

THE LIVING YOGI

Perspectives on the Shivabalayogi Mission Today

Shivabalayogi dropped his physical body on March 28, 1994, two months after he predicted that he would be with his devotees another forty years. He insisted that yogis do not “die” in the ordinary sense. They remain ever present and, if their work in the world is incomplete, they continue using astral bodies. See Mahasamadhi.

Questions necessarily arise about how Shivabalayogi is present today, and how his work is continuing. Just what is his “mission”? This series of pages on *The Living Yogi, Perspectives on the Shivabalayogi Mission Today* explores some different ideas about the “Shivabalayogi mission,” arranged under the following headings:

- **The Living Yogi** — An introduction to the topic.
- **Shivabalayogi on His Own Mission** — Some things that Swamiji himself said and did about his mission.
- **Shivabalayogi’s Sabotage** — Some things that Swamiji said and did suggest that he did not have a conventional notion of his mission.
- **The Living Example** — Shivabalayogi serves as a practical, powerful and timeless example of how to live in this world.
- **The Cosmic Shivabalayogi** — To be Self realized is to be one with God, and the scope of God is cosmic.
- **The Cosmic Mission** — Swamiji suggested that in addition to helping people individually, his tapas served to protect this planet from destruction
- **The Living Guru** — Swamiji often talked about the soul connection between guru and devotee, and in a sense, he is our true Self
- **The Living Miracle** — Swamiji continues to manifest in miraculous ways
- **Bhava & Trance Swamis** — Devotees continue to get bhava samadhi, and in Shivabalayogi’s trance, they manifest his very tangible presence.
- **Meditation as the Mission** — Most often, the core of Swamiji’s mission is described as meditation, his encouragement for people to meditate daily
- **Diversity in the Mission** — A reminder that meditation does not limit the many other ways in which Shivabalayogi gives blessings.
- **A Community of Devotees** — Shivabalayogi did not set himself up as a god; and nor should we
- **Measuring the Mission** — What are we to measure? The Shivabalayogi form or all lovers of God?
- **The Living Self** — The mission is not something external; it is internal to each one of us.
- **Lord of Yogis** — Shivabalayogi’s mission as Teacher of teachers; our purpose in each lifetime is different.
- **Rama’s Army of Monkeys and Bears** — Shivabalayogi used this example to describe his mission, and it suggests that his mission is unconventional.

“People should reduce their tensions and do their work well. This is his blessings to the world. . . . It is his intention to see where there is tension in the minds of people, and to go there and reduce their tensions, to bring them into the spiritual line. Once they are brought into the spiritual line, their tensions reduce and they lead a peaceful life. That’s what he wants to do in the world.”

The Living Yogi — His Presence, Forms, Devotion

His Physical Presence

Shivabalayogi’s continuing presence can be quite obvious. To the extent a yogi’s presence is “concentrated” in certain places or bodies, he remains physically present in each Samadhi consecrated to him, in the things he blessed, in the bodies of his devotees (his successors), and even at the places he visited during his extensive travels throughout India and the world.

Devotion Draws His Presence

Most devotees never met Swamiji in his own physical body, yet often they feel Swamiji's presence more powerfully than those who did. Once he was asked why someone who was around him less often had more experiences of him, He explained,

“The difference comes because those who are close to Swamiji feel a kind of love towards Swamiji. You feel he's your Swamiji. Whereas the one who's away from Swamiji, they are feeling like ‘Swamiji, Swamiji, Swamiji, Swamiji’ with their mind. That's the difference.”

Their stronger desire for Swamiji pulls Swamiji closer. He often assured devotees that his presence would be stronger after he dropped his own physical form.

Ishtadeva: Each Person Sees God Uniquely

The more difficult question concerns the continuation of Shivabalayogi's work. His “mission” has often been summarized as giving darshan, blessed vibhuti, bhava samadhi, and initiation into meditation. See His Mission. To this end, devotees continue to organize meditation and bhajan programs, placing varying emphasis on meditation, bhajans and bhava samadhi (the path of devotion), spiritual discourses, and ritual practices (puja), all of which Shivabalayogi encouraged.

Shivabalayogi was always very adamant that each person's unique connection and experiences of God must be respected.

“If you pray to your ishtadeva [one's preferred form of God] before meditation you will get a lot of control of mind. Then you can meditate well. God will appear to you in your meditation in various forms and bhava. Let us say you do not like this chocolate. Instead you prefer another type of chocolate. If I give you this chocolate you would not like it. That is the meaning of ishtadeva. That is the reason you have to pray to your own ishtadeva before you meditate.”

The Living Yogi — Not Religion, Ancient Truths

No Religion, No Business

The word “mission” conjures up all sorts of notions of winning over adherences to a belief, an organization to propagate the belief, and property to support the organization, all of which Shivabalayogi discouraged. He once told American devotees that he did not like groups, not even Shivabalayogi groups.

In our enthusiasm for Shivabalayogi and his blessings, we sometimes forget that one of the strongest themes that he often talked about, and arguably one of the fundamental aspects of his “mission”, was to put down spiritual leaders who use devotees for their own egos.

He repeatedly said that he was not starting up a religion. Devotees had started religions out of his prior lives, but this time he was going to work differently.

“The people who do business cannot reach God. . . . The real guru is one who trains people. One must practice. Money is not required.”

“Swamiji has come here to beat up the spiritual leaders. If Swamiji openly criticizes spiritual leaders like this they will naturally become his enemies. Swamiji will have to defeat all of them and then he will go ahead. Only then can we put them down. If you want to bring people onto the right path then you will have to accept whatever amount of difficulty that comes in the way. You should not worry about that.”

Sanatana Dharma, the Ancient Truth

Swamiji used to talk about establishing the ancient ways of life (*sanatana dharma*) all over the world. Once he was asked, “Swamiji, it was you as Christ who started Christianity. Then you as Mohammed started the Muslim religion. And now you are Shivabalayogi saying you will establish *sanatana dharma*. So what will people say about it?”

Swamiji replied, ***“It changes with time. When Christ taught there was a need at the time, so I did that. Thirteen hundred years back, the need of the times was different, so I did it as Mohammed. Now today is different, so I am doing it as Shivabalayogi. But it's all the same.”*** He very clearly explained that it was not Christ who started Christianity or Mohammed who started the Muslim religion. When the religions became too strong, he had to return to us in another form.

The Living Yogi — The Mission: Reduce Tension

The Tension Is Within

Time and time again, when Shivabalayogi was asked about his teaching, his mission, or his purpose for traveling to the West, his consistent response was a very simple reply: to reduce tension.

Promoting organizations, raising money, and figuring out who represents the “mission,” are not conducive to reducing tension.

Shivabalayogi was openly hostile towards the business and “us-versus-them” sides of religion.

Tension is something within each of us. Swamiji’s mission is to reduce that tension. As Jesus is often quoted in the Gospel, and as the organization and missionary activity of Christian churches often obscure, the Kingdom of God is within.

In whatever forms The Living Yogi is with us, and however Shivabalayogi remains with us another forty years after his mahasamadhi, the mission is internal to each person.

One God, Many Forms

Shivabalayogi is a God realized yogi. There is only one God. In a very real sense, Shivabalayogi is all other Self realized yogis, and all other Self realized yogis are Shivabalayogi. And, as Swamiji sometimes privately and not-so-privately confirmed, many yogis of the past are his prior incarnations.

We should not limit Shivabalayogi’s blessings to the form of Shivabalayogi. Who is to say that he is not continuing his work within other traditions, whether Native American, Christian, Sufi, Buddhist, New Age, or any other?

Swamiji himself often said that he was here to support everyone.

The Living Yogi — the Shivabalayogi Story

Shivabalayogi — the person who sat in tapas for twelve years, traveled to give darshan, blessings, meditation, and bhajan programs, and transformed lives — is a beautiful personality and a story full of wonder. He embodies an incomprehensibly unlimited depth of spiritual qualities, experience and understanding. Those who are touched by the story and contemplate its implications can draw inexhaustible knowledge and inspiration.

With his mahasamadhi, the story and personality of Shivabalayogi are complete. We continue with the even greater and more profound story of The Living Yogi. But where devotees can generally agree upon the story of Shivabalayogi, there is less consensus on the story of The Living Yogi.

Meditation, Bhava & Indian Culture

In the fifteen years since his mahasamadhi, devotees have focused on three aspects of his mission in varying degrees. They are meditation, bhava samadhi, and Indian culture. Each is beautiful as well as potentially limiting.

In direct and indirect ways, Shivabalayogi encouraged devotees to explore beyond Shivabalayogi, explaining that he was not defined or limited by his physical body. If we understood that Shivabalayogi is more than the personality, the true wonder that is Shivabalayogi would be even closer and more available. We also would be less worried about his mahasamadhi and his mission.

Any notion we may have about Shivabalayogi’s mission and the devotees’ role in it can be limiting. But the story of Shivabalayogi would be incomplete without a discussion of how he remains The Living Yogi, and what is his mission.

Shivabalayogi on the Mission

The Work Is Unfinished

Shivabalayogi talked in terms of his mission, his duty, and the work that his Divine Guru asked him to do. He is an Agent of God, and he clearly indicated that he has yet to complete his God-given duty. Whatever is that spiritual mission, he stated that it is much greater than what he accomplished in his own physical body. All this additional work remains to be done, and the great yogi suggested that he will finish it through his astral body presence and his disciples and devotees.

Once a devotee remarked that in the history of Swamiji’s past lives, there seemed to be a pattern in which he sows a seed and leaves the work of nurturing its growth to disciples. Swamiji responded, “*You have said it. Even in this birth it is the same.*”

Only weeks before his mahasamadhi, Shivabalayogi gave assurances that he would travel to the United States after his sixtieth birthday. He said that devotees in India would have to be satisfied with an idol of Shivabalayogi that he would consecrate. Devotees were pledging to donate silver and the plan was to cast a one-ton silver statue. ***“That statue will stand for a thousand years.”*** Swamiji would continue to travel, he said, and we were asked to start planning for it.

“Swamiji and his devotees are working not for themselves, but so that people can come to know God. Swamiji has placed people throughout the world in positions to be able to help in his mission. Now is the time when they can come forward and participate. People will come forward and make major contributions to Swamiji’s mission.”

One day, about a month before his mahasamadhi, a devotee asked, “Swamiji, how much work has been given to you by Lord Shiva?” He gestured with his arms spread wide open as if to say, without speaking, “As much as this.” Then again the devotee asked, “How much have you finished?” He held a thumb and first finger together to show as much as a mustard seed. “Swamiji that means you have to do more work!” For that he nodded his head seriously.

International Centre for Indian Culture

Shivabalayogi often made grand statements about his mission and the devotees’ role in it. One might visualize Shivabalayogi centers established throughout the world to promote dhyana meditation. Perhaps these centers would have regular bhajan programs, and if not statues, at least images of Shivabalayogi. If there are images, there must be worship. Perhaps there could be classes on how to worship, how to play bhajans, and how to meditate. Shivabalayogi praised the *Yoga Vasishtha* as the best book on spiritual philosophy, so there could be classes in *advaita* (non-dualistic) philosophy as exemplified in the *Yoga Vasishtha*.

Such ideas are not fantasy. They are what Swamiji himself had planned for the ashram in J. P. Nagar, Bangalore. This is why it was named the International Centre for Indian Culture. Shivabalayogi talked about his plans to build a spiritual university, with meditation halls and lecture halls, in the center of the ashram grounds, where the Samadhi is now located,

From a conventional perspective, such plans suggest a “mission” that conjures up all sorts of notions of winning over adherences to a belief, an organization to propagate that belief, and property to support the organization. Yet this was everything that Shivabalayogi discouraged. His idea of a “mission” did not involve a top-down organization. He meant a community of participants.

Shivabalayogi’s Sabotage

Obstacles to Conventional Spiritual Organization

Shivabalayogi made great predictions for the extent of his mission. He also intentionally sabotaged it from a conventional perspective.

We can speculate that if his mission was to make meditation available for millions, he would have set up a movement with many disciples, well trained not only in meditation, but in organizational and leadership skills, to teach, guide and serve as positive examples. He did nothing of the sort.

The few devotees that he publically initiated into tapas essentially failed. Of the four we know about from the 1960’s, two were murdered, one he declared unsuccessful, and the fourth was successful, but disappointed Swamiji because he was more interested in developing his own ashram than serving his guru.

Swamiji repeatedly assured devotees that he was not going to set up a religion.

“Swamiji is just going to teach you meditation and ask you to practice it. If one starts religious feelings then there will be trouble. We already have religions like Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. Because of that there is trouble. Swamiji wants to unite all those people. He is not going to create a religion.”

Shivabalayogi encouraged individuals to pursue their own spiritual practices. He discouraged the notion of a monolithic organization or belief system.

Shivabalayogi placed obstacles in the path of a conventional Shivabalayogi organization. Although many ashrams were given to him, and although he took a keen interest in their development, he was somewhat lax about their management. His largest ashram is in J. P. Nagar, Bangalore, yet at a time when he clearly indicated that he was about to drop his body, he intentionally left vacancies in the trust that was supposed to manage it. He told some of the ashram devotees that he intended to name them as additional trustees, he called lawyers to amend the trust document, then he dropped the matter. As a result, when he took mahasamadhi, there was only one trustee remaining and no provision to add more.

Nothing in any Shivabalayogi organization had been prepared for his mahasamadhi. He left behind no designated successor, trustee or manager who could appoint new trustees or managers. He established no order of monks, teachers, practitioners or any notion of even belonging to a group. What he left behind was a legacy of apparent aversion to spiritual organizations.

Apparent because Shivabalayogi did set an example, and he did train devotees in how to work in the mission. What he did not like were top-down organizations. His example, and what he tried to teach to devotees who wanted to participate in his mission, was for decisions to be made by unanimous consensus in open meetings and equal voices. He disapproved of majority votes because they invited compromises and coalitions that shut out broad participation and accommodation. The function of his management was not to tell others what to do, but to serve others.

To understand this type of mission and organization requires delving deeper into the Shivabalayogi story. It begins with the first and most obvious way in which Shivabalayogi remains The Living Yogi. It is, quite simply, that the Shivabalayogi story lives on. His life serves as a timeless example.

The Living Example

The Story of Shivabalayogi

Shivabalayogi assured us that yogis do not die, and that they are more available after they drop their physical forms. What did he mean? One way in which yogis do not die is the larger-than-life story they lived.

The Shivabalayogi story is more than a chronicle of events and a record of conversations. It is the example that Shivabalayogi set. There are lessons in this larger-than-life Shivabalayogi story.

Fearless

When we think of Shivabalayogi, the first quality that leaps out is that he was fearless. He was already quite fearless as a child, and his grandfather taught him to confront what fears he had. “Even as a child, [Swamiji] was never afraid of anything because of the training that his grandfather had given him.” That ability to be fearless, or to confront his fears, carried Shivabalayogi not only past cobra bites, but even black magic and thugs hired to run him out of town or even kill him.

Swamiji counseled that parents should raise their children without fear. In many traditions, fear is considered one of the greatest obstacles on the spiritual path. In personal psychology, books can be written about the corrosive effect of fear. This one quality, the ability to confront one’s own fears, by itself is a rich treasure. “If you have selfishness, you will have fear. If you are not selfish, then automatically you will not be afraid.”

Honest

Shivabalayogi personified truthfulness. “Swamiji [as a child] cared only about the truth. Even today he is like that.” As a child he was a fearless and uncompromising advocate for the truth, which earned him the village nickname, “Against.” As a yogi, this quality earned him some opposition, and it troubled some people who thought Shivabalayogi was being unnecessarily abrasive.

Swamiji could “push buttons” and upset people, and some time had to pass before many could get past their own emotional reactions. He was, after all, Shiva, and Shiva likes to shake things up. But he did not care what our little egos thought, and many loved him for that.

Persistent

He was persistent. If he put his mind to something, he would not let go until it was accomplished.

A man who sat in tapas for twelve years without any expectation or desire for personal benefit personifies persistence. “By doing the meditation you can increase will power.”

Uncompromisingly Impartial

He was fair minded and an advocate for the underprivileged. He openly attacked those who misused their authority. Spiritual leaders, political leaders and business leaders who misused their power were all fair game.

There are several examples from Swamiji’s childhood about his uncompromising advocacy for the truth in the shiva.org website.

Selfless

He was selfless. Knowing the hardships he underwent, whether the twelve-year tapas or the three decades of grueling travel schedules, it is hard to imagine that anyone would willingly undergo such a life for vanity. He often said that all he had was his loincloth, and even that only for the modesty of others. He was without personal desire, whether for power, wealth or sensual gratification.

Guide, Not God

Shivabalayogi did not claim to be anyone other than Shivabalayogi.

When Shiva and Parvati physically merged into the yogi's body, Divine Guru and disciple became one. He could have claimed to be Shiva or Shiva's successor, but he went out of his way to discourage any such identity.

He worked within the framework of guru and devotee. Although he could claim to be equal to God, he regularly offered worship to his guru, Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati. This is not only an expression of humility, it is an expression of love. We think of Shivabalayogi as a great meditation teacher, but throughout his life he practiced the path of devotion.

He served as an example of what it means to be a yogi, and he contrasted that with spiritual leaders. In the process, he revealed not only the ancient truths (*sanatana dharma*), but the existence of yogis within many spiritual traditions.

Prior Lives

Shivabalayogi could have identified himself with Jesus, or Ramakrishna, or Lahiri Mahasaya, or Nityananda of Ganeshpuri, or a host of other Self-realized masters who have considerable recognition and following in today's world. All these earlier great yogis were his prior lives. He could have ridden on their coattails, but he did not.

Privately he talked about such prior lives, but in his public mission, he went out of his way to discourage identification with other lives. He would say that what is done in the present lifetime is what counts. He simply was himself

His Own Authority

Shivabalayogi was his own authority. He did not quote from books or other teachers. When he spoke it was from his own personal experience. He encouraged others to do the same and find their own truth within. He asked no one to believe anything he said. He asked only that we keep an open mind and learn from our own experience.

Family

Swamiji stressed the importance of the family and he was an example of how to serve parents and children. Parents should honor their children and children should honor their parents. This, he often said, is the foundation for a good life.

He loved his grandfather and mother very deeply. Those who involved in his ashrams know how Shivabalayogi took care of his sisters and nephews. He provided not only for his physical family, but for all devotees. He had a sincere interest in the professional and personal details of all devotees' lives.

Practical

Shivabalayogi was involved in the world. He was active in the management and construction of his ashrams, using observation and his mind to work out construction designs and techniques. He would be a well qualified patron saint for civil engineers. He enjoyed mechanical objects, even toys, figuring out how they worked without waiting for instructions. He enjoyed gardening, and although he himself was not physically suited for the work, he took a keen interest directing it, adopting novel techniques to bring about extraordinary results.

He observed, learned and implemented. He learned about political, spiritual and business leaders from what witnesses told him, and from watching news broadcasts. Often to the surprise of devotees, he was able to give them detailed business and professional advice. It was never obvious whether he was speaking from his unusual access to vast inner knowledge or simply using his mind efficiently.

Playful

He was playful. He teased and joked with devotees. He took them on walks and picnics, and he took them swimming in rivers, lakes and oceans. He was like a mother in how he loved to feed his children — all children, whether devotees or not. He enjoyed cooking, and he was a master at it. There was something extra in the dishes he prepared, something that could not be duplicated by others. It wasn't just that he worked without a set recipe. It was the love he poured into it.

Inspiring the Best

Shivabalayogi brought people together. At his ashrams, the poor sat with the privileged. All were served equally. Each had access not only to him, but to the gods in the temple.

He allowed others to be themselves. He did not segregate people based on who or what they worshipped or how or what they believed or did not believe.

On the contrary, the attitude of excluding people because of differences was something that provoked his anger. He often criticized religions that controlled behavior by threatening expulsion and rewarding conformity.

He talked and suggested, but he never demanded. He did not ask for special treatment, and he never forgot a kindness.

He was love, but not in conventional, sentimental sense if the word. He was too awesome to be regarded as simply sweet. The love that he manifested was not just his behavior, it was also his effect on others. Bliss simply exuded out of him. Even when he was expressing anger, one could feel the love that is his presence.

There is no end to the examples of diverse treasures we can find in the story of Shivabalayogi. Each person will find his or her own inspirations.

In a practical sense, Shivabalayogi is a man who realized his potential, who knew his own identity and calling, who took personal responsibility, and allowed others theirs. He was born to become a yogi, and he followed that path resolutely. By being himself, he inspires others to be themselves.

The Cosmic Shivabalayogi

The Divine Yogi

The incarnate Shivabalayogi that devotees knew is like the day in that his life and blessings were public and visible. The cosmic Living Yogi is like the night sky, mostly unseen but powerfully inspirational.

Most spiritual traditions allow for planes of existence, a cosmos of higher (and lower) spiritual worlds which are all interconnected. Saints, gods, celestial beings, angels and mischievous spirits are all part of the family of creation. We are resources for each other. It is on such cosmic level that Shivabalayogi has many more qualities worth admiring and contemplating. They include his one hundred eight names.

If there is such a thing as God realization, then one who has attained it could claim to be God, or at least a pure reflection of God. This is how we understand claims of divinity by many mystics and yogis who have experienced union with God. Swamiji said as much. If a person successfully complete tapas, they can become God. When Swamiji explained the meaning of the Vedic chant, guru brahma, guru vishnu, guru devo maheshwara, he said not that “guru is like God” but that “guru is God.”

There are worlds of the gods. Shivabalayogi spoke about them and every day he offered worship to them. He told stories about yogis and ancient rishis traveling to celestial realms, and he gave devotees experiences of such spiritual realms.

This cosmic realm is the context for the one hundred eight names of Shivabalayogi. We can admire and take personal inspiration from what Shivabalayogi made of himself in his physical body, and we can revere the infinite possibilities of one who has realized the Self. Each of the one hundred eight names represents a quality of the Self, a quality that Shivabalayogi embodied, and they make impressive reading: Lord of Creation — One Who Teaches the Science of Happiness — One Who Is Ever Present between Our Eyebrows — One Who Is the Form of Silence — Destroyer of Our Faults — God of Gods — Happiness and Divine Bliss — Destroyer of Karma — Incarnation of Shiva’s Divine Play — Destroyer of Love and Hate — Protector of the Poor and Unhappy — Easily Attained with Devotion.

Such consciousness is not limited by number, time or space. As written in the ancient prophesies known as the nadis, “This soul is a Universal Guru. Swamiji has no beginning and no end. His astral body will be here until the end of the age.”

The true beauty of admiration for Shivabalayogi, both as an incarnated person and as a cosmic being, is that he represents our own good qualities. Perhaps now we see only a faint reflection of Shivabalayogi in ourselves (or ourselves in Shivabalayogi), but we all have moments of deeper recognition and awe when we sense that we are expressions of the divine.

The warning and example that Shivabalayogi gave us was to retain a humility that we are not God until we attain final Self realization.

The Cosmic Mission

Agent of God

Within the Shivabalayogi story there is the suggestion that his mission is well beyond our comprehension. He said that a yogi who has completed tapas with no desire of his or her own becomes an agent of God. They do the work that God gives them. That is their “mission,” although Swamiji often used the English word “duty.”

There is a cosmic aspect to Swamiji’s duty. He said that yogis work not only in this world, but in many worlds. What Shivabalayogi does on other worlds, we do not know. But on this planet, he talked about the coming third world war and how maharishis would empower the Kalki Avatar, who had already been born. He talked about preventing this world from destroying itself through nuclear war and pollution. He sat in tapas for one year to prevent war between India and Pakistan.

“There are different times, different maharishis. So it doesn’t matter which planet it is. Maharishis should go there in times of trouble.”

Shivabalayogi talked about his mission to prevent a potentially earth-destructive third world war. From 1987 to 1990 he traveled to England and the United States. Swamiji was in Kuwait in 1990 when Sadaam Hussein invaded and annexed the country as a province of Iraq. The United States and England were the two military powers primarily involved in the war to eject Sadaam Hussein from Kuwait. Had Russia or China intervened, Swamiji suggested, events might have turned out very dangerously. Swamiji took credit for helping prevent a nuclear war.

Let us speculate that by making a physical connection with England, the United States and Kuwait, Shivabalayogi altered history and took the effect of a nuclear war upon himself. Who is to say that he has not already accomplished his cosmic mission on this planet?

After Kuwait, Swamiji’s body was irreparably broken. He pushed it for another three years, then took mahasamadhi.

The Living Guru

Soul Connections

Shivabalayogi lives on in the memories of his devotees and how he has touched their lives. This is passed on to other devotees who have never met Swamiji in the physical body. When we talk about him, his presence becomes manifest. There is a soul connection between guru and devotee that Shivabalayogi often talked about.

If we combine a soul connection with a cosmic yogi unlimited by time or space, then we have additional and different perspectives on the continued presence of this great yogi.

Time & Space

Swamiji was fond of the *Yoga Vasishtha*, and that spiritual treatise relates stories of lives within lives within lives, of realities created by desires that appear to last lifetimes, but exist only for a few minutes. Thought forms create more thought forms.

Reading the *Yoga Vasishtha* can actually distort one’s own perceptions so that what appears as ordinary and real is only a narrow palette of possibilities. We don’t have prior lives as much as parallel ones, and if there is a soul connection with Shivabalayogi, maybe we are his thought forms that have lost their ways — but only for a few minutes.

The tradition is that Shiva is perpetually sitting in tapas. Perhaps we can sense how Shivabalayogi’s twelve year tapas has an enduring effect on the world, as if it were being performed now. Its effects permeate our lives, and we can tap into its awesome potential even now.

Ultimately, Shivabalayogi is us. Our real nature, our true Self, is the cosmic Shivabalayogi. He is the link between the ordinary and what is beyond. He is the external yogi who unfolds the internal yogi.

The Living Miracle

Distortions of Ordinary Reality

In between the embodied Shivabalayogi and the cosmic Shivabalayogi are the many miracles associated with Shivabalayogi.

When he was in his own body, he could seem quite ordinary. He was short, with a big stomach, long arms and long, bent fingers. Yet there was always something other-worldly about this ordinary human person, something hugely larger than

life. It manifested in how we felt in his presence. It manifested in the transforming power of his words. More than eloquence, it was that Swamiji simply spoke truth from his own personal experience.

All around his presence were little distortions of ordinary reality. Little and big coincidences — one could label them miracles — occurred around him almost all the time. Although he appeared to be ordinary, and in a sense he was, there was nothing really ordinary about him at all.

These subtle and no-so-subtle manifestations of the spirit in our physical world have continued since his mahasamadhi, and they can be associated with the Shivabalayogi story.

People are still attracted to his photograph for some consciously unknown reason. His initiation continues to evoke experiences. Things happen through people that are inexplicable except as some manifestation of the Shivabalayogi person. A woman has a vision of Shivabalayogi and sees him wearing a particular and distinctive coat which, unknown to the woman, he actually wore. A woman in bhava samadhi knows and does things that the woman doesn't know, but others recognize as something Shivabalayogi knew and did.

There is the astral Shivabalayogi, the subtle bodies that he manifests. Swamiji talked about a yogi's ability to project any number of astral bodies, and this phenomenon occurred unusually frequently around Shivabalayogi before his mahasamadhi.

Swamiji talked about bhava samadhi and, at least during several conversations in the United States, how he wanted to evoke the experiences in the West. He would say that all yogis use bhajans (spiritual music) and bhava (spiritual trance). He confirmed in different ways, some surprisingly direct, that he communicated and gave guidance and blessings through bhava samadhi.

The phenomena are still a part of The Living Yogi story today, as they are in all spiritual traditions.

Bhava & Trance Swamis

Bhava Samdhi

Since Shivabalayogi's mahasamadhi, devotees in Shivabalayogi's bhava samadhi (spiritual trance) have been talking, blessing and acting just like Swamiji. Some refer to such manifestations as trance swamis.

Many hoped that bhava samadhi was the way that Shivabalayogi would remain The Living Yogi and fulfill his 59th birthday promise to remain physically present for another forty years.

Trance swamis assured devotees of Shivabalayogi's continued presence, that devotees needed to continue the work, and that he would continue to guide the work. If we had questions, he would answer through bhava samadhi, meditation, dreams or some other way.

A new term, *shakti rupa* (form of power), was employed to indicate that a trance swami could be identified with the original Shivabalayogi. One particular trance swami assured devotees that Shivabalayogi had manifested so powerfully and completely in *shakti rupa* upon himself, that there was no more devotee, only Shivabalayogi. "I am not this fellow [*i.e.*, the devotee in trance] and Swamiji. This is the *shakti rupa* of Swamiji in this man. . . . Why should you bother who is giving the answer? You should only be bothered about the answer to your question. Feel happy that Swamiji is with you in *shakti rupa*. Whatever problems you have, whatever confusion you may have, Swamiji is sorting them out. That is more important than anything else."

The trance swami explained that Shivabalayogi entered mahasamadhi through *yoga nidra* (yogic sleep), and therefore his *shakti rupa* was unusual for even great yogis. *Shakti rupa* is an indication of the great mission that God has given Shivabalayogi.

The Need for a Physical Form

There is a human need for an embodied teacher. It is true of most things we learn in life, whether at home, in school, or on the job. The need expands in spiritual life. Shivabalayogi suggested a profound spiritual need. He warned that we can get only so far without the guidance of one who has been there and beyond.

Once in each lifetime, he said, a physical connection is made. Even in the life of Shivabalayogi, God materialized long enough to physically touch fourteen-year-old Sathyaraju. In the lives of his devotees, we are touched by the divine in many ways, but the most obvious is Shivabalayogi's touch, his astral presence on the devotee giving his initiation into meditation.

The teacher-pupil and guru-disciple relationships may be necessary, but they present opportunities for misuse by both master and student. Shivabalayogi attracted many who ordinarily were adverse to god-men because Swamiji so obviously embodied uncompromising and selfless qualities. But we as devotees have limitations, and we can project them onto even the best of teachers.

It is love to believe that the guru is special, but it is human weakness to need others to feel the same way. It is humility to recognize that we know little and can learn much, but it is a weakness to ignore our inner guidance in favor of someone else telling us what to think and do. This question of where is the balance goes to the heart of who is Shivabalayogi, what is his mission, and what is our part in it.

During and after the mahasamadhi, there was much communication from trance swamis. Some assured devotees of Shivabalayogi's continued availability through bhava samadhi, or an even a more powerful presence through *shakti rupa*. There was mixed hope, belief and assumptions that The Living Yogi meant, or at least included, bhava samadhi, and that the mission would continue to be led by a newly incarnated version or versions of Shivabalayogi as trance swami.

Some found the object of their devotion in trance swamis. Their beloved Shivabalayogi had returned, and people had experiences that confirmed their hopes and beliefs. They could serve the bhava samadhi form as they had wanted to serve Shivabalayogi. They could get answers to their questions, and they could be reassured of Shivabalayogi's love for them.

Many devotees who ordinarily would be quite hostile towards bhava samadhi, when they experienced the presence on a trance swami, recognized Shivabalayogi. But bhava samadhi did not become a unifying force for Shivabalayogi devotees. Many were offended when trance swamis dressed like Swamiji and began to claim his authority to conduct meditation and bhajan programs. Trance swamis were threatened, and some were physically assaulted. Tensions arose among those who were devoted to Swamiji's presence in bhava, those who were devoted to meditation, and those who were simply traditionalists and felt most comfortable worshipping Shivabalayogi as a god no longer in anyone's body.

Meditation as the Mission

His Only Verbal Teaching: Meditate

Arguably the most important core value that Shivabalayogi promoted was meditation, to the point where we write that his only verbal teaching was to encourage people to meditate an hour daily.

Shivabalayogi traveled throughout India for three decades, and later in Sri Lanka, England and the United States. Everywhere he conducted meditation programs. Millions were given his gift of initiation into meditation, often, particularly in the West, without having to ask for it.

Devotees often summarized Swamiji's mission with these words:

"Know truth through meditation, then you yourself will know who you are, your religion, your purpose in life, and your nature. Do not believe what others say and become a slave to religious prejudices. Meditation is your religion. Meditation is your purpose. Meditation is your path."

This expression of purpose was printed on invitations to Bangalore programs, invitations which were always presented to Swamiji for his review and approval. In one version or another, this summary was picked up and generally used by devotees around the world.

Over the period 1987 to 1991, Swamiji gave meditation programs throughout the United States. The flyers that advertised probably all of these programs had the heading "Meditate with a Master" and a statement of his mission. "His Mission: Shivabalayogi awakens spiritual awareness through initiation into meditation. He heals those with physical and mental disturbances. He aids those who seek guidance. And he safely guides willing aspirants into the ultimate union with God."

Swamiji repeatedly emphasized not only the importance of meditation in his mission, but also the role of devotees to make the meditation available.

"You want to know the mission of Swami? Listen! To bring eight crore [80 million] people on the path of meditation throughout the world. That is the mission of Swami. See, before Swamiji actually comes on the stage, some of his devotees come and do the necessary ground work. Then Swamiji does the main portion and whatever is left gets accomplished by the last batch of devotees. Every time Swamiji has taken a human body, it happened more or less in the same way."

While he was in his own physical body, Shivabalayogi instructed his devotees to initiate others into meditation even when he was physically absent. He explained that he is present through an astral body which actually transmits the spiritual

blessing. Many people received Shri Swamiji's initiation in this manner both before and after he dropped the physical form. Some had been meditating for a long time, others hardly at all. Yet common to all was that the initiation gave a deeper and more blissful concentration than ever before experienced. The greater the prior experience with meditation, the greater was the effect of Swamiji's initiation. Some with no prior experience had divine visions, and almost all found that the one hour meditation had sped by as if only a few minutes had passed. Such is the effect of a yogi's grace.

Meditation as the Measure

Meditation is the what devotees working in the "mission" most closely and readily associate with Shivabalayogi. Meditation also has the advantage of being less associated with Indian culture than bhajans and bhava, and certainly far less controversial. So if there is a popular and universal theme to Shivabalayogi's mission, it would be meditation.

The embodied teacher, therefore, should be one who has mastered meditation. The true representative of Shivabalayogi is a master of meditation, not a trance swami. This judgment appeals to many. For them, common sense and their beloved Shivabalayogi should return to the devotees in the form of a yogi who has mastered meditation.

True, Shivabalayogi's public programs invariably included as much time in lively bhajans as in quiet meditation, but the explanation is that he intended bhava samadhi to be encouragement to meditate, not an end in itself. He gave experiences of spiritual intoxication to motivate devotees to seek even deeper experiences in meditation. The devotee was to internalize the bhava, not express it as unruly behavior without discipline. Meditation should have a calming and deliberate effect.

The concern is that trance without self-control manifests too easily as emotional over-enthusiasm. Worse still, trance could be an act or an exaggeration designed to serve the ego. There is no shortage of examples. The typical story involves experiencing powerful bhava samadhi, then the experience inflating the devotee's ego, then the misuse and acting. By comparison, meditation gives peaceful clarity which is more important.

If meditation is the measure of Shivabalayogi's mission, the results are mixed. Compared to the millions he initiated, few meditate regularly. He left behind no schools or teachers to encourage the practice. Perhaps most significantly, within the Shivabalayogi story, no one appears to have successfully graduated. He initiated very few into tapas, and even the one man who successfully completed twelve years "failed". He still had ego. As Swamiji explained, those who do tapas for a purpose get only that.

Promoting meditation as the mission, without more, is like measuring spiritual maturity by the number of hours spent in meditation. It ignores the risk that, like any other spiritual practice, meditation can serve to strengthen the little ego. It also ignores Shivabalayogi's own insistence on the importance of the path of devotion (*bhakti*), including spiritual song and even bhava samadhi. This is a context in which meditation ought to be practiced.

It bears repeating that Shivabalayogi stated that the purpose of meditation is not to attain God realization. It is to reduce tension in the mind. Through regular meditation we learn to control and focus our minds. We can discover our own purpose in life, and we can work more effectively with others. Instead of an end in itself, and instead of a tool to escape the world, perhaps we should think of meditation as an important tool among many tools for living happily in the world.

Diversity in the Mission

Many Forms, Many Paths

A focus on meditation without context ignores the diversity in the Shivabalayogi story. Swamiji placed a great value on all spiritual practices — including *puja* (worship) and *seva* (service) in addition to bhajans and bhava samadhi, which are aspects to the path of *bhakti* (devotion). Swamiji himself did puja every day and his life was one of pure seva.

A few weeks before his mahasamadhi, a devotee from Slovenia interviewed Swamiji at the Bangalore ashram and asked what was his teaching. Swamiji simply said, "***Dhyan, vibhuti, bhajan, bhava samadhi.***" It was translated as, "Swamiji teaches dhyan [meditation]. He gives the blessed vibhuti. He preaches bhajan. He also spreads the bhava samadhi."

One can relegate bhajans and bhava to a secondary role, or one can view them as an integral part of Shivabalayogi's public meditation programs. One can see Shiva as always in meditation who abides in peace, or one can see Shiva as the cosmic dancer who shakes things up.

Diversity is reflected in Shivabalayogi himself. He behaved differently in different contexts. In Adivarapupeta, he was informal. Many villagers treated him as a respected village elder, and Swamiji responded accordingly. In Bangalore, he was more formal. In Dehradun, he was more playful. In the United States, we peppered him with questions, so he talked more.

Shivabalayogi reflected us back to ourselves. If we were sincere, he mirrored ourselves directly. Those who enjoyed the scriptures got explanations in terms of the scriptures. Those who preferred meditation, or bhajans, or puja, or bhava were encouraged in their preference. If we were stuck in our patterns, he would challenge us, reflecting an opposite quality. The person resigned to fate was assured there is no karma. The person behaving irresponsibly was told he would have to pay.

Each person is attracted more or less to different spiritual paths, and our concept of The Living Yogi and his mission should include respect for such diversity.

Ishtadeva

Shivabalayogi respected each person's uniqueness. It is reflected in the traditional Indian notion of ishtadeva. Each person has a preference to see God in a certain way. That preferred form is the ishtadeva.

“If you pray to your ishtadeva before meditation you will get a lot of control of mind. Then you can meditate well. God will appear to you in your meditation in various forms and bhava. Let us say you do not like this chocolate. Instead you prefer another type of chocolate. If I give you this chocolate you would not like it. That is the meaning of ishtadeva. That is the reason you have to pray to your own ishtadeva before you meditate.”

Even yogis differ from each other. Swamiji emphasized meditation. Ramakrishna emphasized devotion. Haidakhan Babaji emphasized selfless service. Ramana Maharshi emphasized self inquiry. When asked why different yogis emphasized different values, Swamiji explained

“It depends upon the way they are trained by their gurus. Depending on the training that their gurus give them, they emphasize different things. Whatever his guru taught him, he is teaching the world that.”

Each of us is unique and interprets God uniquely. The One appears diverse.

If God is different to different people, and if Shivabalayogi was different to different people, it should not come as a surprise that each devotee sees Shivabalayogi's mission a little differently. Some see it very differently. When Shivabalayogi was in his own body, the “mission” was a little simpler. He was it. Now we are left with much more flexibility. Each person sees The Living Yogi a little differently.

Some prefer meditation, others the path of devotion. Some are drawn to Christianity, others to Islam, and others avoid organized religions. Each of us is unique and Swamiji always emphasized that each person should follow the spiritual path he or she prefers. He simply encouraged the practice of meditation as consistent with all spiritual traditions.

A Community of Devotees

Serve One Another

When Shivabalayogi was in his own body, devotees saw the mission expressed through his own physical body, and there was only one Shivabalayogi. Now that we no longer have that one body, it is unreasonable to expect any monolithic organization to express the mission, or even any general consensus to emphasize any one aspect of the mission, whether bhava samadhi, meditation or Indian culture. Shivabalayogi, in his own body, made sure that his mission would be diverse.

The ideal would be if each Shivabalayogi devotee shared respect and honor for each other's devotion. Each would see Shivabalayogi in the other. Each would recognize Shivabalayogi in all traditions. None would espouse his or her views of Shivabalayogi's mission as better than another's. Such is an ideal that requires honesty and humility that none of us has all the answers.

Shivabalayogi never asked anyone to believe anything. He encouraged sincere doubt, and he insisted that people would be better served if they believed in what they knew, not what others told them.

Swamiji established ashrams, but he did not appoint successors.

His ashrams were open to the public. Their temples were open to all devotees. There were no rules except those that preserved the facility and equal access.

In Seattle he said the only qualifications for a trustee was the requirement to do a lot of work. Those who had the privilege of hosting Shivabalayogi in the United States know very well that he expected the hosts to be the first to serve the devotees.

When there were personality conflicts, Swamiji insisted that we did not have to like everyone, but we had to learn to get along.

Swamiji himself set an example. He is Lord of Lords, yet time and time again when there were decisions to be made, he asked the devotees and he considered their advice. He would not even leave a program or retire to his bedroom without first asking permission from his hosts.

Shivabalayogi's mission would be well served if his devotees practice honesty and humility. We should not expect to convince others of what we believe. On the contrary, we should love and respect the diversity within Swamiji's large, spiritual family.

Measuring the Mission

Measuring Spiritual Success

In conventional terms, the success of a mission is measured in size and recognition, and in these terms, the success of Swamiji's mission can be questioned. Shivabalayogi is still relatively unknown, even among the general Indian population. There has been no explosion of Shivabalayogi meditation throughout the world.

Perhaps the mission will unfold more clearly with time. Consider Jesus. Swamiji often compared himself to Jesus, and Christianity became widespread many decades, even centuries after the crucifixion. Swamiji said that Jesus initiated only twelve devotees into meditation, but Shivabalayogi had initiated millions. Even allowing for hyperbole, and there is no question that Shivabalayogi engaged in considerable exaggeration, Swamiji was making some very bold predictions.

Shivabalayogi explained that Jesus completed his mission as an avatar. As Swamiji explained it, a yogi confers power upon an avatar. Swamiji said he had passed power to many devotees to do the work. Perhaps some get *shakti rupa*, some are made to meditate for five years, and others have different callings.

Perhaps we personalize the mission too much. There is a tension between love for our guru and the human need to want others to validate the greatness of our guru. Maybe Shivabalayogi's mission is immeasurable because it is not limited to Shivabalayogi.

There may be many God-realized yogis, but only one God. Perhaps Shivabalayogi's tapas served to enhance the true spiritual missions under the headings of Jesus, Buddha, Islam, Native Americans and New Age practitioners.

Consider the revelations of previously secret spiritual knowledge and the proliferation of many practices and traditions in the modern world. Who is to say that such revelations and practices are not part of Shivabalayogi's mission?

Perhaps the mission of a yogi should be measured by the devotees. All devotees, as in all lovers of God.

The Living Self

Profound Questions, Simple Answers

Shivabalayogi talked about the duty that his Divine Guru gave him, and he talked about how each person has his or her own duty. In the more user-friendly language of today, we would say that each person has one's own calling; one's own purpose in life; one's own inner direction. Our duty is to discover and express our particular individuality.

When people asked what they thought were profound questions, Shivabalayogi gave simple answers. Often it was advice to meditate and find out directly.

When Shivabalayogi answered questions about his mission, he mentioned any number of different purposes: teaching meditation; giving experiences through bhajans and bhava samadhi; healing through *vibhuti* (blessed ash) and *prashad* (blessed food); preserving the planet from destruction; empowering the Kalki Avatar; restoring the ancient ways (*sanatana dharma*); establishing a foundation; and guiding seekers to enlightenment and Self realization.

Perhaps the most frequent explanation that he gave for his mission is also the most significant and relevant. It is also the most practical and applies to each devotee and disciple. His mission is to reduce tension.

“People should reduce their tensions and do their work well. This is his blessings to the world. . . . It is his intention to see where there is tension in the minds of people, and to go there and reduce their tensions, to bring them into the spiritual line. Once they are brought into the spiritual line, their tensions reduce and they lead a peaceful life. That's what he wants to do in the world.”

Time and time again Shivabalayogi was asked about his teaching, his mission, and his purpose for traveling to the West. His consistent response was to reduce tension. Establishing organizations, raising money, and figuring out who represents

the “mission” are not typically conducive to reducing tension. Tension is something within each of us. Swamiji’s mission is to reduce that tension.

As Jesus is often quoted in the Gospel, the Kingdom of God is within. In Swamiji’s terms, the outside guru is a yogi. The inner guru is God, Shankara Bhagavan.

In whatever forms The Living Yogi is with us, and however Shivabalayogi remains with us another forty years after his mahasamadhi, the mission is internal to each person. In this sense, he is the expression of The Living Self.

Lord of Yogis

Shiva Bala Yogishwara

Shivabalayogi did not complete unusually difficult and intense tapas so that he could lecture or write books. He did not give any esoteric teaching, or enumerate different levels of samadhi or the various stages of enlightenment. He did not discuss the different spiritual planes of existence, although he enjoyed telling stories about the gods. He gave no commentaries on the meanings of the scriptures or advaita philosophy, aside from suggesting that the *Yoga Vasishtha* was the best book to read about such matters.

It was not his mission to establish hospitals, engineering colleges, or senior centers, although he was an impassioned advocate for such service.

Shivabalayogi completed tapas in order to be Lord of Yogis. That is the name that his guru gave him, Shiva-Bala-Yogishwara. *Yogishwara* means “Lord of Yogis.” He is a Teacher of teachers, a Guide of guides, and a Master of masters.

One could argue that Shivabalayogi was not well suited to be a teacher. In a conventional sense, he was not eloquent. One could safely say that he was not born to be an ordinary teacher, although he inspired learning.

When Swamiji was asked a question about medicine, he would tell the person to find a doctor. When asked about past lives, he said to go ask an astrologer. Perhaps when we are challenged to integrate our spiritual lives with the world in which we live, we should seek guidance from the wealth of counseling and self-help resources now available in the world. Most people need a little more framework and support than simply sitting in silence.

Perhaps Shivabalayogi is the inspiration and enthusiasm behind many teachers of meditation. If so, we should not be counting the number of Shivabalayogi students meditating, but the increasing spread of meditation practices throughout the world.

In the world today there is an explosion of inquiry, the development of different techniques of healing and self improvement, and a much more comprehensive appreciation of the wisdom of the world’s diverse, but fundamentally similar spiritual traditions. If we limit ourselves only to what Shivabalayogi “taught”, then we would deny ourselves the richness and benefits of today’s amazing spiritual awakening.

We do limit Shivabalayogi. For example, in conversations with devotees in Seattle and Portland, Shivabalayogi repeated the importance of meditation so frequently that some of us assumed that meditation was the cure-all. It took some confrontations with our own egos to recognize that Swamiji was also telling us that we needed to adopt an attitude of humility. We missed the written instruction included in the handout that Shivabalayogi insisted we give each person receiving his gift of initiation:

“Practicing meditation regularly and with devotion helps in having your wishes fulfilled in course of time.” (emphasis added)

Spiritual development requires devotion, what in some other spiritual traditions is referred to as the heart. Learning to develop and open the heart is a part of a balanced, practical spirituality.

We also tended to not appreciate what Swamiji meant when he described himself as a practical yogi. It was not just that he asked us to practice meditation, or even that he gives experiences so we learn directly. It also had to do with integrating spiritual life with everyday life.

Shivabalayogi never encouraged meditation in a vacuum. He never gave anyone permission to leave their jobs in order to pursue spiritual life. He sent people home. Even those he initiated into tapas he sent away from the ashram. They could do tapas at home.

In the West, so many asked Swamiji about samadhi and tapas. We were incapable of meditating for an hour a day, but we wanted tapas. Answering our questions, Shivabalayogi never suggested that he expected millions of people to meditate,

solve all their physical and mental problems, attain Self realization, then never incarnate again. When asked whether sooner or later all of us will become yogis and attain Self realization, Swamiji answered,

“No, God realization is not our aim. First you have to reduce your tensions and keep your path right. Then people can understand each other. . . . If you do meditation, tensions will come down and you will be able to have good relations with the people around you. You can be an example to other people to control their minds properly.”

Rama’s Army of Monkeys and Bears

Vanquishing Demons

Shivabalayogi dropped his physical body so that he could complete his mission. Many years earlier, Swamiji confided to close devotees that only when he would leave his body would his mission really become great.

In January of 1994, Shri Swamiji was answering the questions of devotees about a wide range of subjects. At one point he turned the conversation around and said,

“Well I have answered all these questions for you. Now answer my question. Can you tell me why we all are here now?”

The devotees gave various answers such as they loved Swamiji, or they came for darshan, or they came for peace of mind, or they did not know where else to be, or they realized that such darshan was a privilege. Then Swamiji answered his own question.

“There was Rama, Sita and Lakshman. They had come to the forest. Who was with them? They didn’t have anyone else with them. Anjaneya Swami came. Sugriva came. Vibhishana came. Some others came, and this way a group formed. It became a big force and it killed a mighty man, Ravana. They brought peace to the world. That is it. You all have come here from different directions to develop this.”

Shri Swamiji was referring to the beautiful story of the Ramayana which is well known to all Indians. Lord Rama, heir to the throne, was unjustly banished from his father’s Kingdom of Ayodhya. Only his wife Sita and brother Lakshman accompanied him to exile. They spent many years traveling throughout South India and living in the forest. The powerful king of Sri Lanka, Ravana asura (demon), kidnapped Sita and took her to his island fortress to have her as his wife. Lord Rama formed an army of devotees with which he attacked Sri Lanka, rescued his wife, and killed Ravanna. That army of devotees included Lord Hanuman (Anjaneya, the great and powerful god with the form of a monkey), Sugriva (the king of the monkeys), Jambavan (the king of the bears), and Vibhishana (the brother of Ravana).

Ravana was considered the most powerful king of his time and feared by all other kings and emperors. Yet this great king with his powerful armies was vanquished not by a powerful lord supported by a great force of warriors, but by a banished young prince with the support of the simple animals who had gathered around him.

The suggestion is that although the group of people gathered for the mission may seem insignificant in the eyes of the world, they will still succeed.

“If you change the intellect of some people automatically the others will change. We are now ten people sitting here. If Swamiji changes the mind of a few, then there will be discussions among the people here. So the minds of the other people also will change. That’s what will happen. That is the reason he keeps calling you here. He is asking you to learn more, learn well. That’s why he asks you to mix with the rest of the people. You should be just one of them. With that, the tension will come down.”

A Different Paradigm

On the occasion Shivabalayogi stated that his mission was to initiate many millions of people into meditation, he said, ***“You want to know how Swamiji’s mission will be accomplished. It will be accomplished automatically just as Lord Rama’s mission was.”*** On that occasion also, he referred to the armies of monkeys and bears that helped God Rama defeat the demon King Ravana.

We can interpret this story and Swamiji’s mission by focusing on Rama. We can look to leaders like Rama — not just to tell us what to do, but to provide some tangible expression of leadership.

Rama was a king and he could have organized a conventional army to attack Ravana. But an ordinary army would not have overcome the powerful demon king, just like a conventional organization would serve to continue conventional consciousness, not bring about a new paradigm.

Shivabalayogi's mission was to make a connection with devotees, then send them home. If Shivabalayogi did not assume an authoritarian leadership style or hire professional staff, perhaps his devotees should not be looking for such leaders or support now that he is gone. In fact, maybe that is why he left, to force devotees to deal with the issue of taking personal responsibility.

The leadership model Shivabalayogi gave was that leaders should do the work, not take the benefits. They, like he, should serve the devotees. They, like he, are not in the business of telling people what to think and do. We all should listen at least as much as we talk. If decisions need to be made, they should be done not by a majority vote, but by the collective consensus of a community.

Such a community represents a very different paradigm from how modern nations, businesses, or most religions conduct themselves. Within a community of peers, Swamiji's worldly mission can continue. We can pursue darshan, meditation, bhajans, bhava, vibhuti and any and all other aspects of spiritual life. We can learn from The Living Example, delight in The Living Miracle, worship The Cosmic Yogi, and appreciate The Living Self. We can awaken to The Living Yogi which is our own identity.

We can practice a practical spirituality. We can be scientists, inventors, business entrepreneurs, teachers, parents, athletes, artists, writers, musicians and explorers, even mystics, meditation teachers, spiritual leaders, philosophers and yogis, all with the power and integrity of The Living Yogi working through us.

When people lined up for Swamiji's individual darshan and blessings, he would often ask them, "*What do you want?*" The devotee would feel that Swamiji could and would give it.

That is a nice image of Rama's army.