



## गुरुपायः

*We can try to understand the scriptures, we can even get a degree from the university, but the problem remains: how to achieve the direct experience of Truth? So the Śiva Sūtras say, gurur upāyaḥ, “the Guru is the means.”*

*We take refuge at the feet of the Sadguru, and through that we attain true knowledge. This tradition has come down through the ages. God Himself was the first Guru, who transmitted this knowledge. The tradition of Sadgurus has continued, and so also has the tradition of disciples.*

MAHĀMANDALESHWAR SWAMI NITYĀNANDA

*The purpose of Siddha Marg is to share the eternal teachings, sanātan dharma. Formal talks, study, conversations, questions 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 a talk Gurudev gave at an Intensive in Walden, in November 2019.*

## Discipline and Dedication

With great respect and love, I welcome everyone to the Intensive here this morning. How many of you know what our topic is today? *Sādhaka, sādhanā, sādhya*. It’s a personal favorite of mine because if you are here, you are the topic today. Each one of us is the topic.

A *sādhaka* is a seeker. *Sādhanā* is the practice that the seeker does. And *sādhya* refers to the possibilities, to that which can be attained.

As I think about this, the first word that comes to mind is *discipline*. Often as I travel, people ask, “Can I do a little bit of everything?”

I tell them, “Go and ask your wife, ‘Can I do a little bit of ...?’ She will have a very clear answer for that.”

Similarly, when people come to the Guru, they ask, “Can I do a little bit of you, and a little bit of this, a little bit of that?” The question that arises is basically about commitment: “How committed am I to the path, to the practices?”

The next word that comes to mind is *dedication*. This is an internal process. As a *sādhaka*, we must follow discipline, we must have dedication. Society today encourages us to think, “Hey! I’m a free individual. Why should I listen to you? Who are you to tell me what I should do?” But our scriptures tell us differently.

I’ll share a story. A bunch of frogs live in a pond. At one end of the pond, there is a pole.

## Discipline and Dedication (continued)

So the frogs get together and decide to climb the pole. They all have opinions about how to do it. And they all give it a try. They go up, and they fall down. They go up, and they fall down. Only one frog makes it to the top.

The question is, why did that frog make it to the top?

“He listened to no one,” the storyteller says. “He made it to the top because he did not listen to anyone.”

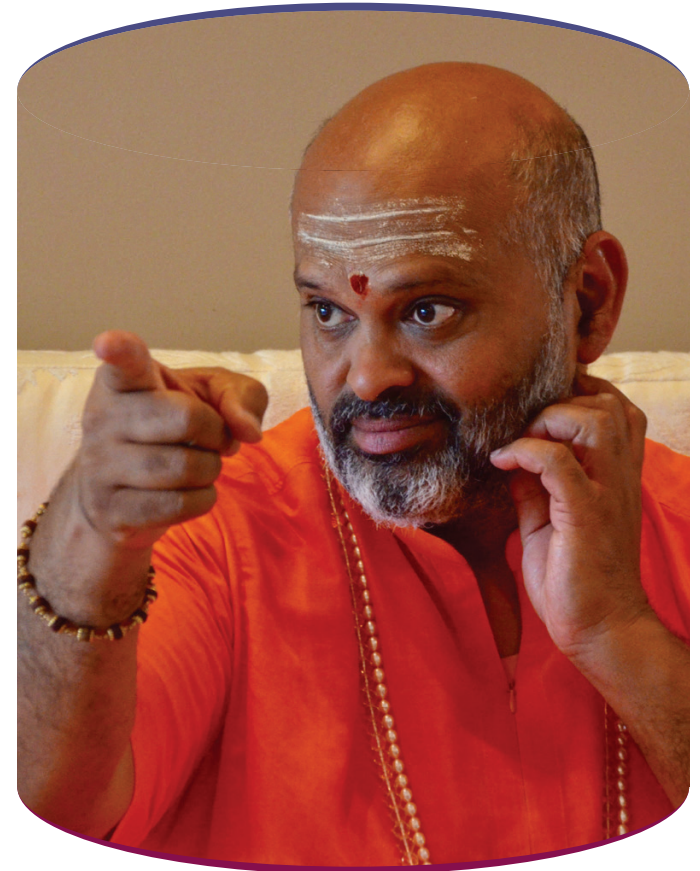
And why did he not listen to anyone? Because he was deaf. He didn’t hear all the nonsense coming from the outside world. Amazing, isn’t it?

Sāadhanā involves unlearning much of what the mind has been trained to think. The teaching the Guru would give to the sādhanika who wants to retrain the mind is constant practice and awareness. This means becoming simple, not complicated. But to be simple is not that simple.

Those of us in my generation and older used to get ball-point pens, and we’d click them on and off. Inside there was a spring. In school, when we got bored with what the teacher was saying, we’d play with the spring.

Swami Brahmānandaji Mahārāj, who gave us monkhood, used to refer to this example of a spring. He said, “You keep pulling the spring. And when you let it go, it goes back to its coiled state. As a seeker, what you want to do is pull the spring so many times that it becomes a straight wire. Only after years of constant practice does the spring stay straight and not go back to its original, coiled form.”

**Sāadhanā involves unlearning much of what the mind has been trained to think.**



# The Four Means

**“Without the four means, you cannot attain the knowledge of the Absolute.”**

Swami Śivānanda was a doctor. As a young man, he worked in British Malaysia, treating poor patients, but eventually the desire for a more spiritual kind of healing led him back to India. He ended up in Rishikesh, where he became a monk and later started the Divine Life Society. He passed away in 1963, the year after I was born. He says, “You cannot stitch without a needle and thread. You cannot dig without a shovel or a pick. In the same way, without the four means, you cannot attain the knowledge of the Absolute.”

He reminds us that a sādḥaka must possess the four means of liberation described by Vedānta: *viveka*, *vairagya*, *śaḍṣampat*, and *mumukṣutva*. That is, discrimination, dispassion, the six virtues, and a yearning for liberation.

*Viveka* is the ability to differentiate, or discriminate, between what is real and what is unreal.

*Vairagya* is not about the dispassion of going to the Himalayas or going into a forest or living in a tepee or a tent; it's about living in society, but with a sense of dispassion. Somebody says you're a wonderful person, and you're happy. Somebody says the exact opposite, and the very next moment when you turn around, you're still happy. That's dispassion.

But what happens instead? Someone walks around the ashram and says, “Did you like the food today? I was the cook. I didn't really *do* anything, I was just the cook.” Then that person comes to me and says, “Everybody loved the food.”

I say, “How do you know that?”

“Well, as I walked around, they told me how much they loved it.”

The person left out one little detail. If you tell everybody you were the cook, what are they going to say? “It was horrible?” No. They'll say, “Ah, I've never had such delicious food,” even if that's a lie. One thing I've learned over the years is that nobody wants to be in anybody's bad books. So we put forth all our effort to trap ourselves, to trap others.

The third means of liberation is *śaḍṣampat*, the six virtues. The first is *śama*, peace of mind. We could say it is equanimity of mind as a result of the eradication of stored impressions, desires.

*Dama* is control of the sense organs. The senses always want, want, want. They are never satisfied, no matter how much we give them.

*Uparati* is satiety, being satisfied. We simply renounce getting caught up in the act of doing. But not in the wrong way, as I just mentioned, where people sometimes say, “I'm not doing anything,” even when they are very much the doers.

*Titiksha* is fortitude, forbearance.

*Śraddhā* is faith without question or without doubt. In English, we could say faith that is implicit, but with wisdom,

## The Four Means (continued)

with understanding. All the checking has been done, all the questioning has been done, and we've come to a place of total, implicit faith.

Which brings us to *samādhāna*, the focus of mind that gives us complete satisfaction. How often can we claim that in life? How often are we satiated, with no want or desire for something else?

In the Indian tradition, we speak about the path of *dharma*. Dharma means that which is right, that which is correct, that which feels complete to the individual. His or her duty. A seeker who follows dharma is disciplined. His life is about austerity, about simplicity. His nature is steadfastness. Because he follows the right path, he is steady in his mind, he speaks the truth.

We say we speak the truth, but we know within ourselves how much truth we actually speak. It's not truth simply because we say, "I'm going to say the truth!" Truth has to be that which, when heard, is also pleasing and beneficial. Otherwise, keep quiet. Don't say, "I'm speaking the truth and I don't care what you feel!" If you speak like that, your words don't have the desired effect, even if they are the so-called truth.

To do good actions, you don't have to inspire yourself by saying to yourself, "I'll be good today." It should be a natural outcome.

I hope you remember all this.

If we examine what Swami Śivānanda is telling us, we see that a lot of conditions are being placed on a seeker whose claim is "I'm doing my spiritual practice."

You can't just say, "I'm going to meditate away all my problems." When you come out of meditation sixty minutes later, the problems will still be just as much there. If not worse, because now you are aware of them. Sixty minutes before, you at least weren't aware of them because you were a happy-go-lucky person.

A seeker makes the decision to do his or her practices, and through that *sādhana*, to reach *sādhya*, the possibilities that can be attained.

The first is easy—to be a seeker. The second is also easy—to do the practices. But the third, *sādhya*, is more difficult. Because the possibilities to be attained are infinite. Of course, from the scriptural point of view, the possibilities are defined specifically as knowledge of the Absolute, knowledge of the Truth, the experience of the Divine. Yet think how vast that experience can be.



**We know within  
ourselves how much  
truth we actually speak.**



# The Sixty Qualities

Swami Śivānanda's books are straight to the point. Either you do spiritual practices, or you get out of the way. I found many of his thoughts compiled in one place, where he lists sixty qualities of a seeker. When you read them, you think, "Oh! I can do this!" Let's go through them.

First, he says, reduce your wants to the utmost minimum.

Adapt yourself to circumstances.

Never be attached to anything or anybody.

Share what you have with others.

Be ever ready to serve, lose no opportunity. Don't say, "Do you want me to give you a hand?" or "How can I give you a hand?" or "Where do you want me to give you a hand?" That means you never wanted to give your hand, because you are asking so many questions. At the same time, Swami Śivānanda says, entertain non-doership. In Swamiji's mind, the seeker is saying, "Who am I to give you a hand, when there is nobody here to give a hand?"

Be a witness. Simply observe. Just do what needs to be done, don't get caught in it—like in the example I gave earlier: "Did you like my food?" or "Didn't I do a good job?"

Speak measured and sweet words. A wife goes to the sage and says, "Every night when my husband comes home, we have a fight, we argue." The sage gives her some holy water and says, "Every time your husband comes home, put this in your mouth." A month later, she comes back to the sage. She says, "I need some more holy water." He says, "How is

everything?" She says, "Wonderful. But I need more holy water. Because every day when my husband comes home, I need to put it in my mouth." The sage says, "No. Just control your tongue. That's all you need to do."

Have a burning thirst for God-realization. That is the fourth means described by Vedānta: mumukṣutva. That yearning should always be there.

Renounce all your belongings and surrender yourself to God. That doesn't mean you should pack up and come here to the ashram, or go someplace else. Just take a look at what you could renounce that is inside your closet, inside your pantry, inside your garage, in storage. Thanksgiving is coming, Christmas is coming. Go to the Salvation Army. Go to all the places where people bring things they feel they don't need anymore. Go to a landfill. Look in trash cans. See how much stuff we throw away. When Swamiji says to renounce all your belongings and surrender yourself to God, he means to feel your connection to divinity, so that you can learn how not to accumulate what's unnecessary.

The spiritual path is a sharp-edged razor path. A Guru is absolutely necessary. So just stay on the path, keep at it. You need guidance, you need somebody who can help you.

Have great patience and perseverance. Accept the circumstances, accept the situation, accept what is in life. And have patience. The circumstances will change, but it will take time. Not today, not tomorrow. The change has to be within you. We always think the change has to be out there. No, the change has to be in us.

**"Speak measured and sweet words."**

## The Sixty Qualities (continued)

Never leave your practice, even for a day. I always say that the day you miss it, the day you feel “I don’t want to do it,” is the day you need to do it. Because if you don’t do it today, tomorrow you will tell yourself, “It was okay yesterday, it worked out.” Before you know it, it’s been a few months since you did the practice.

The Guru will only guide you; you yourself must tread the path. Swamiji says something very important here: the practice has to be done by you. Don’t think, “I’ll just bow to the Guru, and a miracle will happen.” If that worked, why wouldn’t we do it at mealtimes? When it’s lunchtime, you could sit here and say, “Baba will take care of my thirst, Baba will take care of my stomach.” No, you have to walk all the way down to Namaste; you have to make sure you’re the first one in line for the meal.

Life is short. The time of death is uncertain. So apply yourself seriously to the practice, to sādhanā.

Maintain a daily spiritual diary. Correctly record your progress and failures. Stick to your resolve.

Don’t complain that there is no time for sādhanā. Reduce your talk. Reduce your sleep. Meditate during the auspicious early morning hours, two to three hours before sunrise. Waking up early means you have to go to bed early. Here, we go to bed early and we wake up early.

Let the thought of God keep away thoughts of the world. Keep your mind focused on divinity, so it stays away from everything else.

Forget the thought “I am a woman” or “I am a man.” Swamiji says your contemplation of the divine should be vigorous.

Never postpone a thing for tomorrow if it is possible for you to do it today. Make your bed every morning. I go to



so many homes where the beds are not made. In the Indian tradition, when we slept on a mattress, we were told to roll it up in the morning. They said that was so negativity didn’t come and live in that mattress during the day.

Don’t boast or make a show of your abilities. Be simple and humble.

Always be cheerful. Give up worries.

Be indifferent to things that don’t concern you.

Fly away from discussion and company.

**“The Guru will only guide you; you yourself must tread the path.”**

## The Sixty Qualities (continued)

**“The mind should always be immersed in the thought of the Absolute.”**

Be alone for a few hours daily. These days, that is difficult.

Give up being greedy, being jealous, and hoarding. Again, difficult in our society. Greed is what has brought our society to where it is today.

Control your emotions through discrimination and dispassion.

Maintain equilibrium of mind always.

Think twice before you speak and thrice before you act.

Give up backbiting, criticizing, and fault finding. Beware of your reactions.

We all have reactions. Instead of acting blindly on them, find your own faults and weaknesses. See only good in others, praise their virtues.

Forgive and forget the harm done by others. Do good to those who hate you. When I read this, I thought, “Oh, I have to make sure I stress this.” So I am: forgive and forget the harm. That’s difficult in itself, but then Swamiji says, “Do good to those who hate you.”

Shun lust, anger, egoism, delusion, greed. How? As you would avoid a venomous cobra. I think this should be taught in school—in kindergarten, in first grade, in second grade, as the child is growing up—not when we are already thirty, forty, fifty. Then, by the time the child is a teenager or a young person, these are natural instincts within the human being.

Swamiji says an interesting thing here: be prepared to suffer any amount of pain. I won’t comment on this, because I have my own thoughts about it. How much is any amount? We’d have to read his books to really understand what he means by this statement.

Always have a set of maxims with you to induce dispassion.

Treat sensual enjoyment as poison, vomited food, or urine. The mind should always be immersed in the thought of the Absolute; that’s how you take it away from the pleasures of the senses. Coming from Malaysia, where he was a doctor, Swamiji probably experienced having everything life could give him. Yet there he was in Rishikesh, so at some point, he must have thought of all these things for himself.

Preserve your semen carefully. Always sleep separately.

Revere women as Mother Divine. Imagine if a child learned this while young. We wouldn’t have so many of the issues we have today. When people look at someone, that someone is simply a sex object. Instead, we want to see that person is nothing but an expression of the Divine.

See God in every face, in everything.

Take to chanting, *satsaṅg*, or prayer whenever the mind is overpowered by base instincts.

Face obstacles coolly and boldly. Be bold. Be courageous.

When you are on the right path, care not for criticism, yield not to flattery. Just do what needs to be done and don’t care about either praise or blame.

Respect rogues and scoundrels. Serve them. Again, we’ll have to read more by Swamiji to fully understand this.

Admit your faults plainly.

Take care of your health. Do not neglect daily *āsana* and exercise.

Be active and nimble, always.

Develop your heart by giving. Be extraordinarily charitable. Give more than what you expect to receive.

Desires multiply misery. Develop contentment.

Control the senses, one by one.

## The Sixty Qualities (continued)

Develop *brahmākāra vṛtti*. Swamiji uses a technical term here, referring to thoughts that have taken the shape of the Divine. *Akāra* is form or shape; *vṛtti* is the thought modifications of the mind. So Vedānta says brahmākāra vṛtti is the final state of the mind before it merges into the Absolute, at which point there is no mind left, and the limited self is now experiencing liberation.

Keep a check on all your thoughts. Keep them pure and sublime.

Don't lose your temper when anyone insults, taunts, or rebukes you. Hear it as a mere play of words or a variety of sounds. Just think that they're off-key.

Rest your mind in God, and live in Truth.

Get up and keep following the path of perfection.

Have a definite aim in your life, and proceed cautiously. That's something our society needs today. What is your goal, your destination? Know that and keep going toward it.

The benefits of silence are incalculable. Observe silence, beginning with at least one hour a day. And it shouldn't be when you're sitting to meditate or doing another of your practices.

Four important means that allow passion to enter the mind are sound, touch, sight, and thoughts. Be vigilant when it comes to what you see, what you hear, what you touch, and of course what is going on inside your own mind.

Have an intimate connection with no one but God. Mix little with others.

Be moderate in everything; extremes are dangerous.

Do self-analysis and introspection every day.

So, how many of you can remember all of these qualities that Swami Śivānanda describes? That was fifty-nine. If you take some of these qualities and start applying them every day, over time you will see a shift, a change.

The last quality is to give up curiosities on the spiritual path. Conserve your energy and concentrate. Think little of food, of the body, and your relatives. Think more of the Self. You must realize the Self in this very birth.

What Swamiji is saying is, if you do all of the above, the outcome will be the experience of the Self, of the *ātman*.

I think these are all qualities we need to do before we even begin the journey. So for those who think you've already begun, maybe take a closer look. Of course, you can fake it to yourself and say, "I have at least fifty-five of them." But then we'll throw you in the washing machine, and that will tell us how established you really are in all these qualities.



Take some of these qualities and start applying them every day.



# There Is Nothing That Is Not Consciousness

So how do we get to our destination?

First, the seeker has all of his sixty qualities. I think it's actually more than sixty, because sometimes Swami Śivānanda included so many within one. Then the seeker asks, "What is it that I must do?" And as the seeker is doing his sādhanā, he asks, "Where is it that I must arrive?"

You can think of the ocean. When you stand on the shore, looking at the ocean, the ocean has many waves. You get excited—especially if you're a surfer—at the ten-foot, twelve-foot, fifteen-foot waves. You forget that each wave is nothing but the ocean.

There is no separation or difference created when the ocean becomes a wave. The wave comes from the ocean, it forms a wave, and then it falls back into the ocean.

It is the same with us. Within the ocean of Consciousness, all the various forms of the world arise as waves. Seeing this, the poet-saint Dharmadās asks, "Is there really any coming and going?" The truth, he says, is that there is nothing that is not Consciousness. Whatever exists is complete. It is all Consciousness. Everything simply comes to rest in the Self. This is where we must arrive.

The next time you go to the beach, absorb this teaching. The ocean arises, it becomes a wave, and that wave merges back into the ocean. As you watch the ocean and have that vision, you realize that all these forms—all the people, all of creation—are nothing but waves in the ocean.

**Within the ocean of Consciousness, all the various forms of the world arise as waves.**



## G L O S S A R Y

**ākāra**

form

**āsana**

yogic posture

**ātman**

the soul, Self

**brahman**

the Absolute

**dama**

controlling the senses

**dharma**

right action

**Dharmadās**

[15th c.] poet-saint, disciple of Kabīr

**mumukṣutva**

longing for liberation

**sādhaka**

seeker; one who does sādhanā

**sādhanā**

spiritual practice

**sādhya**

possibilities; that which can be attained

**ṣaḍsampat**

six virtues

**śama**

peace of mind

**samādhāna**

concentration of mind

**satsaṅg**

in the company of the Truth

**Śivānanda, Swami**

[1887–1963] founder of the Divine Life Society

**śraddhā**

faith

**titikṣā**

patience, forbearance

**uparati**

being satiated, without worldly longings

**vairāgya**

dispassion

**Vedānta**philosophy based on the *Vedas***viveka**

discrimination between the real and the unreal

**vṛtti**

modification of the mind

