



ध्यान

Through dhyāna, meditation, you allow yourself to become more subtle. As the kuṇḍalinī energy moves through you, you get rid of whatever you don't need.

Then meditation doesn't just happen at a given time, it happens constantly. As you go about your daily actions, you are recharged.

This is a very high yoga. Once it catches you, it never lets you go. Even if you forget grace, grace never forgets you. It will always be following you.

MAHĀMANDALESHWAR SWAMI NITYĀNANDA

Mahāmandaleshwar Swami Nityānanda has invited everyone to study the Aṣṭāvakra Gītā during 2016. This issue of Siddha Marg features the welcome talk Gurudev gave upon his arrival at Shanti Mandir in Walden, New York. In it, he offers his commentary on the scripture.

I Am Not the Body

With great respect and love, I would like to welcome everyone to *satsaṅg* here this morning. As we were chanting, I felt like it was only last week that we were together. It didn't seem like three or four months since we've all gotten together.

Since the beginning of the year, we have been studying the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā*.

In his commentary, Swami Chinmāyānanda warns seekers that such scriptures can only truly be understood when a person has contemplated, meditated on, and become rooted in the vivid experience of transcendental oneness. If the mind has not been purified and we engage in such study or meditation, a book with this kind of wisdom doesn't really help us.

In fact, he says, if a student is not situated in this wisdom, this knowledge, it can blast his faith. It can shake his grasp of the highest reality.

Most of the scriptures we study are in the form of conversations, or dialogues, between the teacher and the student. Formal classes are probably no longer than an hour, so the remaining twenty-three hours of the day are for study, contemplation, conversations with oneself, conversations with fellow seekers ... and then, again, quiet contemplation by oneself.

The philosophy of the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā* tells us, "I am not the body; I am Consciousness."

I Am Not the Body (continued)

It is not easy to eliminate the thought “I am the body.” All our dealings in society, in life, are through the body. So whenever we relate to something, we don’t naturally say, “I am Consciousness.” We say, “I am going to do that.” Or “I will be there.”

I have often shared how Bhagavān Nityānanda spoke about himself. Instead of saying “I’m going to . . .,” he would say, “This body is going to . . .” It sounds strange to us because, though it is a concept we find in the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā* or the *Avadhūta Stotram* or other scriptures, it’s not how we feel. It’s not a direct experience within.

We chant in Ādi Śaṅkarācārya’s “Six Stanzas of Salvation,” “I am not the mind. I am not the breath. I am not all of these things. I am simply Consciousness. I am Śiva. I am that universal Self.” As a concept, this sounds good. But when you’re in society and you’re speaking with people, it’s not always an easy concept to sit in.

Based on the teaching Aṣṭāvakra gives to King Janaka, we can’t say, “So-and-so turned fifty this week.” We would have to say, “That body turned fifty this week.” Of course, whenever I say something like that, people like to have a little fun with the words.

It’s winter right now, so when you meet people, they discuss the cold. When I was getting ready to leave Magod, some people said, “But you’re going to the snow!” In Magod, it’s sixty degrees; it’s comfortable. The mind always thinks about obstacles and problems, rather than about how we can enjoy what is.

I’m sure that when we return again in July, somebody will say, “Oh, it’s so hot! Can’t wait for the fall!” And now, while it’s winter, people can’t wait to go to the Bahamas or Florida or Hawaii, or wherever.

When you study the scriptures, you realize it all ultimately boils down to the mind. It has nothing to do with the weather. It has nothing to do with anybody or any thing. It has to do with who I think I am.

Even though, as I said, it feels like it was only last Sunday that we gathered here, of course, at some level I know we were in Magod last week and had satsaṅg there. The satsaṅg was in English because the Level II hatha yoga course was going on. Some people had questions. One was “How come we can’t love those whom we are closest to; why aren’t we nice to them?” The second was “Can I have a blessing during *darśan*?” The third was a question many people probably ponder: “When I’m away from the ashram or from others who go to satsaṅg, when I am alone by myself, how do I remain established in the teachings? How do I stay connected?”

The answer is “You must constantly practice.”



You must constantly practice.

Knowledge Comes from Within

Renunciation is about learning to detach from our own perceptions, feelings, and thoughts.

King Janaka begins with what we might call some simple questions to Aṣṭāvakra. He says, “How do I acquire this knowledge? How can liberation come about? How is renunciation achieved?”

Sometimes people wonder, “What does renunciation mean? Does it mean I have to leave my family? Does it mean I have to leave my friends?”

These questions arise when we think about renunciation, but the sages tell us renunciation is about learning to detach from our own perceptions, feelings, and thoughts. We realize, “I am simply caught in the way I perceive. I am simply caught in the way I listen. I am simply caught in what I see and what I hear and what I feel.”

Somebody smiles at us, and we like it. Somebody else doesn't smile, and we begin to worry. The night I left, a man came to visit me in Mumbai. He came in and greeted me and greeted all those who were nearby.

A woman was sitting in one corner of the room, and when he walked out again, she said to me, “He never saw me.”

I said, “Correct. He never saw you in that corner. He came for a purpose; that purpose was done, and he walked out.”

She was able to smile and laugh. But what she does when she sees him next I can't guarantee. “You never saw me that day. You only saw him and those around him. What about me in the corner?”

According to the sage, renunciation in that moment is coming to the realization that what happened has nothing to do with anything except your own concepts. It is nothing personal. He simply didn't look in the corner before he went out. But the mind will not forget that evening, that moment. The mind holds onto it.

How do we contemplate this question asked by Janaka: “How can knowledge be acquired?” In the example I just described, knowledge is acquired the instant you realize it was nothing personal. This is the vital knowledge in that moment—not “I am the Self, I am bliss, I am Consciousness.” Of course, the knowledge “I am the Self, I am bliss, I am Consciousness” must always remain, but in that moment, the knowledge you need is “It's nothing personal.”

When somebody asks, “How are you?” we do a quick scan to see if we are going to say, “I'm happy” or the opposite. Usually most of us say, “Well, today is good” because we don't want to discuss too much about what's really going on. We want to just get it over with. Now, if it is a very good friend, we might say, “Let's have a cup of chai or tea or coffee and discuss what's really going on.”

The sage tells us to come to the realization that none of that truly matters. All of it is simply a game of the mind and intellect, a game of the emotions.

Knowledge Comes from Within

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If we sit and we contemplate, at some point we are able to become a witness. We observe that we are caught in all of this because of our own mind. If we happen to have that realization, we are able to laugh.

Of course, it's not easy. On the one hand, yes, we have the realization "I am the Self, I am Consciousness." On the other hand, we think, "All that is fine, *but*"

We have so many buts, so many thoughts about how we would like life to be. Today it's a nice, fifty-degree day. A little windy. Tomorrow it might be something else. You tell yourself, "Maybe I can call God and say, 'I'm going to New York City tomorrow. I'd like no snow, please. I'd like the sun to shine. I'd like the weather to remain amicable to my driving because I don't like driving on black ice.'"

God calls you back and says, "Okay, I have checked the records, and for you I can arrange that."

We are funny in that way, you know?

If you really think about it, it is what it is. The only thing you can do is accept it and become comfortable within yourself. You, the individual, must come to accept "This is who and what I am." This is knowledge.

Knowledge doesn't come from anywhere else, anything else, anyone else. It comes from within.

Who you are, what you are, and the baggage you have brought along with you shift slowly over time. Everything changes. But you remain you. That is a great illumination, if you can accept it.

Some people come to the ashram and say, "I'm spending three months here this summer, and by the end I'll have

gotten everything." Or they say, "I'm going to gather all the knowledge at the retreat, and I'll go home with everything."

Congratulations! But fifty years from now, will you still have it? I think it would be great if you could just get to know "I am not the body."

They say, "I'm on the fast track to liberation."

Maybe that's why King Janaka's first question is "How do I acquire this knowledge?" And he's probably also thinking, "Okay, got it! Easy! I'm going to get there."

But then, we wonder how much did Janaka really get? Of course, the sages tell us that while living in the kingdom and doing his job as king, he remains detached from his body, from his mind.

Aṣṭāvakra teaches him, "O king, just as the shape of a temple does not affect the sky, the crookedness of the physical body has no effect on the *ātman*, or the soul that dwells within." Aṣṭāvakra's body was crooked in eight places.

Aṣṭāvakra says, "A wise person looks at the reality behind this manifested world, whereas an ignorant one gets lost in names and forms."

This is the knowledge that Aṣṭāvakra gives to King Janaka that allows him to understand that he is the Self, and that he is not the physical body or any of that which is constantly changing.



The Best Is to Be Quiet

Knowledge is having the realization that the Self, which dwells within, is playing all these roles.

Only when the ego feels incomplete does the sense of attachment arise. Knowing this, we can see what fights are about in this life. When the ego is not satisfied or is not given attention, one sits in the corner and the ego feels, “Why was I not seen? I’m just as important in this situation.”

I have seen over time that some people make sure they cover all their bases. They make the effort to say hello to every single person in a room. Everyone loves these kinds of people. The other type of person realizes that saying hello individually does not really make a difference. That type of person already feels the connection within himself. We could say one type is socially correct, and the other is doing what is correct for that person.

When I left Magod, I said, “Okay, I have to go. So we’ll all stand up together and have darśan together.” And then, boom, I left.

I’m sure some people thought, “Oh my God, he’s leaving for a month. I didn’t get a chance to say....”

But I thought, “I was there for three months, and we met each other every single day. Whatever it is could have been said yesterday or the day before.”

Still, people want to say, “Have a good trip. We’ll see you when you come back.” Of course, I know that. I will have a good trip. And I will see them when I come back... if they’re still around.

It’s funny if you see it that way. I’ve taught myself that I must see it that way. If one doesn’t have that view, the mind tends to get upset very quickly.

To have knowledge, you must realize that the whole world, as Baba Muktānanda said, is nothing but a big stage upon which we are all actors.

What is knowledge? Knowledge is having the realization that the Self, which dwells within, is playing all these roles. Yet we get caught in the role that is being played. We get caught in whatever is happening to us in that role.

What does the sage do? He is able to stand back and witness the drama.

But we think, “Oh no, wait a minute. Let me make sure everything is as it should be.”

No. It is as it is. It is as it will be.

What can you really do? You are nice. You are sweet. You are loving. You are kind. You are doing all the right things. Still, somebody gets upset. So you think, “Let me go and explain to that person why I was nice, why I was kind, why I was compassionate.”

However, it is not in that person’s nature or personality to respond differently. He is caught in his own perceptions, feelings, and thoughts.

I often think of a sculptor. He sits at a stone, with his chisel

The Best Is to Be Quiet (continued)

Liberation is becoming established in the experience of “I am Consciousness. I am bliss. I am the Absolute. I am Śiva.”

and hammer, and he is constantly chiseling away. If a seeker can understand this image, he realizes that over time he has been hardened by his own views, emotions, and thoughts. So the process of contemplation—of *viveka*, or discrimination—is to take your hammer and chisel and to knock away all of that. Then you know “I am not the body.”

Every Sunday at Magod, we sing the “Six Stanzas of Salvation.” As we sing, I sometimes laugh to myself. I laugh with the thought that the sage is reminding us, “I am not... not... not... not... not...”

Some people don’t like the philosophy of negation. They say, “It’s too negative.”

But Ādi Śaṅkarācārya gives a very important teaching in the refrain. He says, “I am Consciousness. I am bliss. I am the Absolute. I am Śiva.”

Although a seeker may begin by realizing “I am not all of this,” the foundation upon which that seeker must rest is “I am Consciousness. I am bliss. I am the Absolute. I am Śiva.” The mind must constantly remember this. This is knowledge.

Renunciation, the first step, is not getting caught. And liberation is becoming established in the experience of “I am Consciousness. I am bliss. I am the Absolute. I am Śiva.”

Of course, as long as we live in this world of duality, we can’t avoid the sense of attachment. We have likes and dislikes. We love, and we don’t love. In this way, the mind creates duality. It creates questions about what we want and don’t want, and then it gets caught in those questions.

Somebody gives a smart answer, and we think, “Wow, he’s wise.” Somebody else doesn’t give an answer, and we wonder, “Did he even understand my question?”

I often think that when somebody doesn’t answer, he’s actually being wise. He simply smiles because he realizes that if he answers one way, he will get caught, and if he answers another way, he will still get caught. He is caught either way.

Therefore, the sage tells us, the best is to be quiet.

If you go to a store, there are thousands of things for sale. You don’t buy every single one. You don’t buy the entire store. You don’t go to the mall and say, “I want everything.” Of course, the mind may think, “I want everything.”

I always think of the answer the Dalai Lama gave when he was taken to a mall. It was probably on his first visit to the United States. The person was proud to show him, and asked, “What do you think?”

The Dalai Lama said, “All things I don’t need.”

The person of wisdom, faced with the question “What can I take and what can I not take?” comes to the realization that none of this is actually needed.

Recently somebody sent me a joke. A traveler visits a yogi. The yogi is seated in his little hut. He has hardly any belongings. The traveler asks the yogi, “Do you live here?”

The yogi says, “Yes, I live here.”

The traveler asks, “Then where are your belongings?”

The yogi asks him, “O traveler, where are your belongings?”

The Best Is to Be Quiet (continued)

The traveler says, “I don’t have any belongings because I am moving from place to place.”

The yogi says, “I am also a traveler.”

When King Janaka asks, “How is renunciation achieved?” Aṣṭāvakra replies that the objects of the senses must be rejected as poison. He says, “Seek forgiveness, straightforwardness, kindness, cheerfulness, and truth as nectar.”

If we remember simply not to get caught in our own mind, intellect, emotions, and feelings, maybe we have attained a little bit of what the sage wishes to express to Janaka.

In the *Avadhūta Stotram* we sing, “I am not the body; the body is not me.”

A body—as I began by saying—may turn fifty, but the Self that dwells within it is eternal. As long as the Self is in the body, the body seems real. The day the Self leaves that body, then no matter how much it is loved, the body is not kept by anyone.

Some people say, “That’s too much to think about.”

You cannot do anything to change this. However, as a seeker, you can come to the understanding that all this shall perish one day. You can contemplate: if all this shall perish, then what is it that is real? That is what King Janaka wishes to know. That is what everyone in this room and in every satsaṅg wishes to know.

At some point, or in various moments, we have illuminations. We understand. But then once again, we are caught in the process of our own thoughts, emotions, limitations.

Satsaṅg is not something that happens only on the outside. It must happen within yourself, as well. So allow your mind

to constantly ruminate upon these teachings. Then, wherever you go, you bring that contemplation with you.

Ultimately, you realize that the most important ingredient in all of this, as Baba Muktānanda always reminded us, is love. Your love has brought you here today, on this beautiful Sunday morning. And now we have the thought of being together over the next few weeks, enjoying satsaṅg. And then again, life goes on.



**“Seek forgiveness,
straightforwardness,
kindness, cheerfulness,
and truth as nectar.”**



G L O S S A R Y

Ādi Śaṅkarācārya

[788-820] sage, originator of Advaita Vedānta

Aṣṭāvakra

a Vedic sage

Aṣṭāvakra Gītā

Hindu scripture

ātman

the soul, Self

Avadhūta Stotram

verses about the qualities of a sage

Chinmāyānanda, Swami

[1916–1993], wrote commentary of the

Bhagavad Gītā

darśan

vision of the divine, experienced in the presence
of a holy being

Janaka, King

Vedic king, student of Aṣṭāvakra

satsaṅg

in the company of the Truth

Śiva

Hindu deity, the primordial Guru

viveka

discrimination between the real
and the unreal

