

# Siddha Marg



## धर्म अर्थ काम मोक्ष

*The philosophy of yoga says we have four ideals in a human life: dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa.*

*We first have to understand dharma: what should I be doing, what sustains me in life? This takes some clarification, wisdom.*

*As we come to understand dharma, we also earn money, or wealth (artha). This isn't just about making money; it's about using our wealth for a higher purpose.*

*If our desires (kāma) sustain goodness and are uplifting, then as we satisfy them, we can be aware that the purpose of our life is liberation (mokṣa), becoming free of the cycle of birth and death.*

MAHĀMANDALESHWAR SWAMI NITYĀNANDA

*The purpose of Siddha Marg is to share the eternal teachings, sanātan dharma. Formal talks, study, conversations, question and answers, kirtan, meditation, and silence are some of the methods used by Gurudev, Mahāmandaleshwar Swami Nityānanda Saraswati, to share his ruminations on and expression of the universal philosophy. This issue features excerpts from talks he gave while in residence at the ashram in Walden, New York, in 2017.*

## Down the Chimney

With great respect and love, you are welcome to the Intensive here this afternoon.

Our topic today is liberation. Over the years, there's been much discussion about what everyone thinks liberation might be. It's easy to have a conceptual idea of liberation.

A young man in his mid-twenties knocks on the door of a renowned Guru and says, "I've come to you because I wish to study the *Vedas*."

The Guru asks him, "Do you know Sanskrit?"

He says no.

"Have you studied any Indian philosophy?"

He says, "No, I haven't, but I just finished my doctoral dissertation at Harvard on Socratic logic. To round off my education, I want to add a little study of the *Vedas*."

The Guru says, "I doubt you're ready to study the *Vedas*, because that is the deepest form of knowledge. Yet if you wish, I'm willing to test you in logic. If you pass, then I will teach you the *Vedas*."

The young man agrees.

So the Guru holds up two fingers and says, "Two men come down a chimney. One comes out with a dirty face, and the other comes out with a clean face. Which one washes his face?"

The young man stares at the Guru and says, "Is this really a test of logic?"

The Guru says yes.

## Down the Chimney (continued)

The fellow says confidently, “The one with the dirty face washes his face.”

The Guru says, “Wrong. The one with the clean face washes his face. Examine the logic. The one with the dirty face looks at the one with the clean face, and the one with the clean face looks at the one with the dirty face.”

The young man says, “Very clever. Please give me another test.”

The Guru holds up two fingers and says, “Two men come down a chimney. One comes out with a clean face, and the other comes out with a dirty face. Which one washes his face?”

The young man says, “We already established that. The one with the clean face washes his face.”

The Guru says, “Wrong. Examine the logic. The one with the dirty face looks at the one with the clean face and thinks, ‘His face is clean.’ The one with the clean face looks at the one with the dirty face and thinks, ‘His face is dirty.’ So the one with the clean face washes his face. And when the one with the dirty face sees the clean one wash his face, he also washes his face. So each one washes his face.”

The young man says, “Well, I didn’t think of that. It’s shocking that I could make an error in logic. Test me again.”

The Guru holds up two fingers and says the same thing: “Two men come down a chimney. One comes out with a clean face, and the other comes out with a dirty face. Which one washes his face?”

The young man says, “Each one washes his face.”

The Guru says, “Wrong. Neither washes his face. Examine the logic. The one with the dirty face looks at the one with the clean face and thinks, ‘His face is clean.’ The one with the clean face looks at the one with the dirty face and thinks, ‘His face is dirty.’ But when the one with the clean

face sees that the one with the dirty face doesn’t wash his face, he also doesn’t wash his face. So neither one washes his face.”

The young man is desperate. He says, “I’m qualified to study the *Vedas*. Just give me one more test.”

So the Guru again holds up two fingers and repeats the same question. “Two men come down the chimney. One comes out with a clean face, and the other comes out with a dirty face. Which one washes his face?”

The young man says, “Neither one washes his face.”

The Guru again says, “Wrong.” He says, “How can two people come down a chimney, and one have a clean face while the other has a dirty face? That means the logic that you’ve been trying to use all this time to figure this out is nonsense. The whole question is based on foolishness. If you spend your whole life trying to answer foolish questions, your answers will be foolish, too.”

May we all have the wisdom to ask and answer only wise questions.

Here is another story. There was a great sage in Maharashtra called Eknāth Mahārāj. His son goes to Varanasi to study, and then comes back after having studied. He tells his father, “You know, you’ve been teaching for a long time. You must be tired. Your audience must also be bored with the same teachings. So let me teach in your place.”

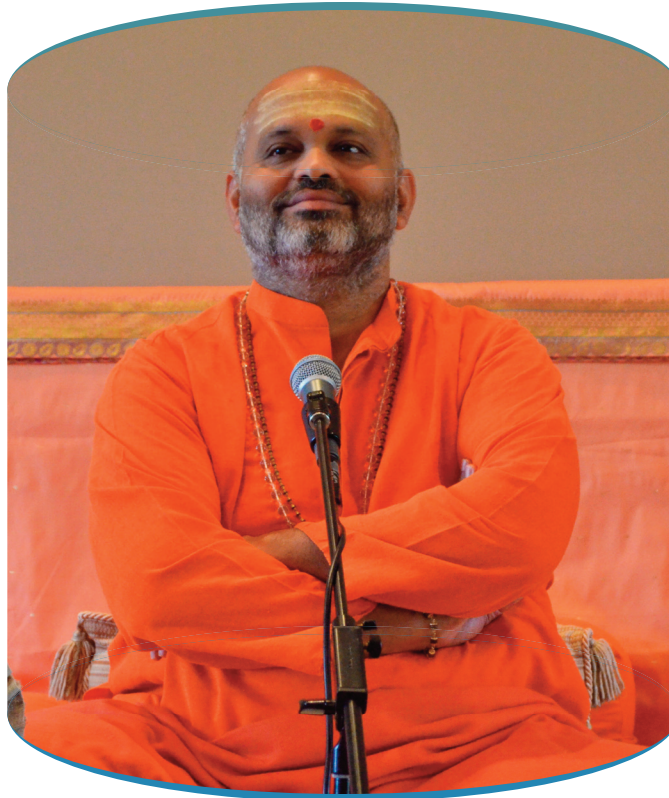
Eknāth says, “Okay.”

So the son speaks to his father’s followers. On the first day, there is a huge crowd, and everybody is excited that the young man has come back from Varanasi to teach. But each day, the crowd grows thinner. Fewer and fewer people come.

Finally Eknāth asks somebody, “Why have people stopped attending?”

May we all have the  
wisdom to ask and  
answer only wise  
questions.

## Down the Chimney (continued)



**“Ahaṁ Brahmāsmi.  
I am the Absolute.”**

The person says, “Your son teaches, ‘*Ahaṁ Brahmāsmi*. I am the Absolute. I am the Truth.’ That we know already. It’s nothing new. We liked the way you expressed the teachings.”

So often, many of us get caught in words. I remember once someone asked Baba about such-and-such a swami who had written a great book. He asked Baba, “Do you think that swami is a *siddha*?”

Baba simply said, “Siddhas don’t have time to do research.”



# Be That Drop of Honey

**The Indian scriptures don't discuss sin. Rather, they speak about the possibility of higher thinking.**

The important thing is to remember that life is a play; it's an illusion. We tend to forget that.

For example, imagine a room. There's a ball in that room, and each of us has a mallet. Each one of us hits the ball with the mallet when it comes to us.

There is also a little opening underneath the door in that room. When it gets to that little opening, the ball goes out.

The ball represents the mind, or the soul, that is living inside the body. The mallet is all of us, with our illusions, who are hitting the ball.

When the final hit throws the ball out of the room—which is like the soul leaving the body—you have to ask yourself: How was it hit? What was the speed at which it went? What was the impact? What was the cause? What were all the various things it took with it?

After it leaves that room, the ball, or soul, finds a new room, which is a new body, and it enters there. It takes with it all our malleable—or we could say mallet-able—impressions. There, the next play starts up again, in a new situation. And you have to ask: How do I deal with the impressions I have brought with me from the first room?

This is the philosophy of karma. The Indian scriptures don't discuss sin. Rather, they speak about the possibility of higher thinking.

The sages tell us that life is like a Ferris wheel. A Ferris wheel goes around; when you ride on it, you go up and then down. I haven't been on one for a long time, but you get on

it and you go up and then you come down, and you go up and you come down. And then you get off, and somebody else gets in your seat. They go up, and they come down.

Sometimes you get excited. Your friend says, "Let's go again!" So you get in a different seat. You go up, you go down.

You get on the Ferris wheel and you get off the Ferris wheel just as you enter the body and you leave the body.

The world keeps going around and around and around. Some days it feels like you're up, you are elevated, you are in an altered state of consciousness.

Baba often said the biggest mistake we can make is to think, "I am incapable." This is what happens to many of us: we don't even begin something we want to do because we think, "I don't know if I'll make it."

If we go back to the story I began with about logic, you could say, "Well, if that's the case, then why do I even want to study?"

If you don't study, then you won't know whatever you want to know. If you don't make the effort, your study won't bear fruit.

The philosophy of Shaivism talks about knowledge of two kinds. One is knowledge you gain through studying with a Guru, a teacher; the second involves taking that knowledge into life and applying it.

You can't just live life without knowledge. And you can't just have knowledge without bringing it into your life.



## Be That Drop of Honey (continued)

Swami Chinmāyānanda said it takes three thousand lifetimes to even begin the study of scriptures. I say, “Okay, forget about the three thousand lifetimes. At least this lifetime, now that you are living, you can think about what you are doing.”

Ask yourself, “What will I do to make my life peaceful and blissful?”

The example I often use is that there is a drop of honey on the counter. No text message has been sent out, yet all the flies, ants, and bees come to that drop of honey.

Think about it. I ask myself this often: how does this network of life work such that a drop of sugar on the counter—just a granule of sugar, a single drop of honey—is enough to attract the flies, the ants, the bees, and whatever else? Somehow they know to come there, sometimes even through a screened-in window. How do they make it inside?

When I read the scriptures, I think, “Okay. Each one of us should try to be that drop of honey on the counter.” I don’t mean literally on a physical kitchen counter, but on the counter of life. How can each of us be so that people are naturally drawn to us?

The poet-saint Chokhamela tells us that he is hugging Lord Viṭṭhal. He describes hundreds of thousands of people in the crowd who are singing the name of God. They are all lost in chanting and dancing. And in their midst Chokhamela says he is embracing God.

If you’re a normal, logical person standing outside that crowd and looking at them, they may seem like mad men and women. But they’re mad with love, mad with feeling. They are like a million drops of honey. At least, we can say there are that many drops of honey around the earth.

I ask myself, “Okay, what are the qualities that transform pollen into honey?”

There’s a process. And if we are all pollen, then we have to ask, “How do I change myself? What is the method?”

Of course, you can go to different people who love this process of making honey. We know an elderly gentleman in Pine Bush who has six or eight hives. You can spend an hour with him—that’s a minimum—and he will explain how the bees come, how the bees go, how he sends them away, what he does, and how they live in the winter.

This process is happening in nature. But then you think, “Now I have to translate this to myself. I am the pollen. I am the bee. I am everything.” And you realize there’s nothing on the outside that’s going to convert you from being “non-honey” into being honey. You have to do it yourself.

Somehow, the way human beings are designed, we always look outside. We don’t realize we need to look within.

Therefore, when Swami Chinmāyānanda says three thousand lifetimes, it’s not actually so much time. The way I see it is that it is like going to a big, thick tree trunk, and sawing it. Suppose you only have a blunt saw, or maybe only a blunt knife. Therefore, you are sitting there for three thousand lifetimes or six thousand lifetimes, or maybe even six hundred thousand lifetimes. Your knife is so blunt that it’s not actually cutting. You imagine that it’s cutting, but it’s not really cutting.

Of course, you could get a sharp knife and still be sitting there and still have a lot of arrogance, and a lot of all the stuff that comes with that.



**You can’t just live life  
without knowledge.  
And you can’t just have  
knowledge without  
bringing it into your life.**

# The Veil of Illusion

Five things tie us down:  
desire, anger, greed,  
delusion, and envy.

During the summer, I talked about the story of Gulliver. He washed up onto the island, and he was knocked unconscious. As he's lying there, the Lilliputians, the little pygmy people, are running around and tying this big man down.

When he becomes conscious, Gulliver realizes he has been tied down. So he tells the little people, "If you let me loose, I'll help you win the island next door."

The scriptures tell us five things tie us down: desire, anger, greed, delusion, and envy.

You could say there are sub-ropes, too. For example, anger can lead to frustration. Anger can lead to upset.

The delusion we live in is thinking that these ropes are no longer tying us up, and therefore we are free. Yet the most important rope remains: the veil of illusion rope remains. There is a big difference between thinking, "I am free," and actually being free.

Baba Muktānanda used to say that a normal ego is better than a spiritual ego because at least a normal ego is identifiable. It knows it is tied up. But a spiritual person thinks, "I am spiritual. I've gotten rid of almost all the ropes. I only have this veil of illusion left, so I am better, I am higher, I am greater."

We think it is easy to get rid of these ropes, but really it's not so easy.

At the same time, it's not a process to see as upsetting. As I travel, I meet people around the world who think *sādhana*

is painful, upsetting, something to fear. For me, it's about joy. It's about experiencing the joy that dwells within you. Yes, it may feel painful to let go, to get rid of something. But the ultimate feeling of becoming free is joyful.

The *Upaniṣads* give a list of things that happen to a person who rises above or goes beyond all the things of this world. They say, "He treats others with respect, regardless of how others treat him."

In other words, you are nice to others not because they are nice but because you are.

And the *Upaniṣads* say about such a person, "When confronted by an angry person, he does not return anger but instead replies with soft and kind words." Such a person is "comfortable with a begging bowl at the foot of a tree, in tattered robes, whether in a village or the city. He doesn't care for all the religious markings. He is humble and high-spirited. He has a clear and steady mind. He is straight-forward, compassionate, patient, indifferent, and courageous."

I often use the example of a clear glass of water. Water on its own has no color. Generally, water doesn't have any taste. So, that's how a human being should be, too. He should be clear.

Yet we go through all of these emotions, and these emotions color us. Then people say, "He's always angry." "She always wants something." "He's always envious." "She is greedy."

The last thing that leaves us is the veil of illusion. The other

## The Veil of Illusion (continued)

ropes fall away one by one, yet the veil of illusion stays with us for a long time.

I'll end with a story. A man sees what appears to be a rug flowing down the river. He wants to have it, so he jumps into the water.

A friend is standing on the bank. As he watches the man being carried away, he calls out, "Come back!"

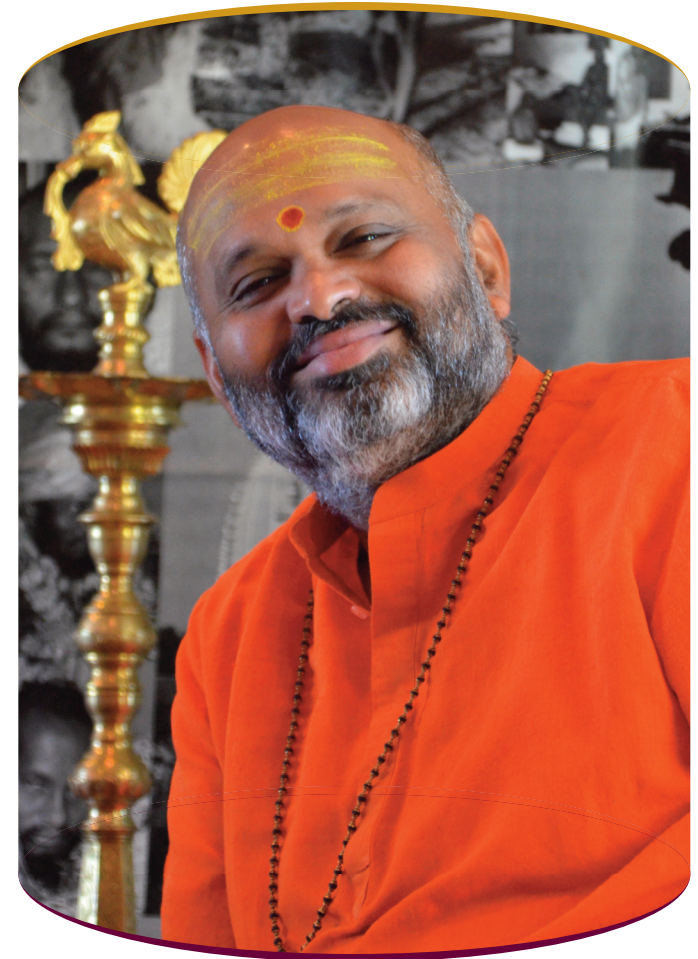
The man says, "It's not a rug. It's a bear!"

The friend says, "Then let go."

The man says, "I have, but it has not."

This happens to many of us in the river of life. Somehow we get caught. We want to let go, and we even imagine that we have let go, but it carries us. We think we have conquered it, yet it surfaces again and again. Only when we finally shake it off, can we say, "That's it; done," and be free.

**The other ropes fall away one by one, yet the veil of illusion stays with us for a long time.**



## G L O S S A R Y

*Ahaṁ Brahmāsmi*

mantra meaning “I am the Absolute”

**Chinmāyānanda, Swami**

[1916–1993], wrote commentary on the

*Bhagavad Gītā*

**Chokhamela**

[14th c.] poet-saint of Maharashtra

**Eknāth Mahārāj**

[1528-1609] saint

**sāḍhanā**

spiritual practices

**Shaivism**

philosophy based on the idea that all is

Consciousness

**siddha**

perfected master

*Upaniṣads*

ancient Hindu scriptures

**Vedas**

ancient Hindu scriptures

**Viṭṭhal**

form of Lord Viṣṇu

