

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 sanātan 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 summer at Shanti Mandir in Walden, New York, in which he continued to offer his commentary on the seventh chapter.

Māyā Disappears Like Smoke

Good morning and welcome to *satsaṅg* here on this Sunday. As we study the seventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, we have come to the subject of *māyā*. For those who study Vedānta, this is a subject that is discussed in detail—"that which is not." It is derived from the Sanskrit roots *mā* (not) and *yā* (that).

In the modern world, however, this subject is not so well liked. When we look at everything that is around us and that we use every day, we ask ourselves, "How can this not be real when it is what I enjoy, what gives me pleasure?"

Yet the sages try to tell us that each and every one of us will leave all of this behind when we leave the body. Of course, we don't accept that we are going to leave this body. We act as if we will live forever.

The sages remind us of two things: the world is illusory, and the world changes constantly. That is what they mean when they say this world is *māyā*, that it is illusory.

That which was yesterday is not today. For example, you might notice that you have a few more gray hairs or a few more wrinkles or that you have fewer hairs—depending on what your issue is at this time in life.

Māyā Disappears Like Smoke (continued)

We could discuss anti-aging creams, hair-growing medicines, or special diets. But we won't because those things aren't so exciting. Instead, we can take the viewpoint of the sage.

Baba used to talk about how we put forth so much effort to beautify ourselves on the outside. Yet all of that is only transitory. It is there for a short period of time, and then it is gone. He reminded us that we need to make the effort and take the time to look at the beauty that exists within each and every one of us.

We had a July 4th picnic here on Thursday. We have done this over the years since we came to Pine Bush, and now we do it here in Walden. Every picnic brings some of the same people, as well as some different people.

It is a wonderful opportunity to see the goodness in each individual who comes. On that day, no one is trying to act spiritual. No one is trying to appear holy. They are just being who they are.

We need to remember the feeling of goodness in each individual that we find on the day of a picnic, or on any day when we simply get together. We want to have that feeling at all times. How do we do that? We can't point to any single technique or trick and say that is the answer.

A sage would say, "You have to see life as a picnic every day."

But most people say, "It's tough to be that relaxed and that at ease."

Nevertheless, the sage would insist that you have to remain relaxed. You can't allow yourself to get uptight. Besides, what do you gain from being uptight, other than feeling stress and tension and all that goes along with that?

When you begin to be aware of the transitory nature of life, and think of māyā in this manner, life is not so upsetting. It's not so disturbing. Don't get caught in how you think life should be; rather, accept change. Welcome change and go along with it.

Just as when the forefathers created the constitution of this country, when the sages wrote down the scriptural truths, they had an idea, a vision. However, as time went along, the individuals who interpreted these truths may not have shared the vastness of the original vision. Their understanding and their commentary reflected their limited vision rather than the expanded vision the sages held when they wrote down these truths.

We have to realize that we need to be in an exalted state to understand what these great beings said.

I often share that when we begin to study the scriptures, we understand them in one way. We study more and we reach a different understanding. We study yet more, having moved along in *sādhana*, and our understanding is different again.

Now, you might think, "Something has changed." The scripture hasn't changed, the Truth hasn't changed. Only the way you see it has changed.

I will tell the story I shared last night at a satsaṅg in Queens. We had just chanted the mantra *Om Namaḥ Śivāya* and chanted *Hare Rāma, Hare Kṛṣṇa*.

As kirtan gets more popular, people often ask, "What is the point of kirtan? Should I do kirtan? Will I see God? Is God listening?" The mind has these questions.

During the time of King Akbar and his minister, Birbal, King Akbar asks this same question to Birbal. He says, "The

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Māyā Disappears Like Smoke (continued)

saints tell us to chant. But what is the point of chanting? Why do you repeat the name again and again?”

Birbal goes to town and finds an elderly woman who is sitting in her home and weaving away. He tells her, “I want you to repeat just one word for the next few days. No matter who comes, no matter what they ask of you, don’t say anything. Simply repeat ‘Akbar.’” He instructs her to repeat Akbar, the name of the king.

The next day, everybody who walks by her place hears this name. It doesn’t take long before the news reaches the king: an elderly woman is weaving away, saying, “Akbar, Akbar, Akbar!”

The king says to his wife, “This is a matter for women. I don’t think I’ll understand her, so it’s better if you go and ask her why she’s repeating my name. I want to know, what does she want from me? What is her problem?”

So the queen goes and asks.

But the woman remembers the instruction from Birbal not to say anything, but to repeat, “Akbar, Akbar, Akbar.”

The queen returns to the king and says, “I couldn’t get anything out of her. She just kept repeating, ‘Akbar, Akbar.’ So I think it is best if you go directly. After all, it is your name she is repeating. Go and see for yourself what she wants.”

The king goes to the elderly woman the next day. When he arrives, of course, he hears her singing, “Akbar, Akbar, Akbar!” He walks up to her and says, “What do you want? Why have you been saying my name all these days?”

Of course, she just keeps repeating, “Akbar, Akbar.”

The king is getting a little bit irritated.

Just then Birbal jumps out from his hiding place. He says, “O king, ask me the question, not her. You want to know why she’s repeating your name? I will tell you.

“You might remember, O king, a few days ago we had a discussion. You asked me, ‘Why should one repeat the name of God? What will be the outcome? Will God come?’ O king, this woman has been repeating your name for only five days. You heard about it, and you sent your queen. Yet the queen could not do anything. You yourself had to come. Because this woman was repeating, ‘Akbar, Akbar, Akbar,’ you had to come all the way here to find out why.”

Birbal says, “O king, in the same way, our sages have taught us to repeat the name of the Lord. As we repeat the name of the Lord, our mind creates this mental practice, and it becomes one with the repetition. Then the Lord will appear to us.”

The sages remind us that the one who chants the name, the chanting that is taking place, and the name itself are not three different things. These are all one.

We have to forget ‘me,’ we have to forget that we are chanting. When that happens, māyā disappears like smoke. It vanishes like a cloud that has blown away.

If you go to a sage and try to talk to him about māyā, the sage will ask, “What is māyā?” In his experience, māyā does not exist. He doesn’t experience anything as illusory. He experiences everything as an expression of divinity, of Truth.

Don’t get caught in how you think life should be; rather, accept change.



Allow the Process to Happen Naturally

In the fourteenth verse of the seventh chapter, Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “This world of māyā is difficult to cross over.” It’s not so easy. Then how does one cross over?

In the next line he says, “Those who hold steadfast and are devoted to the divine can cross over this whole cycle of māyā.”

We had a retreat over Baba’s birthday in May at Magod, and one of the *āchāryas*, who just got his PhD in Sanskrit, said to me, “We often discuss how all of the creatures that God created—birds, trees, animals—know their purpose from birth. They do what they have to do without being taught or told what they should do.” He said, “However, a human needs to be taught what not to do and what to do.”

We harvested about five tons of mangoes at the ashram in Magod a few weeks ago. At first they kept telling me, “No mangoes, no mangoes, no mangoes.” But then as they started to pluck, they couldn’t finish plucking.

On the Sunday that I was to be in Mumbai for satsang, the question arose, “What do we do with all these mangoes?”

Five years ago, we stopped spraying chemical pesticides, and since then we’ve been growing organic and biodynamic mangoes. The first time I tasted those mangoes, in 2009, a year after we stopped spraying chemicals, I was reminded of my time in the ashram with Baba. We children used to take the mangoes and eat them before they were officially harvested. The flavor of those mangoes immediately came to mind in 2009. I realized how over time we’ve lost the flavor nature intended. Humans have changed so many things because of our desires, because of our impatience.

When we had satsang in Mumbai, I encouraged the young people who come regularly to stand out in the street and sell mangoes.

Nature decided to play with us, and it poured and poured. Yet they thought, “This is a challenge. We’re going to go for it!”

Now, you may not know this, but mangoes are plucked unripe. The person knows when to pluck, which is about seven days before the mango would ripen naturally. But because people don’t have patience, most mangoes are dipped in a chemical called calcium carbide. This turns them yellow. What you get in the store is a mango that is not ripe, but that looks beautiful because it is yellow. When you cut it open, it’s horrible. There’s no flavor.

The people of Mumbai are used to these artificially ripened mangoes. But we were going to give them green mangoes and tell them to wait for five to seven days before eating. Somebody said, “People won’t buy these mangoes because they’re going to think they’re not ready.”

I said, “Educate them! Think of how, in thirty seconds—while the light is red and before it turns green—you can educate that person about why your mango is green, why calcium carbide is not good, and why he should wait five to seven days.”

In the end, they sold about 35,000 rupees worth of mangoes, which is a lot.

One man said to them, “My mother loves these mangoes. I only want two. I’ll pay for the whole box, but I’ll only take

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Allow the Process to Happen Naturally (continued)



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two. The rest you can give away, sell, or do whatever you want with them.”

When I heard that story, I thought, “There are wonderful souls.”

We all are wonderful. Yet somehow we have applied calcium carbide, either to our mind or to our heart. We have artificially ripened ourselves. We have told ourselves, “I’m ready, I’m ripe.” But we really aren’t.

The chaos we see in the world today, I feel, is because of this artificial ripening of the human. We want a child to grow up from the moment of birth. We want the child to be responsible. We want the child to be an adult. We don’t allow the process to take place naturally.

You may ask how I know all this. We have sixty-five boys who live with us in Magod at the Śrī Muktānanda Sanskrit Mahāvidyālaya. Twenty more will join us for the upcoming year. As I’ve shared before, they come from all kinds of families. The first few days are difficult for them because it’s an ashram. It’s not just a school. They have to wake up early, they have to be part of the ashram schedule, they have to do *sevā*.

Some last but a few days, call home, and say, “Take me home. I can’t live here.” But those who establish themselves come to the realization, “If I go through this entire twelve-year Shanti Mandir process, I will become a good, useful individual for myself and for society.”

When that shift takes place in their intellect, it is a joy to watch the transformation. It has taken a lot of processing inside their own psyche to realize that “calcium carbide is not going to do anything for me, but if I cook in the pressure cooker of Shanti Mandir over twelve years, and put up with all of these various kinds of minds, I will become richer.”

People often ask me, “What will these boys do when they grow up?”

I say, “We have to look long term. We have to think about how all that we do will continue in the future.”

In the Indian tradition, parents tell their children, “Get married, have children, so our family continues.” Similarly, a swami always tries in his lifetime to prepare somebody who can continue the process of teaching.

My wish and prayer is that our school, which is completing its thirteenth year, creates wonderful scholars—not just people filled with knowledge in their head, but people able to live these teachings. My sincere hope is that these children grow up to be useful to themselves and to society, and that wherever they go, they share the knowledge and understanding they have received.

I tell the boys, “Develop your intellect and mind in such a way that you are not being smart, but you are being wise.” I believe there is a difference. Many of us act smart, but what we actually need is wisdom.

All those who keep coming together in Shanti Mandir, who allow themselves to be inside the pressure cooker for more than just a Sunday morning, know this process takes time. It takes time to accept all of that which they are learning.

One thing I’ve noticed is that when people who do *sādhana* come to *satsang*, they participate and go home feeling content with what has happened. People who don’t do *sādhana*, however, sit on the edge. They are the ones who have so many questions.

It is up to each one to decide how much to take, how much to participate in, how much to do, and what to do. All we can pray and wish for is that each one of us, as we go through this process, becomes free of this veil of *māyā*, of ignorance.



Four Types of Devotees

We say God created māyā, but I think we also create māyā very well.

On a gas stove, we have simmer, low, medium, and high, and we have off. Five positions. We can think that in sādhanā we also have these five positions. Hopefully we are never off. We could be off in our understanding, but not turned off. We can either be simmering, low, medium, or high. On high, you have to be careful because that can burn.

Often around Baba, you would hear, “Oh, I’m burning!” And people would say, “We can see you’re burning!”

I used to cringe when I heard these things. I still cringe. Nobody is burning. It is a choice you make to burn yourself. Turn it down!

Some people think it’s lovely to show how they are burning: “The Guru is working on me!”

The Guru is doing nothing. He is simply chanting, meditating, teaching, doing his sādhanā.

We say God created māyā, but I think we also create māyā very well. But then, we are an offspring of God, so we are bound to do that.

Baba’s message was, “Meditate on your Self, honor your Self, worship your own Self. Your God dwells within you as you.”

He didn’t say, “Meditate on Mukṭānanda.” He didn’t say, “Meditate on Nityānanda.” He didn’t say, “Meditate on this or meditate on that.” He said, “Meditate on your own Self.” We forget that message and we get caught in the māyā of whatever else has been created.

It’s amazing that a sage, Bhagavān Nityānanda, sat in Ganeshpuri from 1935 to 1961 and barely said anything, and from that so much has come about. People all over the world had an experience.

Sāi Baba of Shirdi used to say, “I give people what they want in the hope that one day they will want what I have to give.”

Everybody loves that. They say, “Okay, I’ll keep going back for what I want. And one day I’ll ask him, ‘What do you want to give?’”

Of course, they never ask what he wants to give, but they keep going back.

A man comes to see King Akbar while he is praying. The man is told to sit down outside.

After some time, when the king comes outside, the man is gone. So he tells the guard, “Call him, ask him to come back.”

When the man comes back, the king asks, “Why did you come? Why did you leave?”

He says, “Well, I came because I wanted something. I thought, ‘You are the king, so you will give it to me.’ But as I sat out here, I heard you begging from the Lord. I thought, ‘What can I ask from a beggar? I’m a beggar. You are a beggar.’ So I left!”

Vedānta reminds us that we must become clear about the goal. Where am I going?

Four Types of Devotees (continued)

When you turn your GPS on and tell it to give you directions, it first asks, “Where do you want to go?” You can’t type in “anywhere.” You can’t type in “somewhere.” It asks preferably for a zip code, so it can narrow your destination down to the city and state. Then it asks you for the street name. Once you’ve given it the street name, it asks you for a number. And once you’ve given all that, it asks, “Do you wish to go there now or do you want to save this as a destination for later?”

You may think I’m making this up, but no, try it. That’s of course if you have a GPS that works. If you don’t have a GPS or if it doesn’t work, that’s a different problem.

Within us, nature has planted a GPS. We call it intuition, we call it Self, we call it soul. We call it whatever we want to call it. Usually a question is asked when you wake up each morning: “What do I want to do today? Where do I want to go today?”

For this reason, the sages have prescribed that three times in a day—dawn, midday, and dusk—we do *pūjā*, meditate, take the name of God. It is a time to ask yourself: “Where am I going? What am I going to do? How is this going to happen?”

We can’t just plow through and think, “I’m going to get there!” This is one reason we have trouble in life. We try to plow through without thinking, without discriminating, without pondering.

In verse sixteen of the seventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna, “Four types of people worship me.”

Ārtaḥ is one who is in distress. *Jijñāsuḥ* is one who is seeking, who wants to know why, who, what, where. And the third is *arthārthī*, one who wants something. Especially here, *artha* often is used as wealth, as abundance, as things that will make life go well. And the fourth is *jñānī*, the knower of the Truth.

Swami Maheshwarānandaji shares the story of a young boy named Upamanyu, who is the son of a sage. Sages in the old days lived a simple life in the forest. Their children were taught to also live a simple life. Yet sometimes the mind has a desire.

On this day, Upamanyu wants milk in the middle of the day.

This was before refrigerators. Mothers in those days knew what to eat when. There are morning meals, there are evening meals. It is not the time that Upamanyu’s mother has milk, so she takes some rice flour and water, mixes it, and gives it to him.

He drinks it and he says, “Mother, this is not milk.”

She says, “I don’t have milk at this time.”

He says, “But I know what milk is. Why did you give this to me?”

She says, “Well, then you have to go to Lord Śiva. He can give you anything at any time, whenever you want it.”

Upamanyu leaves his mother, goes to the forest, and sits and meditates.

Śiva appears in front of him in the form of Indra, the Lord of Heaven. He says, “Why do you want Śiva? I can give you so much pleasure. I can give you anything you want.”

The child says, “Thank you very much for coming, but I am focused upon Śiva. Śiva is who I want, and Śiva is the one I am meditating upon.”

Śiva, of course, is pleased at his devotion. But in the form of Indra, he is badmouthing Śiva.

The child listens for a while, hoping Indra will go away. Much as when we sometimes pray that a big, bad dream will go away.

Vedānta reminds us that we must become clear about the goal.

Four Types of Devotees (continued)

But Śiva is there to test him, to make sure he is determined, that he won't be swayed from his goal, that his GPS is clear about his desired destination. In the form of Indra, he continues badmouthing Śiva.

Finally, Upamanyu gets angry and says, "Stop it! Enough! I don't want to hear any more against Śiva. Śiva is the deity I have chosen, Śiva is who I want to worship. You go. I don't want you."

All of a sudden he sees Indra's elephant turn into Nandī, the vehicle of Śiva. He sees Indra become Śiva.

Śiva is pleased with Upamanyu's determination and focus, and blesses him. Upamanyu gets what he wants, which is the experience of Śiva. And he sings the praises of Śiva.

**Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna,
"Four types of people
worship me."**

These kinds of situations happen to each and every one of us. We can so quickly get disturbed and distracted and think, "Really?" The mind goes off into its frenzy.

One day when we were in Miami with Baba, somebody gave him a cowboy hat. He put it on backwards.

Somebody else next to me said, "Tell Baba it's backwards."

I thought, "Oh good! I'll be helpful." So I told Baba. Quietly, of course, because you want to be discreet with the Guru.



Baba kept his hat on backwards. Out loud he said, "I'm a sādhu! What does it matter?"

I became very small in that moment. I couldn't even say, "This other person told me to tell you." I simply was quiet and smiled, okay.

The great sage Bulleh Shah says, "I used to think I knew a lot until I started hanging out with these great beings. Then I realized I actually know nothing."

This is a jñānī. A jñānī simply sits in the experience of his own divine Self. He watches what comes, what goes. He watches who comes, who goes. It doesn't really matter to him.

Therefore, the Lord says, "The jñānī, the knower of the Truth, has become one with the Truth."



G L O S S A R Y

āchārya
teacher

Arjuna
a warrior, hero of the *Bhagavad Gītā*

ārtah
one who is distressed

arthārthī
one who desires

Bhagavad Gītā
Hindu scripture

Hare Rāma, Hare Kṛṣṇa
chant to Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, incarnations of the God Viṣṇu

Indra
Lord of Heaven

jijñāsuḥ
seeker of knowledge

jñānī
knower of the Truth

Kṛṣṇa
Hindu deity, Guru of Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*

māyā
illusion

Nandī
bull that is Śiva's vehicle

Oṃ Namaḥ Śivāya
mantra; literally, "I bow to the divine"

pūjā
worship

sādhanā
spiritual practices

sādhu
a mendicant

satsaṅg
in the company of the Truth

sevā
selfless service to the Guru

Śivā
Hindu deity, the primordial Guru

Vedānta
philosophy based on the Vedas