



Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram

January 2026 Teachings Article

Sadhana: Practice & Process #1

Spiritual Living

By Gurudevi Nirmalananda

I remember when Walt Disney invented the moving sidewalk, which he called the “PeopleMover.” He installed it at Disneyland, near my childhood home. I loved that each stride carried me farther than walking alone. Getting Shaktipat is like this, boosting the results you get from your spiritual practices. In Sanskrit, your practices are called “sadhana¹,” the means you use to attain your spiritual goal. One who does sadhana is called a “sadhaka¹.” The root word is “sat,” meaning Truth, indicating that the practices are taking you to the Truth of your own Beingness.

Research has proven that any approach to spiritual development grants you many benefits. Spiritual practitioners have a better quality of life. They experience less depression and live longer. They have better health outcomes. This means both that they are healthier and, when they do need medical care, they get better results.²

Yet spirituality is not merely about improved quality of life. It’s about “spirit.” While different systems define spirit differently, yoga has a clear definition: your own spirit is your inherent Divinity. Finding your own essence is finding the One Divine Reality within, oh Shiva. Shaktipat makes it findable.

Personally I experienced the difference that Shaktipat makes. My first attempt at meditation was following the instructions in a yoga book. I sat with my spine upright and closed my eyes. I didn’t last even a minute. My racing mind repeated my to-do list many times, each time more urgently, until I bolted and began sprinting through my day.

Still, I really wanted to meditate. I didn’t understand what made it so important to me, but it was a recurrent inner impulse. I found a local group who offered a free meditation program every week. My first experience there gave me a profound and deep meditative immersion. Yes, it was one of my Baba’s meditation centers. His Grace propelled me deep within — deep and easy.

This is why the sages of India say you must have a Shaktipat Guru. While anyone can sit for meditation and repeat mantras, they reap many worldly benefits. But it is only with Divine Grace that your efforts bring true spiritual advancement.

Udyamo bhairava. — Shiva Sutras 1.5

The inner arising of transcendental Consciousness shatters your not-knowingness to set you free.

The inner arising is the meditative energy that climbs your spine, Kundalini. In this sutra, this energy is called Bhairava, naming Shiva in the act of destruction. Here, he is destroying your not-knowingness, the energetic binding that makes you feel small, inadequate, lost, alone and afraid. I had found that inner binding the first time I tried to meditate, the anxiety that had me running on overdrive for years. It is called anava mala.³

My first visit to Baba’s meditation center propelled me past that inner blockage. Immersed in a vast inner space, I was bathed in the bliss of Consciousness. Once I received Shaktipat, anava mala had no hold on me anymore.

This is what I had actually wanted when I felt the inner impulse to meditate. I wanted to be free! Freedom from all I thought I was and from all I was told to be, this is yoga’s promise. It is the arising of transcendental Consciousness that makes it possible.

After Shaktipat, you are on a moving sidewalk. Each step carries you farther. Even if you stop walking, you are still making progress.

Yet my Baba amped up the metaphor, likening the process to traveling on a rocket ship. You are you soaring into the heights of spirituality. Still, you have to steer. It is possible for you to pour all that Divine

¹ saadhana; saadhaka

² JAMA, 328(2), 184–197; <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2022.11086>

³ aa.navamala — from a.nu (atom, individual)

energy into your life, getting worldly benefits, but you won't get the inner bliss. Keep your attention inward, even while you navigate your life, so you live in attunement with your own Self.

Once you have received Shaktipat, the word "sadhana" has an expanded meaning. It now means your inner process, not merely your practices. In the midst of life, your spiritual process continues, propelled by Grace.

In the midst of activities, you may have a sudden insight about how to best handle the situation. Or perhaps you find that your taste buds have changed, freeing you from old patterns. It could be that you begin to welcome the early morning wake-up call. Pre-sunrise, you slip into your meditation seat, actually happy about it. You are a sadhaka, doing your sadhana, becoming more and more attuned to Consciousness within.

As I made progress, I noticed that my motivation changed. In the beginning, desperation got me out of bed for my early morning meditation. I continued because my practices made a tangible improvement in my life. After a few months, I didn't feel so desperate.

Now my continued practices were motivated by habit. I had gotten used to early mornings. I could tell that silent japa (mantra repetition) made me feel better throughout my day. Then I read all of Baba's books. Amazing! Enlightening! Profoundly educational.

As I began to understand his teachings, my motivation changed. I felt a deep commitment to getting enlightened. With time, along with more studies and practice, my commitment grew stronger. And it became softer, more devotional. Now my heart was in it along with my body and mind.

Sa tu dirgha-kala nairantarya-satkarasevito drdha-bhumih.⁴ — Yoga Sutras 1.14

Abhyasa⁵ is the practice you actively engage in, for a long time, without interruption, and with devotion.

Consistency, diligence, perseverance and devotion come together in one Sanskrit word, abhyasa. You put your heart into it. This is true for musicians and athletes as well as yogis. When I recommend doing more yoga, I'm encouraging you to do more of something you love to do.

This is the secret to consistent practice — do the practices you love. It's easy to be consistent when you look forward to doing something. If you have a busy day, carve out time for your favorite practice before your day begins, or as a midday recess. In the evening before bed is a natural time to slow down and settle inward.

More importantly, you can integrate yoga practices into your day. When you are standing, align your feet parallel and stand in Tadasana. Sneak other poses in throughout your day.

Chanting is very portable. The food tastes better if you chant while you're cooking. Chanting in the shower gives you great acoustics! You can deepen your studies by listening to my teaching discourses while you're driving by queuing up the video, then placing your phone face down so you avoid visual distractions. Or watch the video instead of indulging in eye candy.

Bring a yogic principle with you into your day, even into your year by making a New Years resolution. Ahimsa (non-harming) could change your driving habits. Aparigraha (non-greediness) could free you from acquisitiveness. Shaucha (purity) could help you clean out your closets and other spaces.

Now is the time to make your plan! A new year, a new beginning, an opportunity to steer your life in the direction you want to go. Inward.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES, "SADHANA: PRACTICE & PROCESS"

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⁴ Sa tu dirgha-kaala nairantarya-satkaaraasevito d.r.dha-bhuumi.h; aabhyasa.