this time he attained "Self Realization," the personal experience of the indescribable Absolute beyond time, form and space.

When Sathyaraju began his austere regime, friends and relatives were perplexed. Reactions varied. Although some sympathetic well-wishers erected a hut for his meditation at the spot where Siva first appeared to him, other of his comrades possessed by an evil spirit. Such assaults were not the first he was to suffer as a consequence of undertaking such a severe lifestyle, which in the beginning even he did not realize would last for twelve long years.

As the years went by, Sathyaraju suffered from wounds inflicted by snakes, insects and animals. Twice he tried to quit the practice altogether, but both times Lord Siva appeared before him and lovingly persuaded him to continue.

Detractors subjected Sathyaraju to all sorts of torments during his sustained samadhi. One fellow soaked cloth in kerosene, set it on fire and threw it on the young yogi. As Sathyaraju was quite oblivious of his body, he ignored the blazing cloth which caused deep burns on his hands and legs. Only the care of a kindly old man saved him from the unfortunate event.

The kindly old man was Tapaswiji Maharaj, a unique sage who allegedly lived to be

197 years of age. Tapaswiji deeply respected the yogi and in his own deep contemplation ascertained that he was a "Siddha Purusha" who had reincarnated many times as an enlightened spiritual leader. Until his mahasamadhi in 1955, Tapaswiji often looked after Shiva Bala Yogi, especially with regard to his physical health.

Dhyana Diksha

Shiva Bala Yogi asserts that his method of meditation does not conflict with any religious beliefs or practices - nor does he advocate any specific religious or spiritual doctrines. A routine satsang under his direction is comprised of four basic phases: 1. Giving darshan (his sacred sight); 2. Giving vibhuti ("holy ash," a sacred substance); 3. Inspiring kirtan (group singing) and Bhava Samadhi (ecstatic trance); 4. Performing Dhyanan Diksah, (initiation into meditation.) Those who brings into meditation are initiates. Those who choose to continue and deepen this first stage of development are considered his devotees. Long-term devotees become "disciples."

Swamiji stresses that a person embarking on the yoga quest must know what he is seeking. He describes the first goal as "pure consciousness." "By holding on to this state," he asserts, "Self-Realization will occur of its own accord."

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The Beginning

The miraculous beginning of his twelve years of introspection is best described in the words of Shiva Bala Yogi himself:

"I had peeled a palmyra fruit. Just then for no accountable reason, my body began trembling all over. All of a sudden I saw a 'jyoti' (light) emerging from the fruit.

Simultaneously, there was the sound of Aum. My body ceased trembling and my mind became calm. The fruit disappeared, and there was a Linga in my hand. This Linga was black in color and approximately a foot or a foot and a half in height. The Aum continued all the while and the Siva Linga continued to emit the same dazzling light. All at once it broke into two half pieces and fell apart. A man attired as a 'Jangam Devar' (a spiritual seeker dedicated to Lord Siva) appeared before me. His long matted hair was piled up on his head in the manner of the rishis. He had a necklace of rudraksha beads and wore a white dhoti. The yogi asked me to sit down and placed my feet in the correct position for meditation. He told me to close my eyes and tapped me at the 'bhrikuti' (the spot between the eyebrows). I immediately lost outer consciousness and went into deep samadhi. I became totally unaware of my body and my surroundings. All I could see was the same black Linga. And all I could hear was the Aum."

The Yogi Personally

Our HINDUISM TODAY correspondent Isani Allahan personally attended one of Shiva Bala Yogi's meditation sessions in Seattle and was deeply impressed with his loving presence. Additionally, the HINDUISM TODAY staff called the Swamiji in Denver for an interview, a portion of which is excerpted below.

HINDUISM TODAY: Do you ever talk about yoga in reference to Hinduism?

Shiva Bala Yogi: This word Hindu was coined just a thousand years back. Before that no such word existed. Then, only the Indian culture existed. This culture is what I am teaching. Hinduism is a religion. It is not a culture. Religious leaders started religions. Before that, no religion existed. Even the people of the West were of the Indian culture. Slowly, they were distracted by the religious leaders. Now, they are again interested in the Indian culture. Yogis do not talk about religion. No yogi has ever talked about religion. Yogis bring people from all lines together and teach them how to practice. They are practical. Religions are started by spiritual leaders.

HT: How was it possible for you to perform meditation for 23 hours a day?

SBY: While a person is in samadhi state, he does not sleep. I would listen to the sound of Aum and go into samadhi. Once a person enters samadhi, he loses consciousness of his body and also time. When doing tapas, I was not aware of the fact that I was meditating 23 hours a day.

HT: Have you had to deal with accusations of fraud?

SBY: I do not consider such reactions seriously. Such criticism cannot harm me. It only harms them. But even if that person is interested in learning, and not just criticizing, but just has doubts, I will answer his questions patiently and try to prove the points to him.

HT: Can you please explain the ascetic source of your physical deformities?

SBY: During my penance, I was sealed in a grave yard. While I was in samadhi, unconscious of the body, rats would eat my flesh. Also because my hands were clasped for a long time, flesh started growing between my palms and fingers. If you saw me in person, you would understand this for yourself. A plastic surgeon recently offered to operate on my hands, but I declined.

HT: Are you not a Saivite Hindu?

SBY: My parents are good Saivites. I was to be initiated into Saivism through the upanayana ceremony. Had this been performed, I would have had to follow Saivism. But my grandfather postponed the ritual. Meanwhile, I was put on tapas by my Guru, Shiva.

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