



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.”

MAHAMANDALESHWAR SWAMI NITYĀNANDA

Being fully present, balanced and self-aware

In December 2001, during Mahāmandaleshwar Swami Nityānanda’s visit to Mexico City to lead Mexico’s inaugural Intensive, he shared with everyone the wisdom of the sages, emphasizing the need not just to add spiritual practices to whatever else we are doing but to make changes to any counterproductive behaviors that are part of our lifestyle.

The only thing to worry about in life is that the mind never slips from its focus on God, on truth. If the mind remains focused on that, everything is there. The challenge of life, of *sādhana*, is simple and clear – just keep the focus.

How do we keep the presence of grace strong and continuous? By being alert, on guard lest the mind slip.

I notice that many people are trying to capture and hold everything by taking photos or by taping. Unfortunately, one of the weaknesses of technology is that it makes us dependent.

When our ancestors went to school, there was no technology. Everything had to be memorized. The mind had to be sharp, present, clear. Today we have become so dependent on the externals that we are no longer independent.

Don’t get me wrong. I am also a great technophile. If I weren’t on this path doing Baba’s work, I probably would be promoting technology. But God and Guru had other plans.

The divinity from which all is created lies within. Don't make your life totally dependent on external things. Realize that the knowledge you seek exists within and use that understanding to connect with the truth.

What I want to make very clear is the need to realize that the divinity from which all is created lies within.

Baba Muktañanda often shared a story of the time he visited his Guru, Bhagavān Nityānanda, carrying a book. Baba loved to study spiritual works. One day he visited his Guru carrying one of the scriptures with him. Bhagavān noticed the book and said, "Muktañanda, the book did not make the mind, the mind made the book."

The message is simple: don't make your life totally dependent on external things. Realize that the knowledge you seek exists within and use that understanding to connect with the truth.

What usually happens, however, is that our mind becomes so externally dependent that we can no longer rely upon what it grasps.

External dependence doesn't take away fear, it actually encourages it. Through the process of meditation, we are able to clear away all doubt and fear and become courageous and strong.

Whenever we want to remember something, we think, "First let me write it down, let me make a note of it." That means we don't have any faith that our own mind might remember what has been said.

So, to strengthen our mind, we meditate. But to meditate, the mind also must be very strong. If it is weak, our meditations are not good. The most important tool in meditation is the mind. When that very necessary tool is not strong, how can we sit and meditate?

I am reminded of a story of our time with Baba in Miami, Florida, in 1980. I was about seventeen years old and

had been studying the Bhagavad Gītā under the tutelage of Amma, a long-time devotee. Those who have studied the Bhagavad Gītā will be aware that it has seven hundred verses divided into eighteen chapters.

One day I had to accompany someone who wanted to ask Baba a question, translating for him. When the matter was finished, Baba told the person he could go. I also began to depart, but Baba called me back.

At such moments, the mind thinks, "What mistake have I made today that has been reported to him?" Some people thought they would become Baba's favorite disciple by reporting things to him.

Anyway, Baba looked at me and said, "Memorize the Bhagavad Gītā."

"Okay," I replied, and then thought, "How on earth does one memorize seven hundred verses?"

He then added, "Each evening after dinner, just sit down and chant the whole Bhagavad Gītā. It will only take about one and a half hours."

"Okay," I said.

So I began. With Baba, you could not wait around for the right day or moment. If he gave instructions, you acted on them immediately, that very day.

In earlier times, before Baba taught everyone to chant the Guru Gītā, we used to chant the Bhagavad Gītā with him. So the words were familiar.

That first evening I sat and chanted the Gītā. It took about two hours and forty minutes.

This is what the Guru means when he talks about being focused, one-pointed: when the mind is clear of everything else, you are just there, fully present in the moment.

When I saw Baba the next day, he asked, “Did you chant last night?”

“Yes, Baba,” I responded.

“How long did it take?”

“Two hours and forty minutes.”

“When I used to chant the Bhagavad Gītā,” he said, “it only took one and a half hours.”

“Okay,” I said.

The next evening I tried to chant faster. So it went, evening after evening. But no matter how hard I tried, the fastest I could chant the Gītā was two hours and twenty minutes.

For quite a few days Baba did not say anything. Then one day he asked, “How long is it taking?”

“Two hours twenty minutes,” I replied.

“Okay,” he said. “You know what? Chant nine chapters one evening and the other nine chapters the next evening.”

I did, and the time came down to an hour and a half.

This continued for a few months. Each night after dinner I would sit and chant. Sometimes I thought, “How will I know that I have learned anything? It’s easy just to sit with a book and chant and not really imbibe the knowledge.”

One evening Baba was giving his *satsaṅg* talk. He often quoted from the Gītā. Suddenly, in the middle of the talk, he looked at me and said, “That verse from the Bhagavad Gītā.”

For a moment I went blank. “Which of the seven hundred verses?” But because I had been following his talk closely, instinctively the mind jumped to the relevant Sanskrit verse and I repeated it aloud. It was one of the hardest verses in the Bhagavad Gītā and I surprised myself as I mouthed it.

Baba was very pleased. He smiled. “Very good,” he said and continued his talk.

Later I thought about that moment and realized that this is what the Guru means when he talks about being focused, one-pointed: when the mind is clear of everything else, you are just there, fully present in the moment.

When Baba gave a command, he never allowed us the opportunity to ask him, “What do you mean exactly?” or “Do you mean this or that?” He always wanted us to be right there with him, in thought and action.

If in the midst of whatever he was doing, Baba suddenly turned to you and said, “Go and get that one,” out of the thousand people in the ashram, you had to know, without asking him, which ‘that one’ he meant.

Of course, when the mind is cluttered with junk, we are not able to be present, not able to be right there in the moment, connected to the truth within.

Through these various ways, Baba taught us focus, meditation, concentration. When you were with him, you really had to be there, you had to be present. The mind had to be aware of exactly what was happening in that space.

And this is what meditation does. It heightens our awareness, including our sensory awareness, and makes

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the mind strong. Whatever action we are performing, we remain fully aware of everything else happening around us.

When the mind is totally focused, we find ourselves truly present, connected to that consciousness within. And, of course, that consciousness is connected to all other beings, within whom it also resides.

That is why it is said, “If my mind is focused on God, the universe is with me.”

For much of our life, many of us feel unsure about our purpose, as if we have no clear direction. When we start on the spiritual path, the very first thing is to become clear about our destination. I’m not talking about a material destination, but about the real reason we are on the spiritual path.

Sometimes people on the path ask themselves, “What does God want me to do?” But as I have indicated many times, more often than not when people don’t want to make a decision, they try to shift responsibility to God.

However, the sages ask, “Doesn’t divinity exist within you?”

When that is firmly grasped, then it is that voice, that inner truth, that speaks to us.

The mind is a most unusual and unique instrument.

Baba often told the story of a Guru who one day shared with his disciples the teaching that God exists in all.

One of the disciples who had never heard this truth before became very excited. When he left the Guru’s ashram that day, he ran down the road proclaiming, “Everything is God! Everything is God! Everything is God!”

As he passed through the local village, the villagers called out, saying, “Don’t go that way, the king’s elephant has gone crazy and might hurt you.”

But the disciple just laughed, saying, “Everything is God!” And he continued on his way.

Unfortunately, when he came to the elephant, it lifted him up with its trunk and threw him violently to one side.

The villagers were aware of what could happen, and it wasn’t long before they found him in the bushes, unconscious. They gently picked him up and carried him back to the ashram.

The Guru quickly revived him. When the disciple opened his eyes, his first sight was of the Guru, to whom he exclaimed with an agitated voice, “You lied to us today. You told us everything is God. That is why I wasn’t worried about the elephant. I was thinking, ‘He is God, I am God, all is God.’ And look what happened. The elephant nearly killed me.”

The Guru asked, “But what about the villagers who told you not to go in the direction of the elephant? Did you not see God in them?”

This is the kind of mistake we can make when we lack discrimination. Ironically, we get caught in a concept and do not understand how to live it, how to put it into practice.

People think, “Okay, I am going to meditate, but I am still going to be who I am and do all the crazy things I do, because meditation will take care of it.”

But it’s not like that. As we meditate, what we actually want to do is slowly bring about a shift in who we are and what we do – in our thinking, actions, and lifestyle.

We start meditating, but we don't alter the irregular activities, unhealthy habits, evil company, and wicked thoughts. After some time we think, "Meditation is not working. Meditation is not what it is about." We don't bother to contemplate what changes we have actually made to our whole lifestyle.

Sage Vasiṣṭha teaches about physical illness and mental disorders, saying they are the cause of much sorrow. In the Yoga Vasiṣṭha, he notes that their avoidance is happiness and their cessation is liberation. Sometimes they arise together, at other times they cause each other or follow each other. He says that both physical maladies and psychic disturbances caused by psychological conditions are rooted in ignorance and wickedness and end when knowledge of truth is attained.

It is ignorance that gives rise to the absence of self-control. One is constantly assailed by likes and dislikes, by thoughts such as "I want this, I have to get that." All this intensifies delusion or ignorance, which then gives rise to psychic disturbances.

Our mind has thoughts, and we become absorbed in them. We get what we want and are happy or we do not get what we want and are unhappy, causing disturbances within.

Vasiṣṭha says absence of mental restraint leads to improper living and eating habits. Untimely and irregular activities, unhealthy habits, evil company, wicked thoughts – all of this causes a weakening of the *nāḍīs*, the subtle nerves. Everything within us becomes cluttered and clogged.

Of course, the constant cause of what is in our life now is our karmas, the fruits of prior actions from this life or previous lives. So we begin to meditate.

But that's about the only change we make. We start meditating, but we don't alter the irregular activities, unhealthy habits, evil company, and wicked thoughts. After some time we think, "Meditation is not working. Meditation is not what it is about." We don't bother to

contemplate what changes we have actually made to our whole lifestyle.

When we visit a place such as this, everyone's first impression is, "How beautiful! Such a lovely natural environment, such an attractive space." Coming here, the mind immediately feels at peace.

Now imagine if we came here to live and found the walls painted black, the windows dirty, cobwebs on the ceiling, and clutter and filth everywhere. We would immediately start cleaning. And if this large room were empty, we would go to the shop and buy, buy, buy.

When most people see a room this size, they think, "Wow, I can put sofas here, tables and chairs there, and a big television in the middle. I can get, get, get."

If our outside world is a mess, imagine what it's like inside. Instead of the obstacles of sofas, tables, and televisions, there are the blocks of negative thoughts and emotions – anger, jealousy, hatred, lust, enmity, and so on; all the feelings we know so well.

As sage Vasiṣṭha says, they cause a weakening of our system. The balance of the five-fold elements – earth, water, fire, air, and ether – is upset. We become ill.

Physical ailments are twofold: ordinary and serious. The ordinary arise from day-to-day causes. The serious are congenital.

The ordinary can be corrected day to day. Remedial measures can be taken. We can change our mental attitude, and by such means, fix the not-so-serious ailments. However, serious ailments and mental disorders don't cease until self-knowledge is attained.

When the mind becomes pure, there is great joy in the heart. The life force or the inner energy – the *prāṇa śakti* – moves properly through the body. Food is digested easily, nurturing the body perfectly, and all disease ceases.

The mind holds onto a concept, and until real knowledge arises and gives one the experience of truth, that concept cannot be eradicated.

Vedānta illustrates this dilemma with the story of someone walking in the forest in the dark who suddenly sees a snake-like shape on the ground and immediately thinks, “Oh my God, my worst fears, a snake.”

Images are conjured: “It’s moving. It will bite me. I’ll die from the poison.” Before you know it, you’re already dead.

But if we happen to have a flashlight and turn it on, we discover a length of rope on the ground. So we laugh, thinking, “How foolish is my mind to imagine that a piece of rope is a snake, filling me with such fear of death.”

This is what we call a congenital psychic disturbance. The mind, in a state of ignorance, constantly conjures up images of what might happen. It is only the awakening of inner knowledge – knowledge of the true Self – that destroys such ignorance.

How does the ascent of that knowledge destroy darkness? The sages give a very simple example. Before the sun rises, there is darkness. But as it rises, darkness disappears and there is only light. It is as simple as that. There is darkness. The sun rises. The darkness has gone.

In the same way, because of ignorance, there is darkness. We grope about blindly. But when the light of knowledge arises, then instantly the darkness of ignorance disappears.

So sage Vasiṣṭha says, “Physical ailments that are not psychosomatic may be dealt with using medication, prayer, and right action. However, only Self-knowledge ends all physical and psychic disturbances.”

Vasiṣṭha then suggests studying medical books because, along with the tradition of knowledge of the Self, we also have Ayurveda, the traditional path of medicine and healing that deals with the body and the mind.

Vasiṣṭha continues, “When there is mental confusion, one does not perceive one’s path clearly and sets off in the wrong direction. The life force is agitated by this confusion and energy flows haphazardly. As a result, some parts of the body become clogged and others are depleted of energy.”

I’m sure most of you have been to a chiropractor or someone in the alternative health field. If it’s a chiropractor, he looks at our neck and tells us that an adjustment is necessary, that there is a need for realignment. In the same way, the sages advise us to do Haṭha Yoga so that we constantly align the body, allowing the energy to always move freely.

What happens when the inside becomes clogged? Disturbance of the metabolism, and improper functioning of the digestive system. Food that is eaten can easily turn into poison. The natural movement of the food through the body and functions of the organs are arrested. Ailments appear.

However, when the mind becomes pure, there is great joy in the heart. The life force or the inner energy – the *prāṇa śakti* – moves properly through the body. Food is digested easily, nurturing the body perfectly, and all disease ceases.

Vasiṣṭha continues on to explain how the *kuṇḍalīni śakti*, the inner spiritual energy, rises as the body is purified, until it reaches the sahasrāra, that most subtle region,

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near the crown of the head. At that moment one realizes the universal truth, divinity.

The point I want to make is that the path is not just about sitting each day for an hour or two of meditation. Along with meditation, there must be shifts and changes in habits, thoughts, and actions.

Therefore, the sages advise a healthy, balanced diet.

As Baba used to say, a good diet means food full of prāṇa, fresh and wholesome, in season – not 'dead' food but something that retains its life force. When we eat such pure food, good thoughts are generated, full of vitality and life. But when we ingest dead food, we have dead thoughts, thoughts associated with unhealthy habits, evil company, and wicked deeds.

In one of his books, Baba wrote about a noble king who ruled well. As a result, his subjects were very happy. But he had a son who was cruel, who liked to wreak havoc, hurt, and kill.

One day, one of his subjects said to the king, "I don't understand how it is that you, a great king, have such a wicked son."

The king replied, "He is born of my semen."

"What do you mean?" asked the loyal subject.

"When my wife conceived him, I was at war," said the king. "I was battling our enemies. At that time my only thoughts were about killing, about expanding the kingdom. That was when my wife conceived this son. I cannot blame him. My thought forms entered him and that is what he became."

Baba would comment, "Such is the power of thought."

We think, "I just want to have a baby and get it over with." But do we think of what our actions will create?

I often read about women saying they want to have a child but do not care for a husband. Fine! But what about the child? The woman may not want a husband, but perhaps the yet-to-be-born child wants a father.

Imagine saying to your body, "Look, I'm right-handed so I do not need the left half of my body." That wouldn't work.

If we have pain on the right-hand side of the body and go to an acupuncturist, he might treat the pain by inserting a needle in the left-hand side of the body.

If we say, "No, the pain is on the other side, put the needle there," he is likely to reply, "Don't worry, I know what I am doing. This will clear the pain on the other side."

When the pain suddenly dissipates, we realize the extent to which the parts of the body are interconnected.

Now, if we have a situational problem in our life and think, "Okay, I'll meditate for two hours and that should resolve it," how is meditating going to clear up such a problem? When we open our eyes, we are back in the world again and the problem is still there, right in front of us.

And so we think, "Okay, I'll do *japa*" (repetition of the mantra). But when we finish *japa*, the problem is still standing in front of us, and we wonder why it has not disappeared.

Yoga teaches us not just the formal practices, such as meditation and japa, but how to live life in a wholesome, pure, good way, so that all is in balance. Remember, it's not simply about adding meditation to life, it's about fixing the various parts of our life.

Meanwhile, if we have a family member who doesn't believe in meditation or anything like it, he might be getting angry, furious that we have been sitting for two hours wasting our time instead of solving the problem.

Of course, the practices of meditation and japa have their rightful place. But we must be practical, aware, discriminating.

Now, someone might object, saying, "But japa is repetition of God's name. It is thinking about God and can be done anywhere."

True. Then why not take our lunch to the bathroom and eat it at the same time? How efficient! We could accomplish two things at once – make more space by getting rid of some and fill it up again by putting in more.

Yoga teaches us not just the formal practices, such as meditation and japa, but how to live life in a wholesome, pure, good way, so that all is in balance. Remember, it's not simply about adding meditation to life, it's about fixing the various parts of our life.

Our sages teach us to do japa with a *mālā*, using the thumb and the middle finger of the right hand to move the beads.

But imagine if we were to drive like that. We cannot. There would be an accident. In the same way, when we come to yoga, to spiritual life, why do we not follow the rules? Why do we proclaim that everything is consciousness and continue to do whatever we want?

If we crash a car and the police come, we don't tell them, "Everything is consciousness. It was his destiny that I had to crash into him today." Instead we go along with the rules of the game.

I don't know about Mexican police, but in the United States police write out a ticket and you have to go to court and pay the fine. But somehow, when it comes to our practices, our *sādhana*, we make up our own rules.

Often people interested in New Age things say to me, "I don't need to follow these ancient rules. I am a modern-day person and can do as I wish. I will use my own intelligence to create my own rules as I go along. Why should I do what Lord Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna way back when?"

But when we board an airplane, do we go and sit in seat 26B when we have been allocated seat 14B? No, we sit in 14B. If we want to sit in 26B, we must wait until everyone has boarded, then see if it is empty. If not, we remain in 14B.

Whenever I tell people, "You know, self-discipline is good," I'm continually amazed by the reaction. People protest, saying, "No, it's limiting."

In that case, why not build a bathroom in the middle of our house, with walls of clear glass, and take a shower there? Why limit ourselves to being locked away in a little corner room with non-transparent walls, when we can be unlimited? Whatever comforts the ego will always be supported by the mind's rationalizations.

But yoga is not about supporting the games of the mind and ego. It's about diligently monitoring our self, from the time we wake up until the time we go to sleep, and even during sleep. It's about ever-present awareness of our inner world, our outer actions, and the overall situation. It is about being truly self-aware.





यत्सत्येन जगत्सत्यं यत्प्रकाशेन भाति तत् ।
यदानन्देन नन्दन्ति तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ॥

SALUTATIONS TO ŚRI GURU,
BY WHOSE REALITY THE WORLD IS REAL,
BY WHOSE LIGHT IT IS ILLUMINED,
AND BY WHOSE JOY PEOPLE ARE JOYOUS.

– ŚRI GURU GĪTĀ, VERSE 36