

# Siddha Marg



ॐ नमः शिवाय

*We use the mantra Om̐ Namaḥ Śivāya, which means “Salutations to Śiva, the divinity that dwells within.”*

*We must come to understand that the one who is repeating Om̐ Namaḥ Śivāya is repeating our true name.*

*Even to think “I am Śiva” is duality because there is “I am” and there is “Śiva.” The mantra being repeated, the repeater of the mantra, and the deity of the mantra must all become one.*

MAHĀMANDALESHWAR SWAMI NITYĀNANDA

*The purpose of Siddha Marg is to communicate the teachings of Mahāmandaleshwar Swami Nityānanda as he shares with us the knowledge and practices of the sanātan dharma (universal law). This issue features excerpts from a talk Gurudev gave at a Sunday satsaṅg in Walden, NY, toward the end of his stay in 2014.*

**N**amaste. With great respect and love, I'd like to welcome everyone to satsaṅg here this Sunday. Our topic this year has been love, or devotion, and someone recently asked me to speak about mantra and the power of Om̐ Namaḥ Śivāya.

Om̐ is considered the primordial sound. It is said that when you take a conch and put it to your ear, in the beginning you hear the ocean. And then, as you evolve in your listening, you hear Om̐.

If you've never done this, I advise you to try. Of course, it may take a while to hear the Om̐. You may be waiting for the conch to change. But the conch is not going to change. It is your perception, your listening, that goes through a change.

Mantra is a wonderful subject, and I don't know if we can do justice to it in these few moments. Baba Muktānanda taught that *japa*, or mantra repetition, is an important practice. I would say it's an important practice in every tradition. Japa is done within the Indian tradition, the Muslim tradition, the Christian tradition.

Often people think of it as prayer. Prayer can be considered a gross form of japa. As you continue to do it, the practice becomes more subtle.

Many of you are aware of the four kinds of speech: on the tongue, in the throat, in the heart, and in the navel area. The grossest form of japa is repetition with the tongue. Over time, as you allow yourself to become subtler and more sensitive to your own being, mantra repetition bears fruit.

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The very simple meaning of namaḥ is salutations. And śivāya, which refers to Śiva, is understood as auspiciousness. So we can say *Om Namaḥ Śivāya* means “Salutations to that which is auspicious.”

The mind is taught to think noble thoughts, to have auspicious thoughts. In modern terms, we think of this as having positive thoughts. Otherwise, the tendency of the normal mind that hasn't turned to anything uplifting or spiritual is to have negative thoughts, to have thoughts that do not benefit the person who's having those thoughts, or anyone else.

Of all the CDs and tape recordings we have of Baba singing the mantra *Om Namaḥ Śivāya*, I love a particular one from Mahāśivarātri in 1977. I don't know if I was there at that time, but I listen to it a lot. It has a magic that transports you instantly to a place, a world, the mind can only imagine.

When the mind is agitated, it's like being in the spin cycle of a washing machine. I know none of us can sit in a machine that's spinning, but we can imagine looking at one piece of cloth inside the machine on the spin cycle. The mind with the mantra is like that piece of cloth in the spin cycle. If you can live through that spin cycle and come out the other side, then you'll find yourself steady, comfortable, and peaceful within yourself.

I think of chanting, especially chanting the mantra, as a way of cleansing, of purifying, oneself. On the outside, you use shampoo, soap, perfume. But how do you cleanse and purify and make yourself fragrant within? The only way is to allow the mind to become immersed in the mantra.

Baba would talk about becoming pure, cleansing oneself. He would say that through spiritual practice, through

keeping good company, through eating pure food, we bring about purification.

It may take 125,000 repetitions or a million repetitions, but finally japa reaches the navel region. Then one is not repeating it oneself. One simply hears it happening.

Many people tell me, “Oh, I don't do the mantra anymore. It happens.” Just by looking at these people, you know whether japa is happening on its own or the mantra is being repeated.

Baba used to tell a story about a disciple who goes to the Guru. He says, “I want wisdom.”

The Guru says, “*Tat tvam asi*. You are That.”

He says, “That's all?”

The Guru says, “That's it.”

The disciple says, “Ah, it's too simple.” So he goes to the ashram down the road.

The Guru there is a little bit street smart, we would say. He asks the disciple, “Where have you been? Whom have you met?”

He says, “I was just with that other Guru. What he said was too simple.”

This Guru says, “Okay. Here you will have to work for me for twelve years.”

Then the Guru calls his manager. The manager and the Guru know how to handle this situation, so the Guru says to the manager, “This boy wants wisdom, but I've told him he first has to work here for twelve years. What work can he do?”

In Baba Muktañanda's time, the best *sevā*, or service, was to work in the cowshed, picking up cow dung. So this manager says, "All the *sevās* are full right now. The only one that is available is picking up cow dung in the cowshed."

The Guru asks the man, "Well, are you willing to do that?"

He says, "For knowledge, I'm willing to do anything."

So for twelve years he's in the cowshed picking up cow dung. He counts the days, counts the hours, counts the time. When his twelve years are up, he comes to the Guru and says, "Now give me knowledge. I have worked here for twelve years."

The Guru says, "*Tat tvam asi*. You are That."

He says, "Wait a minute. I got this for free from that other Guru, and you made me work here for twelve years picking up cow dung?"

And the Guru says, "The Truth has not changed in twelve years. The Truth was, the Truth is, and the Truth will always be the same."

When we actually think about it, we realize it is simple.

We have the Śiva *lingam* by the stream down there. When you go and sit there on a warm day, it is a simple experience. You are there. There is the stream. There are the trees. There is nothing special to see. It is what it is.

The mantra is also simple. "I offer salutations to auspiciousness." You think, "That's all? There must be a greater meaning." But what greater meaning can there be other than to always have auspicious thoughts, uplifting thoughts, noble thoughts, and for the mind to always be humble and always offer salutations?



When you really think about it, how often are you really humble? How often are you really and truly offering salutations? It takes so much effort to bring the two palms together and say, "Namaste."

A month ago, the Wallkill River was dry. You could see the rocks because it hadn't rained. Then it rained, and it filled up. In the same way, we must rain within constantly for our reservoir to be full, so that somebody can take from there and so that we have something to give.

The syllables of the mantra you repeat redeem you. They free you, first of all, from your own thought process. When

***Tat tvam asi.***  
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When things happen in life, we have our own choice of words to express frustration, and they are not usually uplifting words. Along with them, most people usually say, “Sorry.” Their frustration was expressed through a word they know is not correct, and so they realize, “Now I’m not looking so glamorous in front of this person because I’ve used a word that’s not appropriate.” If they had used an auspicious word, they wouldn’t have to say, “Sorry.” So the practice the Guru encourages is to use auspicious words even in frustrating moments.

The easiest way to explain this is with a story about King Akbar and his minister, Birbal. A man comes to court and says, “I can speak twenty languages, so you’ll never find out where I’m from.”

King Akbar is a little perplexed. This is a challenge. He’s the emperor of Delhi, so how can he not know where this person is from?

Birbal tells the guest, “You are such a great man. You must accept our hospitality and spend the night with us.”

When the man is fast asleep that night, Birbal comes in with a pitcher of cold water and pours it on his face.

When the man feels the water, he cries out in his native language. Of course, this is all done secretly, so the man does not realize it is Birbal.

The next morning, when the court gathers, Birbal tells him, “You are from this state, from this place, and you speak this language.”

The man is aghast. How could they have figured it out?

The sages tell us that our true nature goes with us everywhere we go. Therefore, Baba would say, “Wherever you go, you go.”

You can come here or go somewhere, and act very holy. But the situations that arise in life reveal how much mantra repetition you have done, how much meditation you have done, and how much understanding has become a part of you.

Jñāneśvar Mahārāj says, “Constantly repeat the name of the Lord. We cannot count the amount of merit that is gained by simply chanting the name of God.”

Baba would tell people when they cooked in his ashram, “Chant, sing.” Many modern kitchens have a television, so the cook is watching that while microwaving the food. But Baba would say, “Put that vibration into the food. Don’t play other music, don’t do other things.”

The mantra begins as a thought within you. And that thought filters throughout your being. If you’ve ever had an Ayurvedic oil massage, you have seen that they use a lot of oil. You may wonder why so much oil. They say that it takes that much to actually get into all the layers of the skin. Similarly, the subtlety of the mantra has to spread throughout the body—through every pore, to every single cell.

I always remember that Baba talked about meeting a *sādhū* in Karnataka during his traveling days. He said to the *sādhū*, “Please speak to me about the power of the mantra.”

The *sādhū* had his shoes lying there. He said to Baba, “Pick up that shoe. Put it by your ear.”



**The situations that arise in life reveal how much mantra repetition you have done.**

When Baba did that, the sādhu said, “What do you hear?”

Baba said, “*Om Namaḥ Śivāya.*”

The sādhu said, “Now you can put the shoe down. You have experienced the power of the mantra.”

The various things you own are inert, but they should become filled with that sound. When somebody picks up your object, it should not stink, it should have the fragrance of the mantra.

Where Baba is buried used to be his meditation room and also at one time his bedroom. After he moved to his bigger apartment, that room stayed locked for twelve years. Every so often, when he felt somebody needed a big jolt, he would tell us, “Take this person to that room.”

The person would have no instructions and no information, no knowledge, about where he was being sent. There was a cushion, and we would leave the person there.

Sometimes an hour or two or three later, Baba would say, “Oh, go get him.”

Then we would go, and it would take a few moments to bring that individual back and say, “Baba wants to see you.” Because the person would still be in another world. He would say, “I sat there, and the walls began repeating the mantra.”

People chant for a short time and say, “Okay, I’m done.” But a sage sits for what seems to us like a long time and immerses himself in the practice of mantra. The room could have a brick wall or a sheetrock wall, it doesn’t matter. Those walls become filled with japa.

Baba often said that when you lie down for fifteen minutes after your morning meditation, the rest you get for those fifteen minutes is better than six hours of sleep. I can vouch for that. It is a way of spreading that energy through the body, of gathering oneself and saying, “Okay, now I’m ready for the day.” Especially in his later years, Baba made it a practice. When he was done with his other practices in the morning, he would send everybody away and have fifteen minutes of just rest.

Jñāneśvar says, “Who can describe the incomparable fortune of the person whose tongue is dedicated to the name of the Lord, which is the essence of all scriptures?”

Imagine that when you wake up in the morning from a good sleep, your mind is not thinking “orange juice” or “coffee.” It is not thinking of a cigarette, cigar, or whatever. Instead, the mind is thinking, “I want to sing. I want to chant.”

An easy way today is to set the alarm on your smart phone or iPod or other device so it doesn’t go beep, beep, beep, beep, but plays a chant you love. Whether you want it or not, the first sound the ears hear is a chant. So automatically, the mind thinks of the power of mantra.

Our father woke us up in childhood by playing Baba’s *Gurū Gītā*. Most days we had to get up and get ready for school. But once in a while, I’d be home on a weekend, and I’d think, “Okay, today I can sleep in.” But then I would hear the *Gītā* playing. The tape recorder was right outside my room, so I would get up to turn it off. And it would already be off. It had not been set. I learned over time to laugh at this.

The practice of mantra repetition, as Baba would say, becomes so much a part of you that nobody has to remind

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you to do it. It just is what happens. That is the place we want to arrive at—where, as Jñāneśvar says, “the tongue is dedicated to the name of the Lord.”

Jñāneśvar says, “They are rare who chant the name, the mantra, incessantly.”

So if you think, “I chant a lot,” think again. He means chant nonstop. In our world today, that would be twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

The best thing to do over these winter months is to find some periods of time when there is no television, no Internet, no distractions. Sit in your favorite chair or in your favorite spot, or in front of a fire, and allow yourself to chant the mantra.

Don’t get up. Because as soon as you get up, the flow is lost. Whatever your bodily needs are, take care of those first. Take a minimum of thirty minutes if you tend to be restless. Or if you think of yourself as a mature, serious, spiritual seeker, then two hours will seem like nothing. Make it a practice not to look at the clock because then you think, “Okay, now it’s one hour and fifty-nine minutes,” and the last minute will feel like an hour.

You might say, “I don’t have time. I can’t do that. It’s not possible.”

It may never seem possible, but you have to make it possible. You have to think to yourself, “What is it that I’m willing to give up? What is it that I’m willing to let go? What is there that I’m ready to say, ‘It’s okay if I don’t do it?’” That is the choice you have to make.

I hope and pray that you’ll try this over the next few months, while the weather is cold outside and you’re not rushing to get out in the snow, except to go to work and come back home. It gets dark early. So instead of getting depressed and all the other things that come with early sunset, think, “I have a project. I want to become still. I want to become steady. I don’t want to crave. I don’t want to grieve. I don’t want to hate. I don’t want to run after a pleasure. Rather, I want to become still within myself.”

Offer salutations. Have auspicious thoughts. It’s a tall order. That’s a lot to do over six months. But it goes by fast. Before you know it, spring will be here.

Mīrābāi was a queen from the northwestern state of Rajasthan in India, and she awakened to the love of Kṛṣṇa. She would go to the temple, and she would hang out with the local people, and just be immersed in her singing, in her devotion, in her love.

Mīrā told her own mind, “Drink the nectar of the name of God. Give up bad company. Sit in good company. Listen to the glories of God. Let the mind become free of desire, of anger, of arrogance, of greed, of attachment. Let all of these things just go away. Mīrā says, ‘Let the mind become filled with the essence of the Lord.’”

So let us all, over these next few months, allow our mind and our senses, and our whole being, to become filled with that love.



## G L O S S A R Y

**Akbar**

[1542-1605] Moghul emperor in India

**Birbal**

King Akbar's prime minister

**Guru Gītā**

commentary on the Guru

**japa**

repetition of a mantra

**Jñāneśvar Mahārāj**

[13th c.] poet-saint of Maharashtra

**Kṛṣṇa**Hindu deity, Guru of Arjuna in the  
*Bhagavad Gītā***liṅgam**

form of the formless Śiva

**Mahāśivarātra**

night of Śiva, new moon in February-March

**mantra**sacred words or syllables, literally "that which  
protects the mind"**Mīrābāī**

[1498-1547] poet-saint and queen

**namaste**

I offer my salutations to the divine within you.

**Om̐**

primordial sound

**Om̐ Namaḥ Śivāya**

mantra; literally, "I bow to the divine"

**sādhu**

a mendicant

**satsaṅg**

in the company of the Truth

**sevā**

selfless service to the Guru

**Śiva**

Hindu deity, the primordial Guru

