

Siddha Marg



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 upāyah, “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 questions and answers selected from satsaṅgs held over the past two decades.

The Effortless Effort

QUESTION:

On the path of renunciation, I sometimes fear I will lose everything. Or is it more about inner renouncing, and I don't have to lose it all on the outside?

GURUDEV:

Correct. You should read the eighteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which talks about inner renunciation.

QUESTION:

But how do I keep a balance? Because they also say grace will show the way.

GURUDEV:

You are not the only one who thinks this. Everybody wants grace to move fast so they can just do their self-effort to keep up with it.

I am of the belief that grace is always present. Grace is always there. God is there in the form that we worship, and He protects, He takes care of us. He makes sure the right things happen to us.

The only problem is when we disconnect and become an individual who says, “Okay, God, don't worry. Everything is handled.” Then grace says, “Okay. Try it for a moment. See how it works for you.”

The Effortless Effort (continued)

Your effort has to come to a place where it's effortless.

The whole process of chanting, meditation, and the way you live your life has to come naturally. Don't think, "Now I'm going to be spiritual; now I'm not going to be spiritual. Now I'm going to be holy; now I'm not going to be holy." All those dualities have to go away. You just always have to be good. This means your thought process, speech, and actions all have to become good.

QUESTION:

Sometimes my mind turns to thoughts during meditation, and I can't bring it back to the mantra.

GURUDEV:

The mantra is a tool or a vehicle to focus the mind. Thoughts will be there; they'll always be there.

As I said the other day, when you begin to meditate, you become aware that you have so many thoughts. Over time, you're able to reduce the number of thoughts. Slowly, you come to a place where you have fewer thoughts, and the thoughts that you do have are good thoughts.

So, the mantra is a tool to make the mind one-pointed. The mantra itself is one thought. You make the effort to use that one thought—the mantra—to bring the mind to a place of stillness, of quiet. From many thoughts you go to a few thoughts and then to a single thought, and eventually you extend the quiet you've found so that it lasts longer.

If you allow it to, the mind will focus on thoughts, because that is the nature of the mind. Instead, you want through practice to gather the mind so it remains focused on the mantra.

Your effort has to come to a place where it's effortless.

Sometimes you'll feel like you're in a losing battle with the mind. At such times, you might want to just sit and observe and witness. When you witness your thoughts, they become weaker, and your mind quiets on its own. Then you can more easily go back to the mantra.

If you struggle too much with your mind, you'll find yourself spending a lot of time in that struggle, fighting with your mind. So in that moment, you step back and simply become a witness and observe your thoughts. When you do that, they go away.

QUESTION:

So it's not a good practice to force the mantra on the mind? It should be a more gentle process?

GURUDEV:

Correct. Because when you try to force the mind, then it fights back. So you have a battle. Instead, let the mind become quiet, become weak, for a moment. You have to take a back seat until the mind becomes quiet.

It may take a few moments, but when you feel that your mind is not fighting—or you are not fighting with your mind—then you can take up the mantra again.

QUESTION:

Sometimes when I meditate on *Hamṣa* or *So'ham*, I find it's an effort. And if I meditate on *Oṃ Namaḥ Śivāya*, it can be an effort. I feel I want to do just *Oṃ*, something lighter. What would be your advice?

GURUDEV:

I think that's fine. In the last two or three evenings, as we went into meditation, I simply said, "Just sit and breathe.

The Effortless Effort (continued)

Don't do anything." Because I figured that, just as you said, sometimes even getting caught up in thinking, "Oh, I have to do this" is one more trap.

As all of us go along the path, one illumination that should come to us is "I can just sit and be in meditation." If we can come to that place, then we're there. Nothing more is needed.

So if you can just sit and breathe, wonderful.

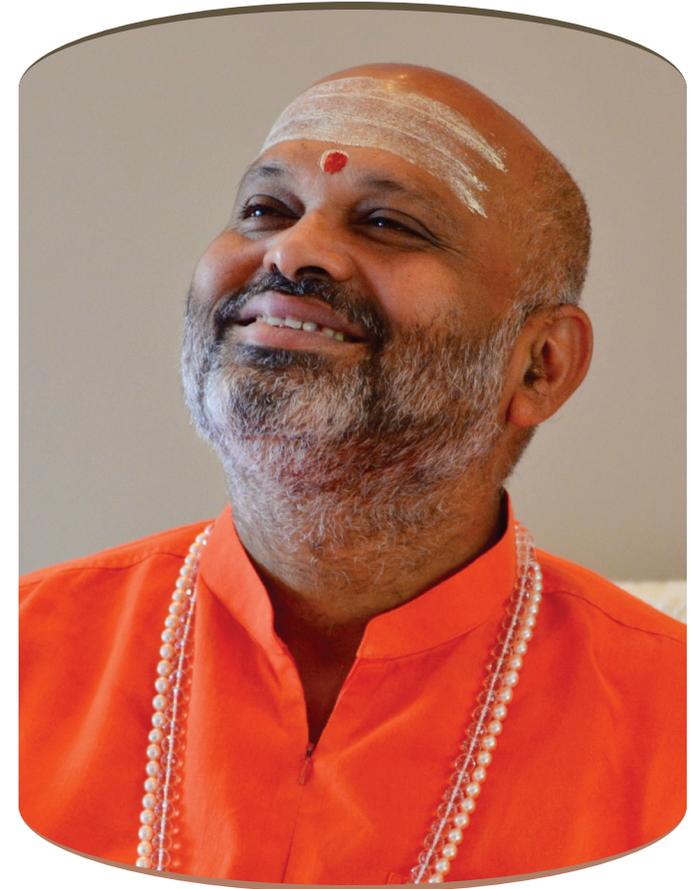
We spoke about death yesterday. And last night, I realized, "Oh my God, it was Anzac Day." Everyone in Australia and New Zealand was honoring and celebrating their dead, as they have been doing for almost a hundred years now.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* talks about *Om* as the sound you want to practice repeating and integrate into yourself. You want to come to a place where your mind is constantly hearing the sound of *Om*. Then, when you die, *Om* is all that is happening.

Because *Om* is all there is in the universe, in everything. And it is there within us.



You want to come to a place where your mind is constantly hearing the sound of *Om*.



Energy Channels Within

QUESTION:

In the *cakra* meditation we just did, what is the relationship between *Harī*, the *bija* mantra we chanted for the throat, and the *Haṁsa* mantra?

GURUDEV:

Each of the elements within creation has a bija mantra associated with it. *Harī* is the bija mantra for the element of ether.

Bija mantras have no meaning, as such. The ancient sages took what they heard as the sound of a particular element and then assigned it to one of the cakras within the body. Each cakra represents a different element.

If you become subtle enough to be able to listen to the sounds of the elements—whether it is the wind, ether, fire, water, or earth—you will probably find they make these sounds. Of course, you have to turn off all your mental chatter to listen to the sound an element makes.

QUESTION:

Can you explain a little bit more about the cakras?

GURUDEV:

In our body, there are various energy channels. I like to say that each cakra is like a junction box on one of those channels.

Each cakra has a particular number of petals, a particular deity, a particular mantra, and so on. At each cakra, each junction box, we may unconsciously be holding onto different things. When we hold on like that, it can be difficult to let go.

I often talk about the throat cakra as one place where we hold fear. When something scary happens, we gulp because we are holding our fear in that area. So when fear arises, I suggest being conscious not to constrict the throat. Remain relaxed and simply breathe and let go.

QUESTION:

In the cakra meditation, I found it hard to get to the end of the breath while chanting the sound vibration *Rarī*. Do you need to breathe out completely, to expel all the energy?

GURUDEV:

I think we react differently at each cakra.

The idea is to find a way to let go, to release, whatever you are holding in that area. When you are able to let go, then there will be no more difficulty.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter, because when you're ready, you will just let go. In the meantime, you practice and make the effort. But eventually the effort is not needed; it simply happens.

Each cakra represents a different element.

Energy Channels Within (continued)

QUESTION:

When you led us through the cakras in meditation, you said the *mulādhāra* was at the base of the spine, and the *svādhiṣṭhāna* was at the sexual organs. But some texts say the *svādhiṣṭhāna* is at the base of the spine. I'm interested academically in terms of the tradition from which you are teaching.

GURUDEV:

In most of the books I have read, the *mulādhāra* is described as being at the base of the spine, and the *svādhiṣṭhāna* is above it. Nothing I have read places the *svādhiṣṭhāna* at the base of the spine. It's always nearer to the sexual organs. Some people describe it as in between the sexual organs and the anus.

I think that a sage in meditation doesn't worry about exactly where a cakra is located. Therefore, I sometimes say "region"—navel region, heart region, and so on.

Carpenters are supposed to put studs every sixteen inches in a wall. You would think that any carpenter would know when he measures that he will find a stud every sixteen inches. But I saw our main carpenter walking around with a stud finder. That means he understands that his people—five of them only—who put the wall up could have put a stud five-eighths of an inch one way or seven-fifths of an inch the other way. If each stud had to be dead-on at sixteen inches, why would he need a stud finder?

In the same way, when God, or nature, creates this body, all the parts are give or take a few millimeters.

There was a devotee in Baba's time who said he had a hearing loss because of the instrument his doctor had used to bring him into the world. Nature had given him the ability to hear, but a human had messed with that. So I think nature creates a mold, but for whatever reason, each of us varies a little bit here and there.

Whenever I read about such things, I allow for a margin of error. I live life with plus and minus, you could say. But sometimes, academically, people get stuck in the idea that "It says this..."

Simply because the scriptures tell us the *kuṇḍalini* is at the base of the spine and travels upward doesn't necessarily mean you will experience it that way. The energy travels through the entire body; it is not limited to just the one path that whichever *tantra* you may have read described.

I always tell people, just because you've read *Play of Consciousness* doesn't mean you should assume that exactly what Baba said in his book will happen to you. Your experiences might seem to happen backwards. For example, some people have a fabulous experience and see the Blue Pearl for a long time, and then all of a sudden they no longer see it.

Ultimately, energy is light and joy. We can't limit it to a certain restricted way of movement. You work in the theater, so you understand how energy has to move, and how you have to move energy.

So when you sit for meditation, try to feel within. See if you can feel the cakras, feel the energy.

Eventually the effort is not needed; it simply happens.



I Am Complete

QUESTION:

In the yoga course, we were studying the three malas. I understood that one brings an innate feeling of separateness that can only be pierced by grace. It made me more appreciative of what we receive from the Guru, and gave me a feeling that *sāadhanā* would also help with the other two malas. Is that correct thinking, Gurudev, or could you expand on that?

GURUDEV:

I wasn't in the yoga class. I can make an assumption. Or which one is it?

QUESTION:

Ānava.

GURUDEV:

Ānava mala gives us the feeling "I am incomplete. I am not perfect."

We can read a lot of books. That can give us a lot of knowledge, a lot of understanding. All the sages say that at some point, that kind of understanding is not enough.

In the tenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, after Lord Kṛṣṇa has been talking to Arjuna for nine chapters, he talks about himself. He describes what is called his *vibhūti*, his divine splendor.

Arjuna wants to know, "What is Kṛṣṇa?"

And Kṛṣṇa explains, "Kṛṣṇa is this, Kṛṣṇa is that."

But Arjuna still can't relate to what Kṛṣṇa is saying. He thinks, "This is my friend Kṛṣṇa. This is who I see as Kṛṣṇa. How can Kṛṣṇa be something else?"

Kṛṣṇa says, "I have been born many times. I have been on this earth many times. I know each and every thing that is to be known."

He sees that Arjuna is still puzzled. So, at the very beginning of the eleventh chapter, Kṛṣṇa says, "O Arjuna, because you don't understand what I am talking about, I will now give you the divine inner eye."

Arjuna is full of—again—amazement at everything he perceives. He describes what he is able to see with his divine inner eye. But at some point, Arjuna says, "I don't want to see any more. Take away this vision because this is too much." He begins to realize, "I am not separate. If Kṛṣṇa is all this, then I am all this also."

In my experience, many of us say, "I want to be one with the Truth" or "I want to experience oneness." Yet when we come close to the experience of oneness, a fear that comes from the ego creeps in rather quickly, and we turn away.

If you ask yourself what makes you run away from the Guru, from the spiritual path, it's not anything but your

The fire of knowledge
burns everything to
ashes.

I Am Complete (continued)

ego. Your ego says, “I just want to be normal. I don’t want to chant, I don’t want to meditate. I don’t want to think that I must be good.” It’s simply the ego.

Actually, I believe all three malas work together. One brings you the feeling of imperfection and incompleteness. The second one, *māyīya* mala, creates the sense of duality. The third, *karma* mala, makes you feel you are performing good and bad actions. So when you think about it, all three are related. Why do you think you are doing good and bad actions? Because you believe, “I am incomplete.” Why do you see duality? Again, because you think, “I am incomplete.” As soon as you come to the realization, “I am complete,” the other two malas dissolve of their own accord.

Last week, we talked about how the fire of knowledge burns everything to ashes. What is the fire of knowledge? It is the knowledge or the illumination of “I am.” Now, if you imagine that in the eleventh chapter, Arjuna were to say to Kṛṣṇa, “I got it,” then there would be no need for the seven chapters that follow. The *Gītā* would have been finished after the eleventh chapter. But Arjuna does not get it until the eighteenth chapter, when he says, in essence, “Having understood all that you told me, I am now willing to be your disciple. So teach me.”

Baba himself went through something like this. When he came to Bhagavān Nityānanda, after having wandered for many years, he had the realization “This is my Guru. These are the teachings. Now I have to study them.”

On any path that has a Guru, one has to live the Guru’s teachings before one will become complete. These days, however, some people wake up and immediately say,

“Okay, I think I’m ready. I can teach now.” And other people come to that person and accept what he teaches without question. But when we come from a true tradition, we adhere to the wisdom of that tradition.

Wisdom is universal. In all traditions, we find the same essential teachings. For example, Baba’s teaching is “God dwells within you as you.” Christ’s teaching is “God’s kingdom lies within you.” The wording may be a bit different, but both are saying the same thing.

When you have the full experience of that teaching, you know “I am complete.” But it takes a long time to give up the sense of incompleteness. Why? I think the only reason is so that the play can go on a little bit longer.

In all traditions, we find the same essential teachings.



The Witness

QUESTION:

Is there a witness to the witness, a witness beyond the witness?

GURUDEV:

What did you learn in the course?

QUESTION:

We just talked about the one witness

GURUDEV:

There is no witness to the witness. There is simply the witness.

You may hear a lot of talk about the distinction between subject and object, but ultimately you come to the realization that you are neither the subject nor the object; you are simply the witness.

QUESTION:

Is the witness “That”?

GURUDEV:

“That” is the witness. We all get to a place every once in a while where we realize we are simply observing.

I often share that a mall is a good place to practice this. You can do it as an exercise. Sitting there, you are just one little

speck among the thousands moving about. You have to learn to become still and not get caught in what everybody else is doing or what is going on, and simply observe. You may feel you like what one person is doing, and not like what somebody else is doing. You can't hold onto any of these feelings. You're just the witness. And that's a good start.

I love two sayings by Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the Guru of Swami Vivekananda. He says, “I laugh when a doctor says, ‘Don't worry, I am here. Your child will not die.’ When the Lord of Death is waiting to take the soul from a body, no matter how good your doctor is, if it's time to go, that individual will go.” Ramakrishna also says, “I laugh when there is a piece of land and two brothers say, ‘This half is mine; this half is yours.’ Whose is it that they can say this is mine and this is yours? It all belongs to God.”

When we think, “I want to become a witness,” we have to ask ourselves, “What do I actually mean by a witness?” In the highest sense, to be a witness means to be able to accept, to surrender, to go along with what is happening. We always want to fix a little bit here and fix a little bit there, but it's actually already fixed in the way it should be. All we have to do is simply go along with it.

QUESTION:

Since we're all God, all the witness, it's about trusting when a challenge comes along that this is for our good, and realizing the grace in what happened?

There is no witness to the witness. There is simply the witness.

The Witness (continued)

GURUDEV:

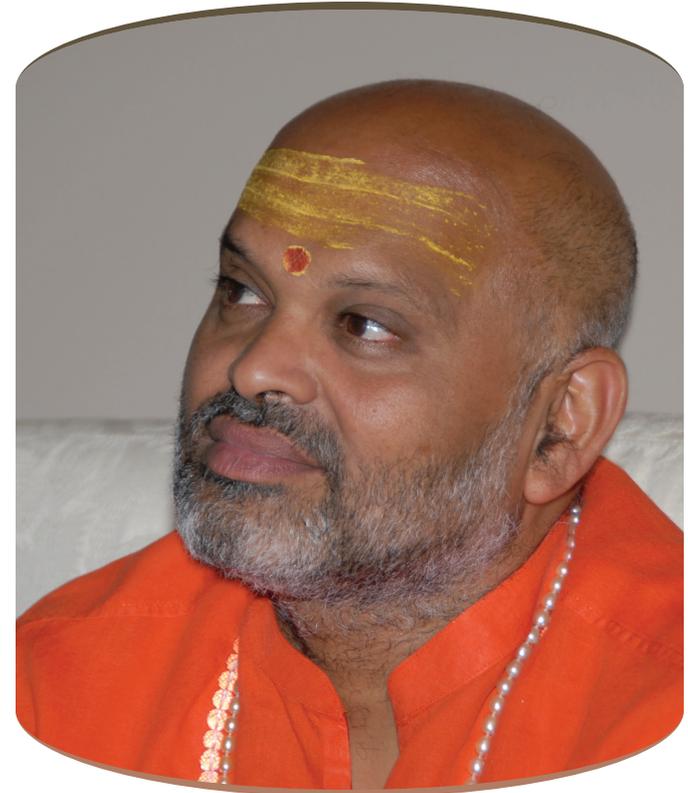
We always want to know the mystery. But the mystery of grace is not always known. The only thing we can do is trust, as you said, that the mystery will reveal itself.

Of course, we want the mystery to be revealed first. Because we think that if we know what will happen and why, then it will be easier to let it happen. But that's not always the case in life. Sometimes we realize as it's happening, sometimes we realize after the fact, and sometimes maybe we never do.

So the most important thing is surrender, trust. That I would say is the challenge.

I think we'll end on that. So witness yourself to chai. We'll have a half hour break before we come back for meditation.

To be a witness means to be able to accept, to surrender, to go along with what is happening.



G L O S S A R Y

Arjuna

hero of *Mahābhārata*

Bhagavad Gītā

Hindu scripture

bīja

seed

Blue Pearl

subtle vehicle of the inner Self

cakra

energy center in the subtle body

Hamṣa

mantra; literally, “I am That”

Kṛṣṇa

Hindu deity, Guru of Arjuna in the

Bhagavad Gītā

kuṇḍalinī

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

mala

one of three impurities (ānava, māyīya, karma)

mulādhāra

root cakra

Om Namaḥ Śivāya

mantra; literally, “I bow to the divine”

sādhanā

spiritual practices

satsaṅg

in the company of the Truth

So’ham

mantra; literally, “I am That”

svādhiṣṭhāna

second cakra

tantra

scripture

vibhūti

power, splendor, sacred ash