



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.

What Type of Disciple Are You?

QUESTION:

Is the role of the Guru important or we should try to find our own path?

GURUDEV:

We learn everything from somebody. When we want to learn the path of yoga or of spirituality, we must also learn that from somebody. When we learn by ourselves, we don’t always know if we have understood it right, if we’ve taught ourselves right.

Just as there are many doomsday predictors today, there are thousands of gurus. People who have done a little bit of yoga, a little bit of meditation, a little bit of studying with somebody, or who have lived with the Guru for a period of time decide, “You know what? Nobody else in my town is teaching. I will become the local guru.” It happens.

So a seeker must be discriminating.

The scriptures teach us about the qualities of a true Guru. When we look for a Guru, we must look for these qualities in the Guru. The poet-saint Kabir says, “You filter water before you drink it; know a Guru before you accept him or her.”

What Type of Disciple Are You? (continued)

Over the years, people have had bad experiences with gurus. Baba would say that when you buy a case of apples, there will be some bad apples. So the bad apples can tell you what a good apple is. From a bad experience, you know what kind of experience you do want.

At the same time, you don't always throw out the entire bad apple. You cut out the bad part and eat the good part. In the same way, simply because you have had a bad experience with one guru doesn't mean all experiences you might have will be bad. You just say, "Okay, that was that."

In my experience, whatever type of person an individual is, that is the type of Guru he or she will find.

Some people are what you might call traditional or orthodox or disciplined. They follow a method that is traditionally right. Other people decide they want nothing to do with tradition. They think tradition and discipline have no relevance. They say, "I do whatever I feel like doing. I go to bed whenever I feel like it. I wake up whenever I feel like it. I eat whenever I feel like eating. I bathe whenever I feel like bathing." But I think all of us would agree that discipline is good.

For example, if you are driving on the freeway, and the freeway has three lanes marked to go in a certain direction, you go in that direction. Suppose you say, "Why should I follow the lanes? I'll drive in between two lanes." The police will come along and tell you that's the wrong way.

I don't know about here in Australia, but in America, you can't go too slow or too fast. You have to go within the range of the posted speed.

A fellow recently shared with us that last year when he was coming to the ashram, he was going with the traffic. The

speed limit was sixty-five miles an hour, and he was going seventy-five miles an hour. Everybody was going seventy-five, so he went seventy-five. A cop pulled him over and said, "Do you know why I pulled you over?"

He said, "I don't know."

The cop said, "Well, you were going fast."

He said, "But everybody was going fast."

The cop said, "You shouldn't go over the limit."

He said, "So why then don't you stop everybody?"

The cop said, "I will stop the others, but for now I've stopped you."

So he got a ticket.

This year when he was coming to the ashram, he was going the speed limit. But when he saw a cop, he slowed down. He was in the fast lane. The cop pulled him over. Again he said, "Do you know why I've pulled you over?"

He said, "I don't know."

The cop said, "You were going slow in the fast lane."

He said, "What do you mean? Last year I got a ticket for going fast and moving along with the traffic."

The cop said, "You should move with the traffic. You're impeding the traffic."

He didn't get a ticket, he just got a warning. He thought, "Now I'm confused. I follow the traffic, and I get a ticket. I slow down, and I don't get a ticket but I get a warning."

This is why you need a Guru. He teaches you the tricks of living.

**Whatever type of
disciple you are, that is
the type of Guru you
will find.**

What Type of Disciple Are You? (continued)

A Guru teaches you the tricks of living.

Everything is not always the same. You can't make up one doctrine and say, "This is how it is." As I think we all know, in life you have to constantly adapt. You adapt to the country, you adapt to the situation, you adapt to the person.

Often people who read Baba Muktānanda's question and answer dialogues say that two similar questions were asked, but two different answers were given. They think, "Wow, that's amazing!" But we have to realize that two different people asked the question. Those two people were at different places in their practice, at different stages in their life. So the answer was given according to the person who was asking Baba the question.

Sometimes what we ask is different from what we want to ask. When we have a Guru who knows us and with whom we have a relationship, he will answer according to our needs, rather than according to what we think we want.

It's a complex issue, and the Guru-disciple relationship is a complex relationship. Entering into that relationship is not as simple as just saying, "Okay." A husband-wife relationship is not simple, either. Yet if both of them decide they will work something out, it can be worked out.

Often people come to me and say, "He's like that" or "She's like that."

I say, "Look, no matter where you go, he's going to be like that. She's going to be like that. So you already have this problem, you better just solve it." Over time, you learn where you give, where you fight, where you compromise—all of those things.

It's the same in the Guru-disciple relationship. You learn. You become wise. You know what you can do and you

know what you are not able to do. You learn all these things, and accordingly you understand that relationship.

Baba Muktānanda wrote a book called *The Perfect Relationship*, which talks about the Guru-disciple relationship. The *Kulārṇava Tantra* talks about it. The Buddhists have many books about understanding the Guru-disciple relationship. The entire *Guru Gītā*, which we sing here in the mornings, is about the Guru-disciple relationship. At first, you understand that relationship at one level, and as time goes on, slowly you begin to understand it at different levels.

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Arjuna says to Kṛṣṇa, "You are my friend. You are my teacher. You are my God." We sing verses in the *Guru Gītā* that say, "You are my mother. You are my father. You are my brother. You are my relative. You are my friend. You are everything." I think the whole Guru-disciple relationship can be understood in this way.

When we feel comfortable with the Guru we have chosen, we create that bond, that relationship, that trust.

I think the responsibility lies both ways. Whether it is a yoga school or a church or a temple or an ashram, the people who attend have as much responsibility in making sure the Guru behaves as the Guru has in making sure the disciples follow the path and the practices. That's why I said, "Whatever type of disciple you are, that is the type of Guru you will find."

Sometimes Indian people tell me, "Well, the times have changed. We can't be as strict as we used to be."

Still, I think Gurus always know that disciples will flunk a little bit. They will cheat a little; they will misbehave a little. Therefore, you set the bar high, so they know they must at least try to reach a certain level.

What Type of Disciple Are You? (continued)

When you practice different kinds of sports, the instructor says, “Okay, go a little further.” The yoga teacher tells you, “Stretch a little bit more.” If you are supposed to touch something, you wish the teachers would bring it down so you could grab it. Of course, they know that if they bring it down, you will easily grab it. But if they put it higher, you’ll make that little extra effort to get up there.

When the ancient Gurus wrote their instructions for yogic practices, they knew they needed to tell us to reach a little bit further than we can easily reach.

QUESTION:

I have problems with the idea of the Guru destroying the ego. It took me years of therapy to get to the point of not letting people walk all over me.

GURUDEV:

Many people like to indulge in what they call “burning the ego.”

I’m sure it wasn’t Baba’s intent to sit there and think, “I’m going to get this one’s ego” or “I’m going to crush this one today.”

I don’t believe that a person needs to be trashed or walked all over. In my experience, Baba never did that to me. And I don’t do that to anybody who comes to me, either. That is not what it’s all about.

However, Gurus who are into power plays, or who are not truly what a Guru should be, seem to enjoy that sort of thing. That is how they manipulate and control their disciples and the crowds who come to them.

Some people like that. You’d be amazed how much some people like to be walked all over.

I can say this because I’m in this position. For example, sometimes I tell somebody, “Go and do this.”

The person has the common sense, intelligence, and understanding to go and do it. But then he comes back and says, “Should I do it this way? Or should I do it that way?”

I think, “Just do it.” I mean, if that’s not the right way, I’ll come and tell you, and then we can change it.

In *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, Chögyam Trungpa talks about the steps in this process. First, you go shopping for a Guru, and then you have an affair with the Guru, and third you get angry, and fourth you walk out. And finally you have the realization that the Guru is not just a person or a body; the Guru is in everything in this life.

Any person could say something to you that hurts you or busts your ego. But you won’t think too much about it because you don’t see that person as your Guru. Nevertheless, the whole process takes place in your mind, and either you learn something from it or you don’t. Whereas, when the Guru says something, people make a big deal out of it: “I am going to learn a lesson; therefore, I need to burn.”

In the West especially, the whole concept of the Guru-disciple relationship has been misconstrued. When you compare what you hear about the things various gurus do these days with what happened around Baba or Bhagavān Nityānanda or other saints, you realize these current gurus are not in the same state those great beings were in.



The Guru is not just a person or a body; the Guru is in everything in this life

Fast Yoga

QUESTION:

We're always trying to do things faster in the modern world: we have fast food, so why not fast yoga? So I'm wondering what practices you consider essential, and what are peripheral?

GURUDEV:

On different days one has different moods. On some days, you want to do something short. You feel that you are already in a good space and practicing for thirty to forty-five minutes is fine. Other days, you feel that you want to practice for two hours.

On Wednesday, we were done after two *sūrya namaskārs*. We didn't want to do a third. The next day, we did five, and we could have done ten. But we told the teacher five because we knew that if we told her five, we would have to do eight.

I think there is a little misunderstanding about fast food. Consider what happens with the packet you pick up in the freezer section of the supermarket. You take it home, and then you thaw it out. Or you put it directly in the microwave. It takes thirty seconds and it's done. But think about everything it went through before it ended up in the freezer section of the supermarket. It didn't just go straight from the farm into the frozen packet. It went through a long process first.

In the same way, whatever end product we might become, our process still has to take place. All of us must go through the process.

The iPhone has an app for yoga. I wish that app would do the yoga and I could just watch and get the full benefit. That would be really instant! Unfortunately it's not like that, as you know.



Whatever end product we might become, our process still has to take place.



Nature Takes Care of Itself

QUESTION:

There's a lot of talk about the shift of the earth on its axis and that sort of stuff. I was wondering if you might comment on how we can best handle this period, if it's something we need to handle.

GURUDEV:

First of all, the Indian calendar doesn't end. So according to the Indian calendar, the world doesn't come to an end.

Even for the Mayans—at least this is what the Mexicans tell me—it is just their calendar that ends. In their traditional understanding, the world doesn't come to an end. However, the calendar was made only up to this particular time.

In the Indian tradition, we still have 427,000 years to go. The present age is called Kali Yuga. It is only five thousand and some few hundred years old. The total length of the age is 432,000 years. So time-wise, according to the Indian tradition anyway, we have a long way to go.

Doomsday announcements are a good way to make money. People get scared if they think it's going to happen.

I have a little story.

A bird is drowning in a little pond. It is shouting—however a bird shouts—“The deluge is coming! The deluge is coming!”

Everybody wonders, “What deluge?”

Somebody picks the bird out of the water and puts it on land.

By then, word has spread that this bird is proclaiming that the world will end because the water is rising. So somebody goes up to the bird and says, “Where's the deluge? Where's the end of the world?”

The bird says, “Oh, it's finished now.”

Because it was in the water drowning, it thought the end of the world had come. But now that it is out of the water, it is fine.

Often in our age today, because of the Internet, the media, and the press, people more easily perpetuate these kinds of situations. For example, after you see a movie like *2012*, you have images in your mind that say, “Oh my god, this is what is going to happen!” You forget that the writer or director had those mental images and turned them into a movie in which they were played out. Because they were such vivid images, you now carry them in your mind.

Baba Muktānanda would say that we must always be prepared for the end.

None of us know our moment of death. Therefore, we must always be prepared for the fact that we could die in the next moment.

Often when people hear that so-and-so died, they say, “But we just had lunch yesterday.” Or “I just talked to him on the phone this morning.” As if having had lunch yesterday or

What is the Truth amidst all the so-called truths?

Nature Takes Care of Itself (continued)

talking on the phone means he could not die. He was normal yesterday. Everything was fine. Yet death occurred.

I think each person faces this uncertainty in life. So rather than pick a date and time when they might die, people think the whole world is going to die at this one time.

One thing we can be sure of: whatever has been created will dissolve. And that dissolution occurs in increments. For example, think of the massive tsunami that happened. It started in one area of the earth and slowly spread to others. We learned that the animals could feel it coming, so they moved to higher land. Some animals died, but many lived.

We are so inundated with information these days that often we don't know what we really believe. We have to go through a process of sifting and thinking to become clear within ourselves. What is the Truth amidst all the so-called truths?

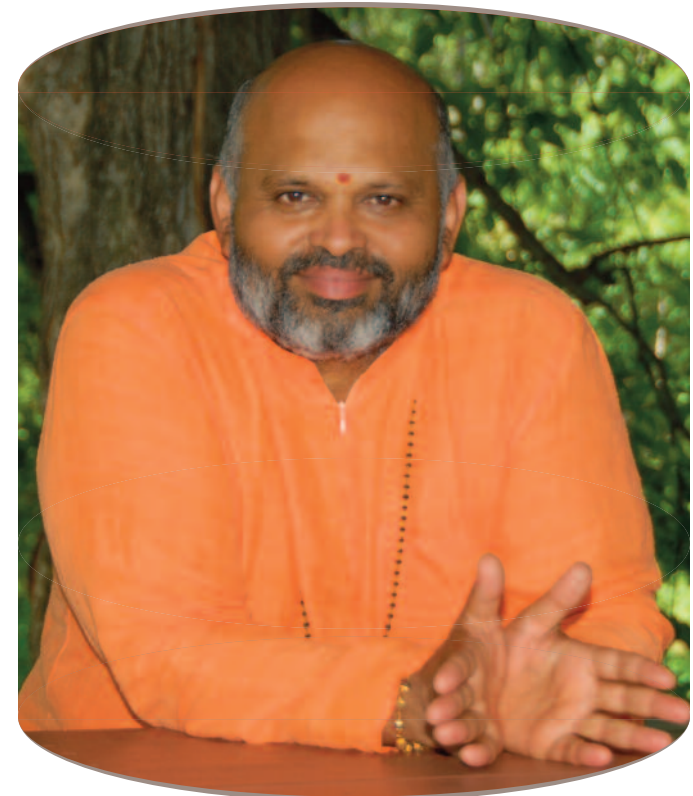
Actually, the end of the world has been predicted many times in the last twenty, thirty years. But because the Mayan calendar is so well known, many people think the world is really going to end this December.

When the computer was going to go from 1999 to 2000, people thought everything was going to collapse. But then we all woke up on January 1, 2000. I remember going to the computer and thinking, "Okay, it's supposed to blow up! Or at least it will have the wrong date." But nothing had happened.

Just as we humans make sure things go well, nature also takes care of itself. Consciousness takes care of itself. It does its best to make sure life continues. That's my understanding of what will happen or should happen. We must do good and be good, and then good is what will be there for us.



**We must do good and
be good, and then good
is what will be there
for us.**



Honor the Divinity Within

QUESTION:

What do those marks on your forehead mean, and do only men have them?

GURUDEV:

A woman can wear them if she wants. If you go to the town of Haridwar, you will see women also have them. In some parts of India, women wear white *bhasma*. But mostly men wear them because women are not willing to put so much on their faces.

What I have is sandalwood paste that is freshly ground every morning. Not everybody uses freshly ground paste; many use ready-made powder.

Often I tell people that just as women put on blush and lipstick and all of that as their makeup, this is our makeup.

You can see in Baba's picture that he is also wearing ash. We have fire ceremonies, and the ash that is left over has been purified. When you wear it, it purifies your body because it comes from the ceremonial fire. It protects you because you sing mantras as you put it on yourself. It's like armor.

Sādhus who live on the riverbanks in India have their own little fires, and they take the ash from that. Instead of soap, they use the ash when they bathe. After they come out of the river, they put ash all over their bodies. That's their clothing for the day.

In India, it is the custom to cremate bodies. So every day when you look at the ash, you are reminded, "One day this is what is going to happen to me." One day you will be ash.

Each morning, we bathe our deities. We anoint the deities with sandalwood, *bhasma*, and different things. Then we also anoint ourselves with whatever is left over after anointing them. The idea is that you honor and worship your deity, and then you honor and worship the deity within you.

We put on three stripes. This reminds us that the world is made of three qualities, or three *guṇas*: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. We must learn to rise above all of them.

The red dot, the *bindu*, reminds us that everything comes from one place, one Consciousness. It's said that the morning sun rays are attracted by the redness. The red is made with turmeric and lime. We make it now in our ashram because a lot of the Indian bindis are filled with chemicals.

In the Indian tradition, women wear the red dot especially. Nowadays they wear the stick-on ones and ones with colorful designs. But the idea is that they wear it to honor that Truth, that divinity, within themselves. Mostly in North India—but in South India now, too—when a girl gets married, her husband puts red powder in the split in her hair. When you see that, you know the girl is married.

These are all different ways of worshiping. When you look at yourself in the mirror and see what you put on that morning, it immediately reminds you of your divinity, of God. If your mind has ventured somewhere else, you say "Oh!" Then you come back to the ceremony, to the feeling, to the mantras.



You honor and worship your deity, and then you honor and worship the deity within you.

G L O S S A R Y

Arjunaa warrior, hero of the *Bhagavad Gītā****Bhagavad Gītā***

Hindu scripture

bhasma

sacred ash

bindu

dot (bindi in Hindi)

guṇa

one of the three qualities of nature

Kabīr

[1440-1518] poet-saint and weaver

kirtan

chanting

KṛṣṇaHindu deity, Guru of Arjuna in the
*Bhagavad Gītā****Kulārṇava Tantra***

Hindu scripture

rajas

the quality of passion

sādhū

a mendicant

satsaṅg

in the company of the Truth

sāttva

the quality of purity

sūrya namaskār

salutations to the sun, hatha yoga posture

tamas

the quality of darkness and inertia

