

# Siddha Marg



## शिवोऽहम्

*When the mind has come to a deep experience of Śivo'ham—"I am Śiva"—that is when you have really understood what meditation is.*

*In that space there is nothing to become. It is a space of joy. You're happy being who you are. You don't have to do anything to please anybody else, or anything to please yourself. You just remain content, still.*

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 sanātana dharma (universal law). This year, he has invited everyone to study the seventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, as expounded by Swami Maheshwarānanda Giriji in Nectar of Discourses. This issue features excerpts from talks Gurudev gave this February at Shanti Mandir in Walden, New York, in which he offered his commentary on the fourth through tenth verses of the seventh chapter.*

## The Thread Within All

*With great respect and love, welcome to satsaṅg.*

In these next few verses, Lord Kṛṣṇa talks to Arjuna about matter and spirit, or *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. He gets a little technical here. He explains that when spirit identifies itself with matter, limitation is created. The spirit experiences ignorance because of its identification with matter. Then the individual doesn't know who he is, what his real nature is, or what his real purpose is.

Swami Maheshwarānanda shares a funny story. In Kashi, there was a ceremony you could go through. I don't know if that's true now, but it was in his time. You would go to a priest, and he would place a heavy sword on your head. As he did this, you were supposed to make a wish about what you wanted to be born as in your next lifetime.

So a cobbler goes to have the ceremony performed. The sword is placed on his head. As he is bearing the weight of it, the priest asks, "What would you like to be in your next lifetime?"

He quickly thinks to himself, "Okay, a Brahmin priest." Priests held the highest position in those days. But then he thinks, "I would have to get up really early in the morning, take a bath in the cold river, do all those prayers, say all those mantras." He thinks, "Nah, I don't want to get up so early and bathe in that water."

## The Thread Within All (continued)

So the next best possibility is to become a king. He thinks, “A king? I don’t want to go to battle. I don’t want to kill people. What if I die? What if I’m killed?” So he thinks, “No, no. I don’t want to be a king.”

Then he thinks, “Maybe a businessman.” But he thinks, “Then I have to worry about all the money. I have to make the money and protect the money and keep the money.”

He tells the priest, “I’ll just be a cobbler.”

The priest says, “Then why did you go through all this? What was the point?”

In these verses, Lord Kṛṣṇa shares with Arjuna that it’s difficult to give up an identity we have created.

In the fourth verse, Kṛṣṇa says, “Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect, and ego are my eightfold prakṛti.” In other words, when the five gross elements come together with the mind, intellect, and ego, they form our material nature.

When we study Vedānta or Shaivism, we begin to understand how all of these elements exist in our life in different ways. We see them, we experience them. The sage wants us to understand that just as when moss covers water and therefore the water underneath is imperceptible, when *māyā*, or illusion, covers our spirit, we only see our material nature. *Māyā* creates fear; it creates pain. Because we do not experience our spirit, we get caught in material existence.

Swami Maheshwarānanda uses an example from the philosophy of Shaivism. He suggests we imagine that Brahman, the Absolute, is like a screen. On the screen many things are displayed. An elephant can walk by, fire can burn, war can occur. All these things can happen, yet the screen remains undisturbed. No matter what image is projected on it, nothing happens to the screen.

In the same way, Kṛṣṇa explains to Arjuna in the fifth verse, we need to understand the difference between prakṛti and

puruṣa, matter and spirit. If we can do that, then we can stand back and just watch.

Of course, we understand this when we read it. We realize that what we are experiencing is simply matter. We can be a witness. We can simply walk through the experience.

Yet somehow, when we put the book down, we get caught. Somewhere within us, the knowledge is there. But in that moment, the mind forgets the screen is Brahman, upon which all of this is depicted.

In the sixth verse, Arjuna is told by Kṛṣṇa, “Know that I am the source of this whole universe, from which everything comes.”

And he goes on to say in the seventh verse, “There is nothing higher than Me, O Arjuna. All this is strung on Me, as beads on a string.”

Maheshwarānandaji explains how to understand this. On the one hand, we have *rudrākṣa* beads that are strung on a gold thread. The beads are different from the thread that runs through them. The thread is what holds the various beads together. On the other hand, we could have a ball of string that is knotted so it forms beads on that string. In that case, the beads and the string are one and the same.

So here Kṛṣṇa is trying to tell us two different things: I am one and the same, yet I am different.

Of course, to fully understand this philosophy, we would have to sit with each other every day and read, study, meditate, and contemplate. Then we would have to come back the next day and ask ourselves more questions. And as we sit, we have our own direct experience of what Kṛṣṇa has explained to Arjuna: there is one Self. And that one Self—as puruṣa, as spirit, as energy—is the common factor in everything.

Therefore, we must realize and be able to see the thread that is within us and within all.

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ignorance because of its  
identification with  
matter.**

# How Can I Be Wiser?

**I**n verses 8 and 9, Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna, “I am liquidity in water. I am the light in the moon and sun. I am the syllable *Oṃ* in all of the Vedas. I am sound in ether, virility in men. I am the sweet fragrance in earth, the brilliance in fire, and the life in all beings. I am austerity in the austere.”

When you read this you go, “Okay, so?”

Try to understand the thought Kṛṣṇa is sharing with us. He is describing the eye with which we should look out into the world. Usually we look at “me” or “I” and we experience everything else as other, as separate. So we treat it thus.

Often as I travel, I meet people. We had satsaṅg yesterday at a local home, and the neighbor said, “I am a simple man, and I like to sit and talk to people. Yet when I watch television, I feel powerless.”

I’m sure that is something we all share. Television shows the same news from morning through night and sometimes repeats it the next day. We watch the news much more than we read the scriptures. In the car, we listen to the radio. Then a friend calls to say, “Did you hear? Did you know?” So we feel even more powerless.

As I shared yesterday, we shouldn’t feel powerless. We may not feel we can become God Himself. Yet within our own little universe, we can be the brilliance, we can be the pure sound. We can be all of these qualities Kṛṣṇa describes. We don’t have to become dull. We don’t have to become insipid.

When we hear, “I am the sweet fragrance in earth, the brilliance in fire, the life in all beings,” we have to learn to tap into that brilliance within us.

Each one of us is brilliant in a different way. When we look at the world, we can enjoy that variety for what it is.

Imagine if we were all the same. It would be boring.

Each individual in this world has two qualities. Each one of us is peculiar; each one of us is special.

Now, what we see as our peculiarity can seem bothersome to others. But our specialty is a pleasure, is a joy. This is my theory, based on my experience over the last thirty years as I’ve travelled the world.

As we go through life, we have to become such that our peculiarity doesn’t hurt others. We can’t get rid of it. It’s inborn. So we have to learn to convert our peculiarity into our speciality. That takes time. Don’t think you’ll walk out today, and you’ll say, “Okay, now I’ve understood. I’m going to be special all the time.” Because sometimes what is a speciality to you could be a peculiarity to someone else.

Some people like spicy food, some people like bland food. Some people like sweet food, some like savory food. So each of us likes something a little different. Of course, through all of this peculiarity and speciality, we have to see the oneness of Consciousness.

Rather than becoming a pain—which is easy to do—we want to become a joy, a pleasure. It is simple. When you sit down on a chair, for example, you adjust yourself a little bit so you can be comfortable. At least I do. Then after a while you think, “No, that’s not comfortable anymore.” So you move over a little bit. If you’re lying in bed, you shift a pillow. It’s only when you’re dead tired that you go to sleep and wake up in the same posture. Otherwise you shift a little bit even on the perfect mattress.

You can view life with the same understanding. You have to constantly make adjustments as you live life. You don’t

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## How Can I Be Wiser? (continued)

adjust yourself just to avoid upsetting or bothering others. You adjust so that your brilliance shines through.

It's not so easy to know what your brilliance is, or what your fragrance is, and how to share that. You have to observe your interactions with others.

We don't always want to give, we don't always want to share. This is what we lack in the world today, I feel. We think, "Why should I bother?"

Imagine that two people are driving on a one-lane highway, and both think, "I'm not going to move!" However, one could move a little bit in one direction, and the other could move a little bit in the opposite direction. And then they'll say, "We made it. Good!"

You learn this on the Indian highway. When Westerners go there, they wonder, "How did they manage that?" They managed because they have learned that in life there needs to be some give and take.

Sometimes we become stuck in our relationships. We say, "I'm the one who's always giving." Well, the other person is also giving. It's just that we don't see it because we are busy adjusting our own pillow.

In the *Upaniṣads*, the sage Yājñavalkya says, "We don't love each other for the sake of each other, we love each other for the sake of the divine Self that dwells within."

This is what I mean when I speak of our speciality—the divine Self that dwells within us. All it takes to recognize it is a simple movement, a simple shift, a simple change in the way we perceive, in the way we hear, in the way we think.

Of course, we often move away from that divinity, from that speciality. We somehow move toward our peculiarity.

To overcome this, you have to ask yourself as you go through life, "What can I do? What can I create?"

I shared yesterday that each one has to have a place—this might sound a little airy fairy—that is full of love. Your home, for example, has to be a place that you don't just keep for yourself but that you share with others.

When you feel that the world out there is cruel, you must ask yourself, "Why is it so?" You have to realize those seemingly mean people are not really different from you. It's just that something happened in their lives that took them into darkness. And then they found others who are also in darkness and have forgotten the brilliance of the Self.

If you are able to see even a little bit of light, share that light. Find your own way, your own speciality, your own technique to do this. Don't be shy about it.

We run a school at Shanti Mandir in Magod. We have about sixty-five boys there. Every so often, we have a struggle because one boy doesn't want to conform to the discipline. He's not the only one who feels that way. So he finds four or five or six others who come to us and say, "We don't want to get up in the morning."

We of course say, "You have to get up in the morning."

"Then we're leaving."

We have a choice. We can say, "Okay, go" or we can try to tweak his mind to see why he should get up. Then he and his friends tweak their minds to tell us why they should not get up.

If a ten-, fifteen-, or seventeen-year-old mind has these kinds of thoughts, imagine the thoughts a thirty-, forty-, or fifty-year-old mind has. In fact, not only is the body thirty-,

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## How Can I Be Wiser? (continued)

forty-, or fifty-years-old, but the mind is from whenever it was created. The mind is part of the subtle body, which we carry with us from birth to birth. Therefore, a child who has just been born can already tell you what he thinks you should be doing.

In the scriptures, we see a child inside the mother's womb telling the father how to sing the mantras. Because that child chanted in his previous lifetime, he's beginning a new incarnation, ready to come out and say, "O Dad, that was wrong!"

The father says, "What do you mean? I've been doing this for fifty years. And you think it's wrong?"

I've shared this before, and I'll share it again. In my experience of life, I've come to an amazing conclusion. If we want to fix one person in a way that we think he should be fixed, then a hundred of us have to get together to convince that one person why he should do the right thing. But if we want to convince a hundred people to do the wrong thing, it just takes one person, and boom! What a strange equation.

You would think it should be the other way. Doesn't everybody want to be good?

They do want to be good. But it's not always so easy. For example, a child has a conversation with a student because he feels that student is good. Then he goes back to his friends and says, "The advice from the good student is this—"

The friends say, "No way. We can't do that. That doesn't fit our reputation."

Each of us comes to satsaṅg. We learn here how we should be. Then we go out in the world and see what everybody else is doing. We think, "I should be like everybody."

I say, "Why not be the odd one out?" Then all of a sudden you'll find there are many other odd ones, too.

I love Swami Chinmāyānandaji's example: "A car going in the wrong direction simply needs to be steered in the right direction."

Don't stop the car. If you do, you won't be able to steer it in the right direction. To go in the right direction, it must be moving. Think of this in life. When you think things are going the wrong way, don't stop and say, "I'm not going to do anything till I can figure this out."

Baba used to tell a funny story. Mullah Nasruddin sees all his friends go swimming. So he also decides to go swimming. Only he doesn't know how. He goes to the deep end and dives in like everybody else, and he drowns.

His friends pull him out and revive him. When he regains consciousness, he says, "I'm not going back in that pool till I learn how to swim!"

Baba would laugh and say, "He has to go into the shallow end first, stand there, and play with the water a little bit."

In the same way, each one of us has what Kṛṣṇa talks about in the tenth verse: the *buddhi*, the intellect. The Lord says, "I am the intelligence of the intelligent, the splendor of the splendid."

Here in the ashram, we have pictures of great beings who lived throughout the ages. We honor them because they realized that brilliant Self, or Consciousness, that dwells within.

The sages think, "How can I fill this world with bliss?" Of course, the world already is filled with bliss, but how can we share the bliss with other people?

My wish is that as we continue on, each of us is able to create places of satsaṅg. You don't necessarily have to say, "We are going to start at 7:30 and we're going to light a

If you are able to see even a little bit of light, share that light.



## How Can I Be Wiser? (continued)

lamp, and sing a prayer, or do this or that.” When you come together, you have a purpose. You share something. You listen. Sometimes there’s just silence.

In modern society, when people gather for a meal or are sitting together and there’s silence, sometimes they wonder. It’s okay. That silence means everybody is either content or very angry. If they’re content, there’s nothing to say because they feel satisfied. Or they’re so angry they don’t know where to begin.

Of course, if you’re one of the participants at that gathering, you know whether it is contentment or the other. In both cases, it’s wise to be quiet. In contentment, any sound disturbs the serenity that has been created. And in anger, a word is like a matchstick in a tank full of fuel.

Someone who visited us a few days ago said, “Two of my relatives are angry at each other, but neither remembers the reason.” She said, “I tried to get everybody together for a birthday party, but I can’t because there are two sides. They don’t know why they are angry, just that they are angry.”

In a situation like that, each of us has to ask, “What is this anger? What is this frustration? What is this feud about? And really what is it going to do?”

That is where wisdom comes in handy.

Baba used to tell the story of a king who wore a ring on which was inscribed “This too shall pass.”

Today we’re all bundled up here. We’ll meet in June, and it will be the total opposite; we’ll be unbundled. We’ll say, “Open the door! Turn the fans on!” And we’ll be thinking, “Oh gosh, when is fall coming? Beautiful fall...”

So we can remind ourselves that all this passes. As I said, don’t stop. Keep moving. In that moving, adjust. And remember, as Kṛṣṇa says: “I am the liquidity in water. I am the light in the moon and sun. I am the syllable *Oṃ*. I am the sound in ether, the sweet fragrance in earth, the brilliance in fire, the life in all beings, the austerity in the austere.”

The difference between a sage and a non-sage is that the sage sees the brilliance and the beauty in all the movement, in all of that which happens in life. The other only gets worried and worked up.

I remember being young and reading Kabīr’s poetry. He says, “There is nothing to give, there is nothing to take. Simply remain in your Self.”

You think, “How can I do that? I have to take care of this one. I have to take care of that one. What is he going to do? Nothing! But I’m going to do so much!”

My mother always said that you can take the tail of a dog and put it inside a straight pipe. But as soon as you take it out, the tail goes right back to the way it was.

Some individuals are like that. So you think, “How am I going to fix him? How am I going to fix her?”

When you become so-called wise, you think, “Okay, some of that I can let go. Some I’m still going to hang onto.” But when you become really wise, you sit and laugh at yourself, and laugh at everything. You realize it is what it is.

In any case, who you are and what you are is for you to decide. We won’t tell you. You have to think for yourself: “How should I be wiser? How can I be wiser? How can I be different?” These are questions only for yourself and no one else.

**My wish is that as we continue on, each of us is able to create places of satsaṅg.**

## G L O S S A R Y

**Arjuna**a warrior, hero of the *Bhagavad Gītā***Bhagavad Gītā**

Hindu scripture

**Brahman**

the Absolute

**buddhi**

intellect

**Chinmāyānanda, Swami**[1916-1993] wrote commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā***dharma**

righteous law

**Kabīr**

[1440-1518] poet-saint and weaver

**Kṛṣṇa**Hindu deity, Guru of Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā***Maheshwarānanda, Swami**[unknown–1970] author of *Nectar of Discourses***māyā**

illusion

**Om**

primordial sound

**prakṛti**

matter

**puruṣa**

spirit

**rudrākṣa**

tree with seeds that are used as prayer beads

**sanātana**

universal, eternal

**satsaṅg**

in the company of a knower of the Truth (saint)

**Shaivism**

philosophy based on the idea that all is Consciousness

**Upaniṣads**

ancient Hindu scriptures

**Vedānta**

philosophy based on the Vedas

**Yājñavalkya**sage, one of the authors of the *Upaniṣads*