

# Siddha Marg



सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः

MAY ALL BEINGS BE CONTENT.

*"This prayer that we chant each day at Shanti Mandir is a reminder that we need nothing more than to be content with what is. Instead of desiring more, demanding more, just be content. This is the knowledge, the wisdom."*

*"It is what the Guru does – he makes us content, removing all afflictions, giving us the wisdom, revealing the inner light that lets us see the perfection of everything."*

MAHAMANDESHWAR SWAMI NITYANANDA

## The answer is found where the question arises

*In the teachings he imparts, Mahamandaleshwar Swami Nityananda often discusses the nature of the mind and how we can become free. This first issue of Siddha Marg offers the edited transcript of a talk given by Gurudev at a satsang in Berkeley, California, May 2, 1997. He shares with us the wisdom of the great sage, Vasiṣṭha, the Guru of Lord Rāma.*

**F**or so many, life seems to be a battle, not only with the external situation but with inner conditions and tendencies; a constant struggle with the heart and mind to find lasting peace and contentment.

It has long been this way, not just in these times. It is one reason why the great sage, Vasiṣṭha wrote the incomparable **Yoga Vasiṣṭha** in which he holds a wonderful conversation with Lord Rāma that I wish to share.

Rāma asks Vasiṣṭha various questions about the mind, consciousness and his state of being, and Vasiṣṭha responds by telling Rāma a story, not about the questions being asked but about what it means to be a seeker; how to search for Truth. He tells Rāma:

Early one morning a seeker, out walking, reached the crossroads. A Sufi happened to be seated there. He asked the Sufi if he could sit and learn from him.

"Sure," replied the Sufi replied, "For today, yes."

So the seeker sat and observed what happened as people came to visit the Sufi. Whether they came to ask a question or simply to pay their respects, the Sufi remained the same – he never responded but simply sat in silence.

Towards sunset, a man with a big load on his head came and asked for the right road to take to town.

The Sufi stood up, saying, "I will show you by walking there with you but please, let me carry your load."

The man gave the Sufi his load and the three of them began walking.

When they reached town, the Sufi deposited the load, turned and began walking back to the crossroad with the seeker.

After a while, the seeker said, "It's time for me to return to my family but before I do, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure," replied the Sufi.

"Well," continued the seeker, "all day long, people came to you. Some paid their respects, others asked you questions but you never responded in any way. Then, when this man came who had no apparent interest other than to ask you for the right road into town, not only did you reply, but also you took him there and carried his big load. Can you please explain your actions?"

The Sufi replied, "Of all the people who visited me today he was the only one who was truly interested in receiving the answer to his question. That is why I felt I would be more purposeful in taking care of the situation."



Though we may wonder about life and what we want out of it, somehow we become like the people who visited the Sufi, not sincerely pondering the issue before seeking an answer from someone, not allowing sufficient time for the answer to emerge.

So we get caught in the questioning, in the question itself. We think we must ask a good question, or that we must contemplate good questions so that we can get good answers. But all that really happens is we get caught in the play of our own mind.

Once I was hosted by a former Swami who had become the Minister of a church. Sharing his experience of first meeting Baba in the late seventies, he said he had prepared himself by thinking about what he would say if Baba popped THE question to him – about the meaning of life or any other typically philosophical question one might expect from a saint.

Finally, when he met Baba, he found that his mind was so immersed in probable questions that when Baba asked him his name he could not remember and did not quite understand the question, nor the level on which it was being asked. When Baba asked him where he was from, he remembered his name. When Baba asked him what he did, all that he remembered was where he was from. So it went.

He said that, by the end, he felt utterly foolish. Though all Baba did was ask very simple questions, all he, the seeker, was able to do, was think about the answers that should be given.

I often reflect on great beings who actually dwell in the state of highest consciousness and I observe that they are

**"The mind exists because of ignorance. When knowledge shines, the mind is gone. Because of the existence of ignorance, thought-processes continue to unfold. As soon as the light of consciousness shines – the light of pure being – there is no mind."**

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also most practical, living life simply. They are so present, so real.

We, however, seem to take a different approach. In our state of ignorance we try to live in what we think might be a state of elevated consciousness, contemplating lofty thoughts and questions, thinking that by such means we will attain that elevated state.

So Vasiṣṭha tries to explain to Rāma that if we truly understand the nature of the mind, and go beyond mere questions to the direct experience of its nature, we come to understand consciousness itself. That is the key.

As he says to Rāma, "The mind exists because of ignorance. When knowledge shines, the mind is gone. Because of the existence of ignorance, thought-processes continue to unfold. As soon as the light of consciousness shines – the light of pure being – there is no mind."

Really, the purpose of yoga is not so much to try and trick ourselves, but to trick the mind, so that it may dissolve.

Vasiṣṭha explains this to Rāma by telling him about the great sage, Uddālaka who, as a young boy, decided that attaining supreme wisdom was what he really wanted to do with his life.

But while his aspiration was sincere, he found he had a restless mind. Though his heart was pure, there was a lack of understanding and, most unfortunately, the mind was always thinking. He just could not quieten it.

So Uddālaka says to his mind, as he contemplates, "O mind, I should not even be taking the time to talk with you, to think about you, because I want to dissolve

you. You do not really exist. At this moment, I think you exist, but you really do not exist."

Vedānta teaches that after we study or listen to a teaching, the next step is contemplation or, as Baba would say, imbibing the teaching, experiencing it. That means understanding not only what it means but also how it works in actuality, in our real-life situation.

So, with this understanding, Uddālaka begins reflecting on questions that arise such as, "What is liberation, the foremost amongst the objects to be obtained, upon obtaining which, one becomes free from the cycle of birth and death? When will the mental agitations caused by desire and craving cease to exist? When will I permanently rest in that state of equanimity? When will the mind be free from thoughts of, 'This I have done. That I need to do?'"

The sages remind us that even such sublime thoughts as, 'I am Brahman,' 'I am Consciousness,' or, 'I am the Absolute,' are still merely thoughts. The challenge is to arrive at the place where thoughts no longer exist, having dissolved our self in the actual experience.

Then the mind no longer thinks 'I am,' or, 'I am not,' 'I am Shiva,' or, 'I am not Shiva,' for one has the direct experience of That.

So, sage Uddālaka is asking himself, "When will thoughts like, 'I have to do this,' or, 'This I have done,' cease to exist? When, through that wisdom, will I be able to go across the ocean of worldliness? When will I arrive at the state where I will be able to perceive these diverse activities of people just like a child?"

**When a little child engages directly in life they are wholly present, now – simply being – playing, crying, laughing.**  
**Yoga calls this ‘the state of non-action’ because the *Puruṣa*, the individual soul, is not attached to the action which is merely part of the natural flow. There is no attempt to possess it. The notion ‘I am doing this,’ is absent.**

As we know, when a little child engages directly in life they are wholly present, now; simply being. Afterwards, they do not think, ‘It was good I did that,’ or, ‘I should not have done that.’ The child is simply being – playing, crying, laughing.

Yoga calls this ‘the state of non-action,’ because the *Puruṣa*, the individual soul, is not attached to the action which is merely part of the natural flow. There is no attempt to possess it. The notion ‘I am doing this,’ is absent.

Uddalaka asks, “When will my mind be able to look upon the activities of others, or my own, with the simplicity of a child? When will the illusory division between the objective and the subjective dissolve? When will the mind dissolve so that all appears as one consciousness, no longer differentiating subject from object? When will I be able to behold this concept known as time, without being involved in it? When will I become free of birth and death? When will I live in a cave of the mind, in utter tranquility? When will I remain like a rock, in a state in which there is no movement or thought at all?”

Just as sage Uddälaka began his seeking with these questions we can also begin or continue our seeking with such questions.

We can start to really contemplate the Guru’s teaching that, “You are Consciousness. You are God. You are Truth. God dwells within you as you.”

Still, something within us – the mind, the ego – stops us from directly experiencing this. If we ask ourselves what it is, the very questions of sage Uddälaka will probably appear in our mind.

What is it that stops us from directly experiencing the Divine – from feeling it, from receiving it within and outside our self? Nothing other than the mind and the ego.

The mind stops us by thinking of itself as the subject and of everything else as objects. It sees duality and becomes caught in action. But the sages tell us, “Be in non-action.”

Sometimes people ask, “How can you perform non-action? What is non-action?”

Very simply, when we perform action without doer-ship, without being caught in this play of, ‘I have to do,’ ‘I am doing,’ ‘I will do’ or, ‘Because of me it happens,’ then we find ourselves in the state of non-action. Action is being performed but attachment to it is absent.

Uddälaka continues with his reflection and, in the pause between thoughts, allows himself time to meditate, to ponder. It is not as if questions go on and on without end. In between each question he allows himself time to practice meditation. That is what contemplation is about – taking a teaching or idea and pondering it deeply. Vedānta refers to it as ruminating like a cow; taking the goodness out of the food then chewing it again to extract more.

When Uddälaka asks himself the question, “What is liberation, the foremost of the objects to be obtained?” he is not just finding a question, playing with it for a while and dropping it, then moving on to the next. He is opening up to the question, truly trying to understand it. He wants to experience the answer so he makes the effort to become quiet, developing inner stillness so that real understanding may arise.

**"You may go wherever you like but you will never find supreme peace, except in perfect wisdom. To find that peace, to find that stillness, go inside yourself. Go within."**

When the mind is active all day, it is not so easy to find peace and stillness at the end of the day. For sixteen hours we make a huge effort to fill our mind and then expect to empty it in half an hour.

So the sages ask us to contemplate such questions and to ponder on even more sublime thoughts so that the mind slowly comes to the direct experience within itself, where it dissolves within consciousness and becomes still.

As Uddālaka contemplates these questions he finds his mood changing. Instead of stillness there is agitation.

As we know, sometimes the answer seems to be right there, while at other times it seems so far away. Sometimes the question seems real while at other times it is as if the only reality is the question in the mind. The process can be frustrating.

Experiencing all these emotions, Uddālaka decides to find himself a nice cave in the forest where he can just sit in quietude and continue with his contemplations.

There he asks himself, "O, mind, what do you have to do with this world appearance? Why do you get caught in the play of this world? Become a witness, just watch. Wise men do not seek contact with what is called pleasure. They who abandon the supreme peace that lies within and go in search of outer pleasures abandon a delightful garden and enter a bush of poisonous herbs."

Uddālaka reminds himself, "What you seek – peace, joy and tranquility – is within. Don't allow yourself to wander outside. You may go wherever you like but you will never find supreme peace, except in perfect wisdom. To find that peace, to find that stillness, go inside yourself. Go within."

If we think about all the teachings Baba shared with us, really, what was it that he was always urging us to do? Simply speaking, to go within.

This is what the entire *Yoga Vasistha* is about. It is what all the scriptures are about. They are constantly telling us. "What you seek does not lie outside yourself, it lies within your own being. Look there! Look there!"

Yet, as Uddālaka realizes, his own mind keeps wandering, looking outside, so he tells it, "O my mind, you have all these different expectations. You love to see, touch, smell, taste and hear good things, and are constantly looking outside yourself for satisfaction. But how can you find lasting happiness there? O my mind, you are like a silkworm which builds its own cocoon and traps itself in its own web. In the same way, O my mind, you continuously create thoughts that become like a web in which you trap yourself."

If we wish to come close to the experience of our own true being, the Self, we must be able to stop our mind from being constantly drawn to the outside, training it to resist that inclination by reminding it that what we seek can only be found within.

This is the problem with unhelpful habits, for example, smoking. Sometimes, people ask if smoking is really that bad. Well, the reality is that while we might think that we enjoy smoking, it is really enjoying us. That is where the problem lies.

If someone can sit for days or months without any desire to smoke, without any such thoughts in their mind, then they have one, well, they can probably claim, "I am enjoying it." But it is rarely like that. As we know, when

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people who smoke are on long airplane rides, they invariably have a certain thought on their mind. So ask yourself, “Am I really enjoying, or is it enjoying me? Am I really finding something valuable, or has something else found me? Am I really attaining peace, or am I just torturing myself?”

When the sages ask us to contemplate these questions, they are not asking us to become trapped in the ideas of our own mind. They are instructing us to train our mind, to explain things to our mind.

And if we do so, who understands? It is we who understand. And if we do not, who becomes trapped? It is we who become trapped.

When the mind finally understands, it is we who become free of this whole web it creates, which brings us to the very meaning of sadhana, to the nature of the effort we make on the path.

Uddālaka's sadhana is this process of disentangling himself from his own mind. He asks himself these questions, reflects on them, contemplates them and then meditates on them. Slowly but surely it bears fruit, and he is able to stop himself from being caught in the mind's play, realizing, “This is exactly what I have contemplated, not being trapped in this.”

Sometimes people ask about destiny and freewill, saying, “If everything is destiny, how does freewill play its part?”

Well, while the circumstances of life are brought about by our karma or destiny, our freewill exists in the space where we respond or react to what is happening.

Sadhana bears fruit when we find ourselves in a situation and instead of allowing the mind to react with, “I am glad this happened,” or, “How horrible this is,” or any of its automatic reactions, we say, “I am being freed from this; something is leaving forever.”

When sage Uddālaka engages in contemplation, instead of allowing his mind to automatically react then respond to the reaction, the *cit* or consciousness within him simply says, ‘Stop’ or ‘Let go.’

Though this capacity for non-engagement with the mind happens gradually, each occurrence increases the future probability of it happening until it eventually becomes our natural state of being.

The mind is a very sharp instrument. It only gets dull because we do not use it wisely.

As a result of contemplating, Uddālaka says to himself, “O mind, why do I instruct you thus? As I investigate the truth I discover there is no such thing as the mind. Mind is but the product of ignorance. When ignorance wears out, the mind wears out. Therefore, I renounce you. You will soon disintegrate and I will be aware of pure consciousness, of that Being within myself. O Mind, I am infinite consciousness, ego-less, homogeneous consciousness; you are merely the thoughts of this limited ego.”

So let us ask these questions that Uddālaka asks, or questions that we find relevant to our lives or situation. Allow the mind to ponder them and, as we contemplate them, let us look a little deeper within, for the answer is found there, where the question arises.



भेदों बीच अभेद बताया, आवागमन विमुक्त कराया,  
धन्य हुए हम पाकर धारा ब्रह्मज्ञान निर्झर की ।  
आरती करूँ गुरुवर की ॥

YOU HAVE REVEALED THE ONENESS AMIDST THE DIVERSITY  
AND DELIVERED US FROM TRANSMIGRATION.  
HOW FORTUNATE WE ARE TO HAVE RECEIVED THE CLEAR STREAM  
OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIVINE.  
LET US DO ĀRATĪ FOR THE BEST OF GURUS.