

Siddha Marg



LOOK TO GOD RESIDING IN THE SKY OF THE HEART.

BHAGAVAN NITYĀNANDA*

Yoga has always declared that the nonphysical space of the heart is where Consciousness dwells. Science is now coming to see this, too.

So much is going on in our hearts and minds. So much stuff has been stored within us over lifetimes. For this reason, the heart has to be cleansed, purified.

How do we purify the heart? Through all the practices we do: chanting, meditating, study, contemplation.

MAHĀMANDALESHWAR SWAMI NITYĀNANDA

* *The Sky of the Heart*, Rudra Press, 1996, p. 212.

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). One of the ways Gurudev shares knowledge is by answering seekers' questions. This issue features questions and answers selected from satsaings held over the past two decades.

Don't Let Your Mind Trick You

QUESTION:

Sometimes I'm not sure if I'm getting what I should be out of your talks and the chants and the other practices. Is there a way to maximize what I'm getting?

GURUDEV:

It's when you get caught in "I should be doing this to get the maximum out of it" that problems sometimes arise. It is better to allow yourself to sit and participate without saying, "I should feel this or not feel this" or "I should think this or not think this."

Baba used to tell a very simple story about a seeker who went to a Guru and said, "Give me initiation."

The Guru agreed and said, "Okay, here is a *mantra*. Now meditate." And he added, "But never think of a monkey when you meditate."

The seeker thought, "Why? I never think of monkeys. Why would I think of a monkey when I meditate?"

So he went back home and he sat. And the first thing that came to mind was a monkey. He changed directions. He changed places. He changed postures. But all he could do was think of a monkey.

He ran back to the Guru and said, “I never thought of a monkey before. But now that you’ve given me initiation, I can’t think of the mantra. I can only think of a monkey!”

Just by doing it and by participating fully, you will get better at it. The value of what you are getting will start to grow. But if you tell yourself, “I want to make sure that in this twenty-four hours we spend together I get the maximum benefit out of everything,” then your own mind will trick you. When you leave for home, you’ll be asking yourself, “Did I get the maximum benefit or didn’t I?” You’ll start evaluating. Whereas if you just come, participate, and then return home, you’ll be happy.

You see my point? Just enjoy. However much of yourself is able to participate, allow it to participate. It might be the whole thing, it might be ninety percent, it might be fifty percent. Whatever amount is fine.



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A Golden Vessel

We need to prepare and purify the physical body, and also the other bodies within it, to avoid the pitfalls of too much meditation.

QUESTION:

Could you speak about the hazards of meditating too many hours a day?

GURUDEV:

I've always warned against over meditating. One thinks, "I should just meditate." But Baba didn't prescribe that. He said too much meditation consumes the fluids of the body. The scriptures prescribe many other things – study, repetition of the mantra, *japa* – to complement meditation.

If you look at Baba's own schedule during his *sāadhanā*, you'll find he had an early morning meditation. Then he had a break. Then he had a mid-morning meditation. Then he had a break. Then he had a late afternoon meditation. Then he had a break. Then he had an evening meditation, around sunset. Then he had a break. And again he had one more meditation before going to sleep. So it wasn't constant, non-stop meditation. His meditation was spread out during the day, along with study, *japa*, walking, and some interactions with people.

The main thing the sages say is that the mind and the body aren't strong enough for so much meditation. We generate a lot of energy within ourselves as we meditate.

The analogy often used is that of tiger's milk and a golden vessel. Tiger's milk is said to be such that one needs a gold vessel to carry it. Whenever I mention this, I tell people, "If you're not sure, you can always get some tiger's milk and see."

The idea is that the body is a vessel. We've done so much with it that it takes a long time to cleanse and purify it so when we meditate, it can digest and hold the energy of meditation. We need to prepare and purify the physical body, and also the other bodies within it, to avoid the pitfalls of too much meditation.

QUESTION:

I remember reading that during his *sāadhanā*, Baba meditated twelve to fourteen hours a day for nine years. How does that compare?

GURUDEV:

You have to realize that he had done twenty-five years of seeking and searching before he got to those nine years.

Baba also talked about eating accordingly to make sure the body is prepared. Cashews, ghee, pistachios, and raisins are some of the foods that give us strength for meditation. We use these in our kitchen.

Around Baba, when somebody had a strong reaction in meditation, a *kriyā*, they would stuff a banana into that person's mouth. If one person couldn't easily handle it, two people would hold down the person having the *kriyā*. Sometimes it was just a little person, but even two big people had trouble holding that little person down. That's how much energy the person would have.

I don't think we fully understand *śakti*. I mean, we talk about it. We say what we think it is. But when *śakti* is raw, as we saw sometimes around Baba, we realize the power it contains.

I think, as the sages advise, that it's better not to risk doing too much meditation. Because all that energy can short-circuit within the body. We've seen that over the years. A person "loses it" because his system can't handle it.

You ask why? A simple example is taking something made to work in the United States on 110 volts of electricity. If you put 440 volts through it, that's four times what it can handle. It's going to blow.

I think those of us who enjoy – or have learned to enjoy – silence can create silence, at least in our own spaces. We learn to turn off things that make noise. Because everything makes noise, including ourselves. The whole practice of meditation is about learning to enjoy silence.

We play music. And at some point we want even the music to stop. Last night after the chant, there was a stillness. We have to learn to enjoy that stillness. If we're used to noise, then we're dying to make noise. We have to hold ourselves back and say, "Be still. Be quiet."

Focus is a great exercise. Over the years, we have to teach ourselves how to focus. Baba's experience was about focus. He put forth great effort to get to that place.

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QUESTION:

In our world full of noise and confusion, how do I focus?

GURUDEV:

Our world is noisy for sure. Yesterday as we were walking here, after we'd spent a few minutes in the cottage, I said, "It's so quiet."



The Light Shines Through

The purer you become within, the brighter your face is. That brightness is not because of anything other than the light shining within you.

QUESTION:

Baba talked a lot about the Blue Pearl. Could you explain more about it?

GURUDEV:

The Blue Pearl was what Baba experienced in his own meditation as the final goal. He used to say his experience of the Self within each one of us was a Blue Pearl.

The sages talk about the subtle bodies, or energy bodies, within us as light. Tukārām Mahārāj said he experienced red, white, black, yellow, and different colors. Depending on a person's inner state, you will see different colors emanate from him or her. Modern people call it an aura.

Baba used to say that whenever he saw somebody approaching him, he first saw light. He didn't see the individual, all he saw was light. For him, that was the light of the Self, which he called the Blue Pearl.

He said that when he was going through his process of meditation, he sometimes saw the Blue Pearl coming and going. As he became established in his experience of meditation, that blue light became steady.

I don't think you can read about the Blue Pearl in too many places other than Baba's books. That's why I say that it was his experience. Of course, after he wrote about it, many people talked about it.

QUESTION:

So is the Blue Pearl something we can achieve?

GURUDEV:

You can get to a place where you see the light of Consciousness. How you see it may be the same as someone else, or it may be different.

Within this physical body are the subtle body, causal body, and supra-causal body. They are all bodies of light, or energy bodies. When you don't meditate, you become denser. You put more covering over the light bodies. When you begin to meditate, you cleanse and purify the various bodies. Then the light shines through.

Therefore, it's often said our face is a reflection of how we are inside. The purer you become within, the brighter your face is. That brightness is not because of anything other than the light shining within you. And for that you have to do living yoga.



The Mantra Redeems

Use the mantra *Haṁsa* as a means of concentration, of focus. Use *Om Namaḥ Śivāya* as a reminder.

QUESTION:

I have been practicing *Om Namaḥ Śivāya*, and today you mentioned *Haṁsa*. I started to do it, but I was battling with it. Could you please put some light on that?

GURUDEV:

You're not the only one. So thank you for that. Everybody has this issue when they've done *Om Namaḥ Śivāya*, or some mantra, for a period of time. They wonder, "How do I do *Haṁsa* when my mind automatically goes to *Om Namaḥ Śivāya*?"

As you sit for meditation every day, you begin to become aware of the full breathing process. We breathe, but it's very rare that we find ourselves taking a full, deep breath, down to the abdomen, and a full exhalation up from the abdomen.

First allow yourself to become aware of the inhalation and exhalation. When you find you are able to inhale and exhale from the abdomen, then along with that breath, do *Haṁ* and *Sa*.

The philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism explains that this is the sound the breath makes as it goes in and goes out. Up to a certain point, you repeat *Haṁ* and *Sa*. Then you find that you become quiet. Sometimes you will hear yourself doing the mantra. But you aren't actually doing it. It is happening.

Then the question arises, "What do I do with *Om Namaḥ Śivāya*?"

As you go about your daily activities, without being aware of your breathing, without trying to go into meditation, repeat *Om Namaḥ Śivāya*.

You have to remind yourself in some way or another that all of this is a reflection of Consciousness. How can you do that? You can't say, "Reflection, reflection, reflection, reflection, reflection, reflection." So you say *Om Namaḥ Śivāya*. And that reminds you it's a reflection. It reminds you to smile. It reminds you to laugh. It reminds you to simply sit back and enjoy.

You use the mantra *Haṁsa* as a means of concentration, of focus. And you use *Om Namaḥ Śivāya* as a reminder.

QUESTION:

If a person repeats a mantra, either consciously or unconsciously, with the wrong pronunciation, can that person kill somebody else or himself because of the power of the mantra?

GURUDEV:

You won't kill yourself with the power of mantra. Mantra is that which redeems through contemplation. When you do it with a positive understanding, it helps you and uplifts you.

There are people who use mantras to do bad things. Yet if at the same time you repeat a mantra that protects you, you won't be hurt by that other person. I've always found that the person who chooses the positive route wins.



All This Is a Reflection

QUESTION:

Can you speak about ways of staying connected to this living yoga at times when the mind needs to be focused on practical, worldly things?

GURUDEV:

The philosophy of Shaivism talks about a practice called *ābhāsavāda*. It means seeing everything as a reflection.

Let's begin with the simple theory of reflection. There is a mirror. Objects are reflected in the mirror. Now, both are real – the reflection and the objects. Anything that happens to the objects affects those objects. Yet nothing happens to the mirror. The mirror is independent, right?

What you are asking me is “How should I perceive this big reflection?”

You have to apply the same concept as you go into the world. All you see there is nothing but a reflection of universal Consciousness. Not every object is aware of the fact that it is a reflection. Moreover, there is no mirror there between you and the reflection to remind you that all this is a reflection. You have to know.

If you go out into the world with the understanding that all of this is a reflection of that one Consciousness, your whole attitude in dealing with everybody changes.

It is okay to mentally say, “Everything is a reflection.” But there is a reality you have to deal with. You can't drive behind a car and say, “It's a reflection, so I won't bump into it.” That's not true. You're going to bump into it. But

at the same time, remember it's simply a reflection.

I brought Baba's book with me. And I just looked at the title: *Reflections of the Self*.

He wants us to understand how long a reflection is good for. As long as you stand in front of a mirror, there is a reflection. The moment you move away from the mirror, there is no reflection. As long as the body is here, there is a reflection. The moment the body passes, there is no more reflection. It's gone.

Often I ask myself, “How do sages who live in the experience of Self at all times deal with this world?”

They are aware that everything is Consciousness, yet they have to deal with us. I think they don't allow themselves to move away from the experience of oneness, of bigness, of awareness, or whatever you want to call it. They remain expanded. We contract. Our contraction comes about because of fear, because of limitedness.

So the question you want to ask is “How do I get rid of this limitedness?” Because, as Baba said, a human being has the potential, the power, to be anything. We can be good, we can be bad. We can do good, we can do bad. We limit ourselves by immediately telling ourselves, “No, it's not possible. I can't do that.”

I think when you are dealing with the world, rather than think something can't be done, you have to look at it the other way. You have to think of what is possible, what can be done. The only question is how.

It's all about managing people's perceptions. Think of what the media does. It manages your perception. All of a sudden, a million people all over the world have read

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the same news. And a million people have the same thought: “Oh my God!”

I think about what Baba did in his time. He got so many people to chant. He got so many people to meditate. Historically, there have been places, such as Pandharpūr and Ālandi, where great crowds of people gather to chant. Okay, it's hot, it's dusty, it's dirty. It's all of that. But if you can rise above that, there is the collective experience.

In your own workplace, see if you can create an environment of awareness, of Consciousness. Many business places, companies, and factories in India gather their workers to chant. They do *ārati*. Recently, a man brought a group of his co-workers here so they could experience something other than what they normally experience. One lady liked it, and she brought her husband and parents.

Because what we do here is so different, I think we get scared. We wonder, “What should I tell people?”

When I go to a grocery store, sometimes there's a child who has the courage to say, “Mommy, what's a man doing in a skirt?”

She goes, “Shh!”

The child continues to watch me, and as we meet in different aisles, continues to wonder, “What is that man doing in a skirt?”

All I can do is smile because I know the mother is afraid I might convert the child into who I am. Of course, I have a dress that makes me obvious. But you can bring awareness into your workplace in other ways. You have to realize that, just as I was ignorant some years ago, my

colleagues, friends, and family might be like that now.

It's not about coming in and saying, “Okay, everything is God! Everything is Consciousness.” That will immediately put them off.

You have to think of ways to share this teaching. Let them know you're trying to live a better life. You're trying to act consciously. You're trying to watch your thoughts. Many people don't even know they can be aware of their thoughts. Some think, “I have thoughts. What can I do about it?” However, we can have better thoughts.

So the question arises: “How do I improve the quality of my thoughts?”

Baba said, “Read good books. Listen to good music. Keep good company.” And then? Well, start with that. Of course, they'll ask, “What should I read?” So be ready with what you want to give them to read.

All of these are props. They begin the conversation. Of course, for you they serve as reminders that this is a reflection. Because it is possible in the moment to forget.

All of us have to find ways to remember the teachings. Baba used to do this. Brahmānanda Mahārāji used to do this. He always carried a pocket version of the *Bhagavad Gītā* or another scripture. That way, when you're sitting idly, instead of having wasteful thoughts, you can open the book.

I remember when we were with Mahārāji in 1995, in Calcutta. Early in the morning, we all gathered on the lawn for breakfast. He was seated on his chair, reading his small *Bhagavad Gītā*. I thought, “He's been a monk for fifty or sixty years. He's got the whole thing backwards

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and forwards. He knows all the verses. He knows everything.” So I said, “Let’s ask him why he is reading this at 8 o’clock in the morning.” Normally one would want to read the newspaper, to know the latest gossip. So we asked him.

He said, “I am Arjuna. And this is Kṛṣṇa speaking to me.”

Over the sixty years, somewhere along the line, he realized Arjuna is not somebody else. The teachings aren’t just for preaching or sharing, they are what we have to learn. We have to take away the distinction that this is a conversation between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa on the battlefield. No, this is my battlefield. I am Arjuna. And Kṛṣṇa is speaking to me. These teachings are for me.

When we read Baba’s books, we think, “Wow, Baba said such great things.” Then we read *Reflections of the Self* and see that he says, “Wash your face and hands. Whatever food you receive, whether tasty or dry, eat it only after purifying your mind. Don’t be tantalized by delicious food. If you are given dry food, don’t be angry.”¹

You might say, “Well, of course, I’ll wash my face and hands.” But what you really have to remember is “If you are given dry food, don’t be angry.”

Sometimes when you’re on an airplane, the flight attendant serves you something you can’t eat. In that moment, you have to realize this is all the person can do. Simply because you would be able to do more, don’t think he or she is able to do more. That reflection can only do that much. This is the capacity of that reflection. We want to force our reflection upon that reflection. It’s not possible.

To me, this is what living yoga is about. It’s about living the teachings, the principles, constantly. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes and think, “What would I have done?”

Once in a while, a flight attendant who finds out we’re vegetarians will be creative and say, “I’ll be back.” Someone else will just say, “Did you order it beforehand?” and won’t get us anything. Usually we don’t want anything anyway because we have come prepared. But it’s fun to see how this person will behave.

Whenever somebody is not nice, or is mean, it’s a good lesson. We can remind ourselves, “This is how I don’t want to be when I am in a situation like this.” Of course, that means we also have to say to ourselves, “How *do* I want to be?”

In all our dealings in the world, we simply have to ask, “How would I like to be dealt with?” And then deal with others accordingly.

QUESTION:

If you are confused, how do you know you’re making the right decision?

GURUDEV:

I have a question. When I ask myself the question, an answer comes. The answer comes softly, gently. I listen to that answer. I am aware that my question has been answered.

But suppose instead of following that very first response, I go and get a few opinions. A dozen people give me a

1. Swami Muktananda, *Reflections of the Self*, verse 369, SYDA Foundation, 1980, p. 97.

dozen opinions. Then I am confused! I may have a dozen opinions, but I've forgotten that first response.

We as seekers have to learn to trust that first response. It comes from a place of truth, of Consciousness.

That doesn't mean everything will work out perfectly as we go along. But we will arrive at our destination. The reason those obstacles come is because Consciousness wants to see how determined we are to get to our goal. Will a distraction take us away from our goal or will we keep going no matter what happens?

If I am coming from Mexico City to here, I can get lost. There could be a traffic jam. The road could be closed. Last time we came, we had four flat tires. Every time we had to look for a place to repair the tire. Now, I can say, "God didn't really want me to go there." Or I can say, "God wanted to see how much I really wanted to get there."

I can say to myself, "These are just little things happening on the way. They're going to happen to someone, so today it's me." And I can keep going.

This is what focus teaches us. We don't get distracted by all these things.

Nor do we have to dig too deep and say, "What is God trying to teach me here?"

I ran into a pothole, so I had a flat tire. Or I didn't do my homework to find out the road was being repaired. We become wise.

The question is "What is my goal?" That is what I have to become clear about. When I am clear about my destination, I have to stay focused and get there. That is the clarity each one of us must maintain.



We as seekers have to learn to trust that first response. It comes from a place of truth, of Consciousness.

G L O S S A R Y

ābhāsavāda

the practice of seeing everything as a reflection of Consciousness

ārati

waving of lights to worship a deity

Arjuna

a warrior, hero of the *Bhagavad Gītā*

Bhagavad Gītā

Hindu scripture

dharma

righteous law

Hamṣa

mantra; literally, “I am That”

japa

repetition of a mantra

Kashmir Shaivism

philosophy based on the idea that all is Consciousness

kriyā

mental or physical purification, generated by the awakened kuṇḍalinī

Kṛṣṇa

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

kuṇḍalinī

spiritual energy dormant within all humans, can be awakened by the Guru

mantra

sacred words or syllables, literally “that which protects the mind”

Oṃ Namaḥ Śivāya

mantra; literally, “I bow to the divine within”

sādhanā

spiritual practices

śakti

the creative energy of the universe

sanātan

universal, eternal

satsaṅg

in the company of a knower of the Truth (saint)

Tukārām Mahārāj

[1608-1650] poet saint