



सच्चितानन्द

Vedānta speaks about sat-cit-ānanda, or existence-consciousness-bliss. Sat is that which exists in all things, in all places, at all times. No matter what situation you are in, if you go within, that is what you experience. We might think of it as Truth.

Consciousness, or cit, is the illuminating factor. When we see something, we know what it is from within. Not just through the mind, but from deep within ourselves, we come to understand what that is.

Being in that space of Truth, through understanding what it is, we come to experience ānanda, or bliss.

MAHĀMANDALESHWAR SWAMI NITYĀNANDA

Mahāmandaleshwar Swami Nityānanda spent about four months at Shanti Mandir in Walden, New York, in 2016. This issue of Siddha Marg features a talk Gurudev gave at the end of October, just prior to his departure for Argentina.

Ritual Is a Part of Life

With great love and respect, I'd like to welcome everybody to our Sunday *satsaṅg*. It's supposed to be a semi-farewell *satsaṅg* because we go to Argentina this week, and we're back for the Thanksgiving weekend.

I thought I'd take a moment this morning to look at what we've done during this month of October. It's been a very celebratory month.

Some people came for Navrātra. Some came for Baba Muktānanda's *mahāsamādhi*. Some came for the flute concert. And most recently, we've had this week of Dīpāvalī. Some of you have been here the whole time, and others have come and gone.

In one of the homes we visited recently, the father pointed toward his teenage son and said, "I have to answer his questions, such as 'Is there a God?'" His mother was sitting next to him, and she said, "You haven't given him the traditions that we gave you, the teachings." I'm sure he felt, "Well, I've done my best."

Of course, the mind naturally wonders, "Is God for real?" So, for this past month, that's exactly what we've done—we have focused on experiencing that divinity.

First we had fifteen days of worshipping and honoring the ancestors according to the Indian tradition. In India, we call these kinds of practices *karmakand*, or rituals. Many modern-day people say, "I'm not interested in rituals."

Sages such as Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and Bhagavan Nityānanda have shown us that we don't need rituals to experience—as they themselves did—oneness with the Ultimate. But

Ritual Is a Part of Life (continued)

those who are still in the process of getting to that experience can't eliminate rituals completely.

Ritual is a part of life. For example, you wake up in the morning. You have your juice or tea, or whatever you prefer, and then you brush your teeth. For me, the taste of juice and toothpaste don't match, if you know what I mean. So I've resolved to do something I like better for my morning ritual. It's called oil pulling.

In the Āyurvedic tradition, you take a spoonful of sesame oil and swish it in your mouth for fifteen minutes. Just be careful that you don't swallow it and that you have a place close by where you can spit it out when you are done. Don't spit it in the sink; that's not good for the plumbing. The best is outside or in the toilet. Especially if you sniffle or have sinus issues throughout the winter, or even for all twelve months, oil pulling is beneficial.

Undigested food is what causes phlegm. Āyurveda calls it *ama*. Simply having a bowel movement doesn't mean your stomach is empty. What is left becomes stuck inside you and can stay there for years and years—much as karma and other kinds of subtle impressions do. According to Āyurveda as well as traditional Chinese medicine, most of the sicknesses we get are due to food that has not been completely digested.

I developed a sinus issue while living in the basement in Pine Bush. When we were in Haridwar in 2010, one of our swamis recommended putting warm almond oil into my nose at night before going to sleep. I told her that was a horrible idea.

But she kept at me for three or four days.

Finally, I accepted the idea because I thought that was the only way she'd leave me alone. I figured I'd have my own personal experience and then I'd tell her how horrible it was. But I liked it. Six years later, I've made it a regular practice: five drops in each nostril. It is called *nasya*. And now I can say that most of the phlegm and all the related issues I had are gone. Try it, and you'll see.

You might ask, "What does this have to do with ritual?"

Well, these are two rituals I'm introducing you to. Oil pulling is one. And the other is *nasya*. You can look them up.

When we do the ancestor *pūjā*, as we did at the beginning of the month, we not only pray for our ancestors' upliftment and for good things to happen for them, but we pray for the same for ourselves, and for our own lives.

After that celebration finishes, we have the nine or ten days of Navrātra, during which we worship the Goddess as Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahāsarasvatī. These are the three aspects of the Goddess: one removes ignorance, one bestows abundance, and one gives knowledge.

The sages believe that all three aspects exist in our life. First, there is that which we need to get rid of. Then there is abundance, which is something all of us love in life. And finally, I would say, the thing we especially need more of in our lives today is wisdom.

Wisdom is not just knowing the Self, knowing the Truth. It is also knowing how to deal with basic, everyday life situations.

The word *guru* is now used across all of these situations in life. We have a management guru and a financial guru; we have this guru and that guru. But as the ancient sages told

We not only pray for our ancestors' upliftment and for good things to happen for them, but we pray for the same for ourselves, and for our own lives.

Ritual Is a Part of Life (continued)

Meditation has to be done in such a way that on some days you sit for a few moments and you feel satisfied, and on other days you need a little bit longer.

us, the one who teaches you the Truth is the Sadguru. You may have umpteen gurus, but the one who finally takes you to the knowledge of “Who am I?” is the Sadguru.

Navrātra is celebrated in March or April, as spring comes, and also in September or October, as autumn comes. One can choose to observe it during the rest of the ten months, but these are the two main times people chant the *Chandi Pāṭh*, the *Lalitā Sahasranāma*, or whatever their tradition prescribes. Some people get up early in the morning, chant and pray, go to work, then come back in the evening, and again do their prayers.

Āyurveda explains that when you go from one season to the next, it is a good idea to take in less food so the body can adjust to the change. Many people fell sick in October because we had cold days, and then we had hot days. This past Thursday, we had snow. The weather changes much more rapidly now than it used to.

During Navrātra we eat less and we spend more time in *japa*, chanting, and meditation. This gives the body time to adjust to the change of season.

In the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, the Guru takes time to explain to his son—who is also his disciple—the effects of food upon the mind. What you eat determines your thoughts. It also determines how you speak. This is then translated into actions in your life.

The texts of Āyurveda discuss this at great length. The *Bhagavad Gītā* also talks about it. Food is an important aspect of life that we have decided to make less important nowadays.

Not only is everybody stressed these days, but everybody is trying to figure out why they are stressed. When you

read about it, you see they have come up with many reasons. I say that the most important reason is that we simply don't take time for ourselves.

When people come to me and say, “I want to learn to meditate,” their next question always is “And how long should I meditate?” That means they've already decided “I can only donate so much time in my day. Meditation isn't important enough to me to be flexible and open about it. Because I really don't have time.”

If you don't have time, how and when will you sit? Over the years, I have seen that meditation has to be done in such a way that on some days you sit for a few moments and you feel satisfied, and on other days you need a little bit longer.

Think about what happens when you wash your clothes. The cleaner your clothes are, the less time they need in the washing machine; the dirtier they are, the longer the cycle has to run. Similarly, if your mind has taken in a lot of information throughout the day, or has gone through so much emotion, then it needs more time for cleansing. If the day has been wonderful, it needs less cleansing.

I'm talking about truly wonderful, not fake wonderful. I hope those of you who come regularly to satsaṅg understand what I mean by the difference between truly wonderful and fake wonderful. You have to know the difference within yourself. Otherwise, you tell everybody, “I feel so good!” But underneath you are thinking, “Let's sit down and talk so I can unload what really is going on.”



Where the Goddess Dwells

You can wish somebody auspiciousness. Even if you're not happy yourself, doing that helps you to come to a place of auspiciousness, to a good place within yourself.

Every day in India has a celebration. There are celebrations for the husband, for the wife, for the son, for the daughter, for the whole family, and so on and so forth. There is no day devoid of some ceremony, of some aspect of God that is part of your life.

The way I understand it is that everybody loves to get together. But the sages decided that people couldn't just come together to eat. That couldn't be the only reason; there had to be a greater purpose. So we have celebrations so people can invite others. Of course, a major part is the food afterwards, but people can say they came for the ceremony.

During a ceremony, people are reminded that there is a God, there is Truth. If they like the priest, they have a conversation with him. They ask, "Why did you have this ceremony today?" And the conversation continues.

But these days many people just say, "Come, let's party." There is no purpose to that party other than eating, drinking, and being merry.

For example, for this celebration, we traditionally say, "Śubha Dipāvalī." Meaning that we give our heartfelt greetings on the occasion of Dipāvalī. But as the English language has crept into India, most people now say simply, "Happy Dipāvalī." When somebody from India writes that, I write back that it is "Śubha Dipāvalī," auspicious Dipāvalī.

Happiness is transitory. Happiness takes place for a limited period of time. You can't really wish others happiness

because their own situation at any given time is what will determine whether they're happy or not.

The sages say, "O my mind, always have auspicious thoughts." Similarly, you can wish somebody auspiciousness. Even if you're not happy yourself, doing that helps you to come to a place of auspiciousness, to a good place within yourself.

Last night we had the pūjā to Goddess Lakṣmī as part of our Dipāvalī festival. I shared that in India we worship Lakṣmī in eight forms.

Mahālakṣmī is her eternal nature. Gajalakṣmī is the elephant Goddess. The elephant was a vehicle in the early days, so this refers to a way or means to get to places. Dhanalakṣmī is the Goddess of wealth, which is how most people relate to Lakṣmī.

Vijaya or Jayalakṣmī is the Goddess of victory. Everybody wants victory in their life.

I believe in our life today we need patience and acceptance: patience to just wait out the situation, and acceptance to be at peace with it. So that is one of the forms: Dhairya Lakṣmī.

Dhanya Lakṣmī is the Goddess of grains. Everybody has a pantry. We have this form of the Goddess to always make sure the pantry is full.

Vidyā Lakṣmī is the Goddess of knowledge. The sages believed that no matter who you are, where you are, or what you are in life, knowledge is important. You must know; you

Where the Goddess Dwells (continued)

**Wherever there is
satsaṅg, wherever holy
men are served and
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Nārāyaṇa dwells.**

must understand. This is not just school knowledge, but knowledge about how to live life and what to do with life.

Finally, Santāna Lakṣmī is the Goddess who oversees the ability to have children, to create progeny so this human race can continue on.

I will share a story about Lakṣmī.

Once there was an elderly man who was both rich and virtuous. In the early days in India, there were people who not only had abundant wealth, but who opened their homes to everybody. They did not use their wealth selfishly. They were not miserly. What they had, they shared. The whole village felt good to have such noble people among them. One could have conversations with them and seek their advice. Sometimes they settled issues. Things in the village were taken care of.

The man in this story had thus been blessed throughout his life, as were the generations before him. But it is said that Lakṣmī is fickle. She doesn't stay with one thing. She keeps moving.

One day the man has a dream. In it, he sees a beautiful woman leaving his house. He asks her, "O Goddess, who are you? When did you come to my home, and why are you leaving?"

She says, "I am Vaibhava Lakṣmī." This is yet another form of Lakṣmī: the Goddess of grandeur and the qualities I just described that a blessed family possesses. She says, "I've been here for many generations, but now my time is up. I can't live here anymore, so I'm going to move on. But I am pleased that I was able to live here for so many generations and that I was so well used. Your family invited holy men to your home. You fed poor people. You built wells. You took care of the cows. You did a lot to uplift society. Therefore, as I leave, I want to grant you a boon. Whatever you want is what I will give you."

The man says, "I have four daughters-in-law. They manage the house. So I will consult with them and see what they want." He says, "I will get back to you."

Lakṣmī says, "Okay, I'll come back tomorrow night in your dream, and you can tell me your boon."

The next morning, the man calls his four daughters-in-law and tells them his dream.

The first one says, "Tell her to fill our safe with plenty of gold and silver and lots of wealth."

The next says, "Tell her to fill our granary."

The third agrees: "We should always have plenty of food."

The youngest daughter-in-law regularly goes to satsaṅg. She says, "Listen, if Lakṣmī wants to go, she will go. We can't stop her. Even if we ask for all of these things, they won't stay, either. Gold and silver will run out. Grain will run out. All these physical things will run out. Not only that, but our children will become full of ego, thinking, 'We come from a rich family.' They'll become lazy. They won't put forth the effort they need in life. So I feel we should ask for a blessing that will stay with us. Ask that satsaṅg and chanting happen regularly in our home. That we always honor holy men. And that there will always be love and harmony between each and every one of us, even in difficult times."

The next night the man has another dream.

Lakṣmī appears and asks, "Did you discuss the boon with your daughters-in-law?"

He says, "Yes."

She says, "So what do you want?"

He says, "O Mother Lakṣmī, if you wish to go, go with great

Where the Goddess Dwells (continued)

The Goddess gets rid of everything—the good, the bad, the ugly, however you want to see it—that’s not yours. So we pray to her, “Take it away!”

joy. But bless us so that our home always has satsaṅg, so that holy men come to us and we’re able to serve them, and so that there is great love and harmony between all of us in the family.”

Lakṣmī is surprised. “What have you asked for? Because wherever there is satsaṅg, wherever holy men are served and taken care of—that is the place where Lord Nārāyaṇa dwells. And I am his wife, so wherever Nārāyaṇa dwells, I do too. Therefore, even if I wish to leave, now I cannot go. The boon you have asked for forces me to stay in this home.”

Wherever there is satsaṅg, wherever holy men are served and taken care of—that is the place where Lord Nārāyaṇa dwells.

The story ends here. But think about what the storyteller has tried to tell us. He says to be noble first. Because we cannot do noble actions unless we are noble. That means we have to be magnanimous ourselves. We can’t be small-minded; we can’t be stingy.

This is the fear people have in our society today: “Do I have enough? Can I afford to share? How much can I really share with others?”

If you look at any ancient tradition, you see the value of sharing. In fact, you only have to go back twenty years or so; that’s how much things have changed. People’s homes were more open, and people were more generous and willing to give and to share. Now those people might have more things in their life, but they’ve become more stingy. They think, “Oh, I don’t know if I want to give. I don’t know if I want to share. I don’t know if I have enough.”

But I always say, “Money just goes around: it comes and it goes. So be noble.”

Here is another story.

A man arrives at a hotel. He wants to spend the night, but he wants to have a look at the room first.

The desk clerk says, “If you leave a deposit of one hundred dollars, then I’ll let you see the room.”

The man deposits one hundred dollars, and he goes to see the room.

The clerk immediately takes the money and sends it to the grocer to pay his grocery bill. The grocer uses the money to pay his own bill. In this manner, the money goes from one business to another, to another, and to another. In the end, a prostitute comes back to the clerk and says, “Here’s your hundred dollars.”

In the meantime, the man comes back. He says, “I don’t want the room.” He takes the hundred dollars, puts it in his pocket, and leaves the hotel.

People like to think, “Whatever is mine is mine. And whatever is yours should become mine.” That is not what this story is trying to teach us. It says, “Share! Give!” It says, “Open your pocket, open your wallet, and let what you have move, circulate.”

Ultimately, we learn in life that whatever is ours will stay with us, or return to us. Whatever is not ours will not stay with us no matter how well we take care of it.

You can think of it as karma. Whatever the reason may be, what does not belong with you won’t stay with you.

Through the process of Navrātra, you realize that the Goddess gets rid of everything—the good, the bad, the ugly, however you want to see it—that’s not yours. So we pray to her, “Take it away!”



You Are Not Alone

We will end our month in this way, with the understanding that “I am not alone. I should not be alone. And I will not be alone.”

Tomorrow morning we’ll have our last pūjā. It will have been exactly a month because we began on the 30th of September with the ancestor pūjā. Tomorrow’s Annakuṭa pūjā is performed to the mountain of food.

The story of Annakuṭa is about Kṛṣṇa holding up Mount Govardhan. He protects all the villagers from the rain and storm sent by Lord Indra, and does it by holding the mountain over them with just his pinky.

At one point, all the people standing around start to think, “We could do this ourselves.”

Kṛṣṇa says, “You want to help me? Please help.”

Everybody thinks, “Sure. Let me give a hand.” So they put their hand or their stick or whatever they have under the mountain.

Kṛṣṇa says, “Now that all of you are holding up the mountain, I’ll just relax my pinky.”

Everybody thinks, “Yeah, why not? There are so many of us—the whole village—we can handle it.”

As soon as Kṛṣṇa begins to remove his pinky, the mountain starts to sink.

“No, no, no!” everybody cries. “Put your pinky back. We need you to continue to hold up the mountain!”

In our own ways, we do the same in life. We think, “You know what, God? It’s okay, I can handle it. I can handle my

husband. I can handle my wife. I can handle my job. I can handle my children.” We say, “God, take a break. Let me show you how good I am at handling all this.”

This is what we have done in society today. It’s Kali Yuga, after all. We think, “Let me handle this situation. Let me show you how well I can handle this situation.” All our problems arise from this.

We began our summer like this: “Let us walk together. Let us move together. Let us come together. Let us share everything that has been given to us by God.”

Now we will end our month in this way, with the understanding that “I am not alone. I should not be alone. And I will not be alone.”

As you go about your life, think about this. How can you open up your space? How can you be loving? How can you be kind? How can you be compassionate?

Remember that inviting people into your home doesn’t mean you have to talk the whole time. Sometimes silence is good, also.

We try to do that here in the ashram. We have the morning chant, the noon chant, the evening chant, and we have time in between. You can just be. You can enjoy the space. You don’t have to run to the next class. You don’t have to run to the next event.

We have nice eight-foot-wide porches on all the buildings.

You Are Not Alone (continued)

This is your homework for the winter. Find a place. Take your shawl or blanket or whatever you have, and sit in your own company. Sit without any of these distractions.

Of course, it's winter now, but during the other months you can sit there. Learn to just sit.

We have made our life "run, run, run, run." When somebody says to us, "Just sit," we don't know how.

We say, "Can't I turn the television on?"

"No."

"Can't I put some music on?"

"No."

"Can't I read a book?"

"No. Just sit."

"But I want to relax."

"Yes, relax."

This is your homework for the winter. Find a place. Take your shawl or blanket or whatever you have, and sit in your own company. Sit without any of these distractions.

Look at your own thoughts. Feel your own feelings, your emotions. Ask yourself, "What is really going on?"

If you feel you need something, then I think a mirror is good. Buy a handheld mirror if you don't have one. And then have conversations.

Ask yourself, "How are you today?"

"I don't feel that good. I could be better."

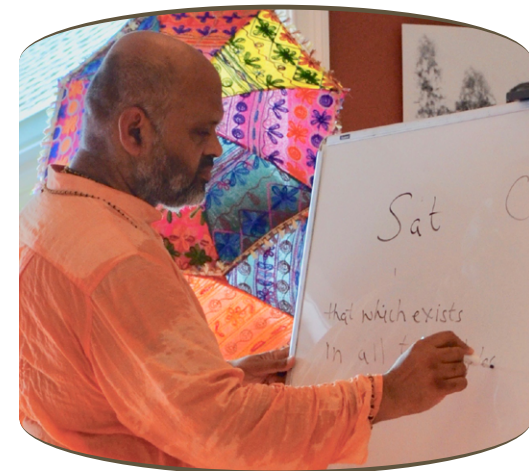
"What can you do to make it better?"

You will be amazed: your questions will be answered after half an hour or forty-five minutes, or even before you put the mirror down.

Of course, that's if you know how to have a conversation. If you don't know how to do that, then take some classes. Not everybody knows how to have good, wise, uplifting conversations.

On our tour through Maryland, we met a young girl who was studying psychology. I told her, "I encourage people to study psychology, to study psychiatry." I said, "As time goes on, we're going to need more and more of that. People will need more counseling because the mental makeup in society these days is disturbed for so many reasons."

We need to take care of this. We need to make our conversations and our lives uplifting.



G L O S S A R Y

Ādi Śaṅkarācārya

[788-820] sage, originator of Advaita Vedānta

ama

toxic waste from digestion, causes disease

Annakūṭa

Hindu festival; literally, mountain of food

Āyurveda

the ancient Indian science of health

Bhagavad Gītā

Hindu scripture

Chandi Pāṭh

Sanskrit mantras to the goddess

Dīpāvalī

Hindu festival of lights

japa

repetition of a mantra

Kali Yuga

the dark age, the last of four ages

karmakand

rituals

KṛṣṇaHindu deity, Gūru of Arjuna in the
*Bhagavad Gītā***Lalitā Sahasranāma**

chant of the thousand names of the Goddess

Mahākālī

the great Goddess who removes ignorance

Mahālakṣmī

the great Goddess of abundance

mahāsamādhi

final merging with the Absolute

Mahāsarasvatī

the great Goddess of knowledge

Nārāyaṇa

Lord Viṣṇu, God of sustenance

Navrātra

nine-night celebration of the Goddess

pūjā

worship

satsaṅg

in the company of the Truth

Taittirīya Upaniṣad

Hindu scripture

