

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 sanātana dharma (universal law). One of the ways Gurudev shares knowledge is by answering seekers’ questions. This issue features questions and answers selected from satsaṅgs held over the past two decades.

Never Miss a Day

QUESTION:

The practices are like trial and error with me sometimes. I’m not focused on being aware and I just space out.

GURUDEV:

Take the help of whatever will remind you to be aware. It could be a picture or a symbol or another object. People keep things in their homes from their family or things that were given to them by their friends. And when they see those things, they are reminded of the ones they love.

People who came to the ashram would see the pictures of great beings on the walls and they would ask Baba, “Why do you have all these pictures around?”

He would say, “When you see their pictures, what happens? You think of what they taught.”

In your home, you can create a space where you sit every day. What I find most important is to have a little altar with a lamp or a candle. You can light incense and do a little ritual, such as chanting *Jyota se Jyota*, and that inspires you to sit for meditation. Then even if you only sit for a few minutes after you chant, you will have a great meditation.

I believe it is far better to have a great five- or ten-minute meditation than to sit for one hour while your mind is wandering and filled with thoughts.

Never Miss a Day (continued)

QUESTION:

When one falls and can't jump back into *japa* or chanting or whatever practice, what is your recommendation for getting back to that practice?

GURUDEV:

That is when you need to have good friends. You can call or talk to them, and they help you come back up.

Sometimes you feel lonely. You feel, "What can I do?" At that time, you can call a good friend. You don't have to say, "I fell down." You just call and talk, and you feel better.

Or you can keep a notebook, a journal. Later, when you feel down, you can look back at what you wrote. Something may strike you. You get the lift you need from what you have written.

When you reach a place of *tamas*, of darkness, you want to have things around that are uplifting. Then everything you look at tells you, "Get up! Get up! Get up!" You are left with no choice but to think, "Okay, everything I look at is telling me to uplift myself."

All of us come to this place at different times in our life. We find different techniques and methods to uplift ourselves. That's why you must be clear about what technique works for you. Sometimes it might mean getting out of the place where you are and going somewhere else altogether.

It is also important to clean your space. Get rid of all that you don't need. Only keep that which is good and uplifting. That may be books, pictures, notes, music.

You may not be aware of the subtle energies in a space. Sometimes energy becomes stagnant, and you must make it

fresh again. If you have had something in the same place for a long time, move it. Clean it. Then reset it. Light lamps. Light incense. Bring in flowers.

The purpose of all this is to create a movement of energy.

A good time to do this is when you are angry. There's a lot of energy in anger that has to be released. When you clean or do other kinds of work, it's released. Instead of getting angry or doing something harmful, you do something productive.

After some hours, you're tired and wonder why you started to do all this. You laugh to yourself when you realize, "Ah, I was angry." You may not even remember why you were angry. But at least you have a clean space.

These are different things we learn to do. We constantly move and shift the energy. We have the ability to rise up. It's just that sometimes we become lazy and say, "It's not possible." So change that mantra and say, "Yes, it's possible."

Everything's okay? ¿Todo bien?

QUESTION:

Lavarji told me to do *saṁdhyā*. But I've never done it. I thought I'd just do what Baba told us to do: the mantra, meditation, kirtan. Am I being stubborn? Is that wrong?

GURUDEV:

Lavarji is a priest. He joins us for a couple of months. Then he goes away. He comes, and he goes. Every morning he chants mantras in addition to those he does here in front of all of us. And when he meets an individual, he tries to share his knowledge with that person. I think there is nothing wrong in listening to what he wants to share, and then

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Never Miss a Day (continued)

asking yourself, “How can I apply this to the teachings my Guru has given me?”

The word *sandhyā* means dawn and dusk. In other words, the junctures of the day. Some practices have to be done at those times.

Baba has given us these practices. The question to ask ourselves is “How much do I really do?”

Some people come to the ashram and say, “Well, I have to go home and rest now.”

I ask them why.

They say, “Here I have to get up early. I do a lot throughout the day. Then I go to bed and wake up early again the next day. At home I can sleep in. At home I can sleep whenever I want.”

These are people who have been on the path for twenty, thirty years. My thought is “Something is wrong somewhere.”

What is important is that you find the time—no matter how busy, no matter how occupied you are—to do your practice. Create a schedule. Don’t just do it when you come to the ashram. Don’t just do it when you come together as a community or as a group of friends.

We have people here who, knowing the *ārati* begins at 6:30 am, get up at 6:25. They have a quick brush, throw on a little water, and show up in the temple. That is not the idea.

The idea is that you get up early in the ashram and do whatever daily practice you have created at home. That is your individual practice. When you come into the temple, you do a group practice with everybody. That’s a bonus, in addition to whatever individual practices you do.

The question to ask yourself is “What have I created as my own personal daily practice?” It could be *Harīsa*, *Om Namaḥ Śivāya*, kirtan, the *Guru Gītā*. Then you ask, “How was I five years ago? How am I today?”

I don’t think we can have an exam for *sādhana*. You can say, “I’m very good.” But if your friends tell you otherwise, then you can’t just say they are wrong in how they judge you. When we feel judged, it is natural to think others shouldn’t judge us. But in this case, you have to ask yourself, “What do I do now? How do I improve? How do I get better? How do I evolve?”

There are a lot of teachings out there. The question is how much of that knowledge do you actually apply on a daily basis in your life? How much do you actually use?

In his books, Baba talks about how a person can be a great scholar. A person can have a lot of knowledge, a lot of information. But that does not necessarily mean he knows it.

The example I give is of a CD or a video. That CD contains a lot of information, but that doesn’t mean the CD player has imbibed it. All of us can read books, can quote from books, but how much do we really know? Do the teachings really resonate within us? That is the question.

Coming together in satsaṅg whenever you can helps make this apparent. When you are in a group of like-minded people, and you each share with and check each other, you see how much you have really understood of all that has been taught and all that you have read.



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God's Wife

QUESTION:

Baba talks about worshipping the Self. I understand he's not talking about our individual selves, but I don't know how to think of the Self in another, bigger way.

GURUDEV:

Think of what you did a couple of years ago at the bagel shop. You happened to be there, and you said, "Here, let *me* pay for those bagels." That's an example of worship, at least in my mind.

In that moment, you had an idea: "This is what I'd like to see happen." And you made it happen. The Self, when you think of it, is present as all the various forms in our lives. That includes the friend whose bagels you offered to pay for.

I read a little story. It's winter, and a rich lady is out walking. She hears a little child talking to God outside a shop. He tells God, "I need a pair of shoes." So she takes him into the shop and buys him some shoes.

At the end of the story, he asks, "Are you God's wife?"

I'm sure she will never forget that moment.

When Baba says to worship the Self, he is referring to the moments all of us have. In each moment, we have an opportunity to worship, to honor, to love, to offer kindness. Of course, we shy away because we think, "What will that person think? What will he feel? Will he take what I give?"

You can't control how someone else is going to feel. But whatever opportunity comes to you, you can go with that.



**The Self is present as
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Draw Wisdom Through Your Love

QUESTION:

I try to listen, but I never quite get some of the lines in the *Guru Gītā*. Is it just a matter of doing it more or is it good to have a lesson on it?

GURUDEV:

If you can, get a CD of Baba chanting the *Guru Gītā* and listen to him. By listening to him, you'll better understand some of the words.

If you still feel after some years that it's difficult, it's good to get some help. English-speaking people usually find places in the chant where the tongue has to be turned. It's not so easy. If you sit with a teacher who knows Sanskrit, he can help you place your tongue in the right way.

In Sanskrit, the placement of the tongue is what makes the sound. The correct placement of the tongue is also what makes the chant have the effect it should have upon our body.

There are four types of sounds we can make. We have labial, dental, palatal, and guttural. It can take, I would say, a minimum of a month to get the tongue placement so you can make the right sound.

QUESTION:

As I remember, Baba changed the melody of the *Guru Gītā* before he took *mahāsamādhi*, but afterwards we went back to the original melody. This isn't a dream of mine, is it?

GURUDEV:

We are all in a dream.

If you sit with somebody who knows the *Guru Gītā*, that helps.

For example, for the last three evenings, we've been singing the *Pādukā Pañcakam*. Many of you have been singing it for years. Verse number 1 says *pādukābhyah*. However, most people just close their eyes and say *pādukābhyam*. But when you look at the words, you find it says *pādukābhyah*.

Then you read the meaning. The first verse says, "I offer salutations to the Guru's sandals."

Sanskrit is quite a complex language. Anybody who's afraid of getting Alzheimer's disease, as we discussed at the retreat, can drink beetroot juice—don't spill it on your white shirt—and study Sanskrit.

I hope I answered your question.

QUESTION:

I'm still not sure about the melody. Has the melody of the *Guru Gītā* gone on for thousands of years or are there different melodies for the same mantras?

GURUDEV:

The Vedas have been chanted the same way. If students study with a knowledgeable teacher for five years minimum, they can learn the correct way to chant the Vedas.

In Sanskrit, the placement of the tongue is what makes the sound.

Draw Wisdom Through Your Love (continued)

Teaching is all about the relationship.

But many students don't want to have to live with a teacher for years to learn the things they want to learn.

For example, people come to us and want to learn the harmonium. They want to learn it in one day. They say, "I already know piano. I already know guitar. I already know everything. So just show me. Give me a sheet with the notes, and I'll figure it out." They figure out what they think they should figure out.

In the *Guru Gītā*, for instance, we have *Kailāsa-śikhare ramye bhakti-sandhāna-nāyakam*. Here, bhakti has a short i. In English, you don't have different letters to indicate short i's and long i's, and short a's and long a's. You just use the same letter for i and a.

Somebody who plays the harmonium for the first time doesn't understand these kinds of differences. And if that person speaks Australian, it's going to be even more different.

If you are really interested in a language or tradition, you have to go to the country it comes from. Find a good teacher and immerse yourself in the language. Whether it is an Indian language or a European language, that's the only way you will get everything.

As you were sharing with me, there was a man who wanted to learn the didgeridoo. He went to where the aboriginal people lived, and he was told, "Yes, you can learn it. But for one year you cannot touch it. Just listen to our music. Listen to us. Feel the music first. Then after a year, you can touch the instrument."

People don't always have that much patience and persistence. Sometimes they come to our hatha yoga course and say, "Okay, you're driving me too hard. Give me fewer hours. Let me have the certificate. I just want to go out and teach."

Then they complain that the teacher was horrible. Of course the teacher will seem horrible because the student avoided a lot of the classes and cut practice time just to get that piece of paper. But to get good at anything takes time, commitment, and dedication.

We tend to think that it's only the path of yoga that requires us to have a loving relationship with a teacher, with the Guru. But I think on any path—whether you want to be a carpenter or musician or anything else—you have to have a good relationship with your teacher. You draw the wisdom out of that teacher through your love and passion for learning.

I don't know how it is today when students learn from online courses. But thinking back, when we went through school, I learned the most from those teachers with whom I had a wonderful relationship and who made the effort to be with us students. It worked both ways. We gave a lot, and they gave a lot. Teaching is all about the relationship.



Winding Down

QUESTION:

I'm so busy that I find it very difficult to turn off the thought process and sleep. I don't want to turn off the world, but I need to rest. And I don't know how to do that.

GURUDEV:

You have to create a timetable for yourself each day: a time to wake up, a time for what you will do in the morning for yourself, a time for the world. And then, when the sun goes down, you decide what winding-down activities you will do until it's time to go to sleep.

It's a matter of preparation—at the beginning of the day, in the middle, and then of course at the end.

People often tell me they can have a cup of tea or coffee and then go to sleep. I don't believe that. I think they are just lying in a supine position, not actually sleeping. I know because when I've done something silly like that, I've lain in bed for three or four or five hours. I may have slept for one hour, but then I woke up and thought, "I didn't really sleep."

You get wise over time. You realize, "Okay, this is the kind of body I have. I'm outgoing and friendly and I like to be engaged in the world." You know that you need to take the last two or three hours of the day to wind down, to do only activities that lead to sleep. The whole evening is geared to that.

Take the last two or three hours of the day to wind down, to do only activities that lead to sleep.

I always tell people there is no need for a television screen in the bedroom. There is no need for your telephone. You leave all of that outside. Then when you come into the bedroom, it's a quiet, peaceful place.

You can have some books. You can have music. Especially on a night when you can't sleep, you can read a particularly dense book. That knocks you out; in five minutes you're gone. Other days, you can read a lighter book.

In the ashram, we are in bed by 10 o'clock, ready to go to sleep. We know we have to get up at 4 or 5 am, and we want six hours of good sleep so we can be productive throughout the day. Our last tea is at 4 o'clock, so no caffeine is served during the six hours before sleep. You eat and you chant and then you go to sleep.

The body, I have found over the years, is the best friend we have. As you train it, so it becomes. But you have to train it. You create a schedule for yourself and you stick with it.

QUESTION:

I went through a stage where if I ate too much before I went to bed, my heart would beat too fast. I think it might have been too much for the energy. Do you think that could have been the case?

Winding Down (continued)

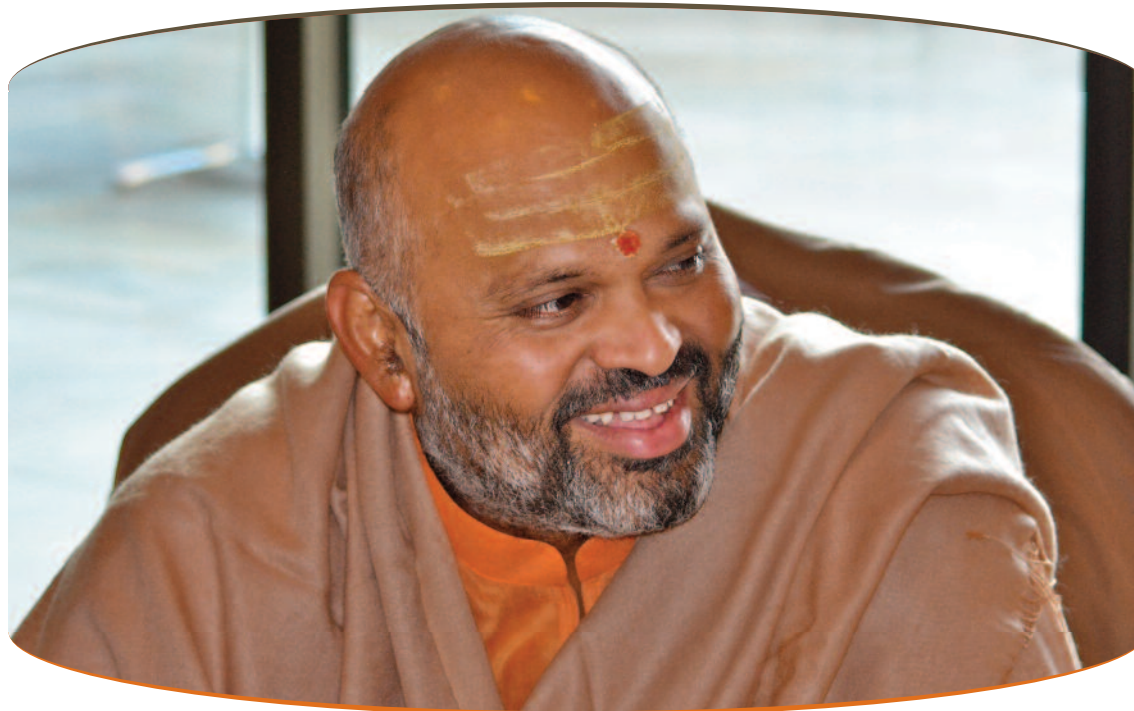
GURUDEV:

That is probably true for all of us. Ayurveda states that we should all eat less as the sun starts to go down. But we don't. We think, "The more I eat, the better sleep I'll get." Then, of course, the body has to work to process that.

I think we should all get wiser and realize that once our noon meal is over, we should start to slow down, because the day is slowing down. That helps the body. It also helps us get up the next morning.



The body is the best friend we have. As you train it, so it becomes.



G L O S S A R Y

ārati

waving of lights to worship a deity

bhakti

devotion

Guru Gītā

commentary on the Guru

Haṁsa

mantra; literally, “I am That”

japa

repetition of a mantra

Jyota se Jyota

chant invoking the Guru’s grace

mahāsamādhī

final merging with the Absolute

Om Namaḥ Śivāya

mantra; literally, “I bow to the divine”

pādukā

sandals

Pādukā Pañcakam

five stanzas on the Guru’s sandals

sāadhanā

spiritual practices

saṁdhyā

dawn and dusk

satsaṅg

in the company of the Truth

tamas

the quality of darkness and inertia

