

[Baba Muktananda: 'Meditation Revolution' Continues Ten Years After His Passing](#)

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Baba Muktananda; 'Meditation Revolution' Continues Ten Years After His Passing

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A journalist once called him "Swami Muktananda, the Bliss Liberator," a play on his name which means literally "Bliss of Liberation." Those who met him felt his exuberant personality and the humor and love with which he guided the lives of his students. Many also, as one devotee described it, "sensed that the goal of human life, liberation, was within our reach." Today his unique spiritual energy (shakti) is alive in his teachings, in the two young successors Swami Nityananda and Swami Chidvilasananda whom he designated before his passing, and through the hundreds of thousands of students around the world whose hearts he touched.

Muktananda's primary teaching was "Honor your self, worship your Self, kneel to your self, God dwells within you as you." Anyone can say these words, but Swam Muktananda - or Baba, as we who loved him called him - could transmit the experience of inner divinity.

Baba brought spirituality alive. A distinguished rabbi with a Harvard doctorate, author of many books on religion, put it this way: "I've read about God, talked about God, and written about God, but only meeting Muktananda has given me the certitude that God exists."

The rabbi's was not an isolated experience. Sincere seekers of every profession and religious persuasion got the experience, from contact with Baba that the God they sought outside was really the divine reality within. Steeped in a background of Kashmir Saivism, Muktananda taught that all visible phenomena are manifestations of Siva's Shakti, created out of one all-pervasive Being.

Krishna was the name Muktananda received at birth. He was born on the

auspicious Vaishakhi Purnima, on the fall moon, May 16, 1908, near Mangalore in Karnataka State. His family was rich and pious, and he developed into an intelligent, imaginative, spirited child. When he was 15, Swami Nityananda, a wandering avadhoot well known in South India, visited his school and stroked his cheeks. The strange magnetic spell of that meeting never left his memory. Krishna soon left his family's loving hearth to begin his search for God with a determination that nothing but complete knowledge of the Self would satisfy. He travelled to Hubli where he studied Sanskrit, Vedanta and all branches of yoga in the Math of Siddharudha Swami and took the initiation of sannyasa, becoming Swami Muktananda. From there he walked across most of India, living an austere existence, mastering hatha yoga, studying ayurveda, and acquiring wisdom with many holy men. Finally he settled in Maharashtra, home of his beloved poets Tukaram, Eknath, Namdev and Jnaneshwar.

In 1947, at the age of 39, Muktananda went to Ganeshpuri to receive the darshan of Bhagawan Nityananda, the avadhoot Siddha he had met in his childhood. In Muktananda's autobiography he says, "All three important factors - divine Shaktipat, the grace of a great Siddha and a burning desire for God-realization - had combined." Nityananda sent him to Yeola to meditate, and for eight years, living in a little hut, he underwent extraordinary yogic experiences sparked by his initiation.

In 1956, Nityananda, dancing with joy, declared that his shishya had become one with Parabrahma: "Muktananda Paramahansa! Muktananda Paramahansa! He gave him a small piece of land with three small rooms at Gavdevi, near Ganeshpuri, which was to become Swami Muktananda's ashram and final resting place.

Throughout his life Swami Muktananda maintained a profound respect and love of his guru. When Professor Huston Smith met Baba and reminisced about his earlier darshan of Bhagawan Nityananda, he said he hadn't noticed Baba there. Baba replied humbly, "When the sun shines, the stars are not visible. My guru was the sun."

After Nityananda's passing on August 8, 1961, devotees - first a trickle, then in doves - began to gather around Baba Muktananda. His environment became an exquisite sacred place. Shree Gurudev Ashram began with beautiful rose gardens and gradually grew with the numbers of devotees. Swamiji, a master cook, prepared

the meals and greeted every visitor with affection.

Students came from everywhere, extending invitations for Baba to visit the west. In 1970 he visited Australia, Los Angeles, Dallas, New York and Europe, transmitting shaktipat, leading groups in ecstatic chanting, and talking of the path of the Siddhas, whereby through the blessings of a satguru, meditation and yoga occur spontaneously.

Returning to Ganeshpuri, Baba modernized and expanded the ashram to accommodate the students who poured in. He established a traditional ashram atmosphere and a religious discipline that demanded sincerity on the part of the residents. All visitors, regardless of nationality or caste, were required to eat together, chant the Sanskrit texts and dhuns, meditate and assist in maintaining the ashram premises. Teachings remained informal, with Baba answering questions about people's practices with solicitous love or occasional sternness as the situation required. He often contrasted the attitudes of the Western and Indian devotees, saying "See what great bhakti, devotion and surrender the Indians have." To the Indians he would say, "See what humility and renunciation the foreigners have, they are from good families, and well educated, they come here and clean our toilets and do sadhana with great dedication.

Invitations again poured in, and in April 1974, after visiting Australia, Swami Muktananda arrived in Oakland, California. From 1974 to 1976, his work grew enormously as he travelled extensively in the USA. Recognized as a rare master of meditation and a yogi of extraordinary attainment, he was visited by many leaders in science, psychology, physics and politics, including astronaut Edgar Mitchell, psychologists Karl Rogers, Rollo May and Stan Groff, author Carlos Casteneda, and politician Jerry Brown. In an article on his extraordinary appeal for well-known teachers and religious leaders, Time magazine labeled him "The Guru's Guru."

Baba also set in a place a format for his work, a two-day meditation intensive during which he transmitted shaktipat. People yearned to be touched by him, and he walked among the rows of students, touching each personality, by hand and with peacock feathers. "I still remember how it felt," recalls one devotee. "The rustlings of his silk as he approached, the scent of heena, then his thumb between my eyes and a swish of feathers on my face. Then deep meditation." Baba Muktananda had often said that his work was a start a "meditation revolution" that

would transform peoples' hearts. Its seeds were sown in the intensives.

Often shaktipat set off a loud response as the energy activated physical and emotional responses. Kundalini arousal caused people to experience yoga and meditation effortlessly, and sometimes quite dynamically. "I was sitting close to Baba," says one of his students, "looking intently at him. Suddenly he lifted his glasses and looked me in the eye. I felt an electric current pass from his eyes into mine: ZZZZZZZ. It was so powerful one could only bear a little of it."

Babaji travelled coast to coast, and Siddha Meditation centers sprang up in Denver, Aspen, Dallas, Houston, Ann Arbor, Boston, New York, Chicago, Portland, Seattle, Los Angeles and Oakland. The first ashram was established in Oakland in 1975, and Siddha Yoga Foundation of America was created. A second property in upstate New York became a large country ashram. The tremendous effort of reaching thousands of people and personally transmitting shaktipat took its toll in 1975 as Baba suffered his first serious illness, a diabetic stroke.

Muktananda's own desire for liberation had transformed into an active compassion for all who came to him, and overrode consideration for his own health. He gave darshan in the waiting room of the hospital, ignoring the doctors' warnings. He returned to India in October 1976 having given a hundred intensives and awakened the hearts of thousands of people.

By then Siddha Yoga had become a world-wide meditation revolution. An ashram was established in Delhi, dhyana khendras were set up in devotees' homes all over India, and Swami Muktananda initiated some of his long-time students, both Indians and Westerners, into the Sankaracharya tradition of sannyasa and sent them on teaching assignments in India and the centers in the USA, London, Paris, Sydney and Melbourne.

In 1978 during his 70th birthday celebrations in Ganeshpuri, Baba addressed thousands of well-wishers. He blessed a huge seven-day yagna that was going on and returned to his room where he suffered a massive heart attack. Surrounded by concerned doctors and nurses, he awoke saying, "My Gurudev told me to return. Why are you all looking so concerned?" His recovery was spent in good humor surrounded by many visitors, and from then on he seemed determined to outwit

the doctors who cautioned him about his health. Resuming his work, from 1979 through 1981 he visited Los Angeles, Oakland, Miami, Boston and his ashram in upstate New York. Hallmarks of that time were large conferences on meditation of specific interest groups, including artists and health care workers, and courses of Siddha yoga and Kashmir Saivism. During that time he essentialized his teachings in two books, *Secret of the Siddhas* and *Reflections of the Self*. Written - rapidly, urgently - with great concentration, they set down his commentary on Kashmir Saivism in the former and advice to seekers in the latter.

On his return to India in October 1981, Baba undertook actions that indicated he had prescience of his impending passing. He announced that he was creating a succession that would carry the Siddha tradition into the future. He designated two swamis, Swami Nityananda and Swami Chidvilasananda, brother and sister, children of long-time devotees Sheena and Devaki Shetty to take on the mantle of siddha yoga. The two young successors had been under his tutelage since their childhood. He called students from around the world to be present of the patabhishek (succession ceremony) on his birthday celebration in May, 1982.

When the day arrived, thousands of people crowded in to witness the occasion. Garlanding his two beloved disciples, Baba said, "This lineage which has existed since ancient times, which has come down from the acharyas and from my own Gurudev - I give the knowledge and Shakti and the authority and the power of this lineage to these two, Swami Nityananda and Swami Chidvilasananda. By giving these to them, I retire."

There was a certain foreboding about what he meant by "retire." Following that occasion, Baba seemed more contemplative, and often sat silently during darshan. In September, Baba travelled to Kashmir to visit the sacred spots of Kashmir Saivism. On October 2nd, 1982, under the full moon, his heart, which had blazed to embrace all who called on him and sought his blessings, flamed into eternity, and Swami Muktananda passed into Mahasamadhi. Tens of thousands of mourners came from all over India and the world for the last rites. Swami Muktananda was buried in the dhyana mandir, in the spot of earth that had been given to him by his beloved guru Nityananda.

"At first I was sad, as if the ground of my very being had been swept away," say one of Baba's long-time followers. "A month passed in this way. Then suddenly, out of my grief, a wave of tremendous bliss arose, and a flash of understanding: The

divine flame that Baba ignited is within. His Shakti and his love are there and always will be. Liberation is still possible."

What Baba Meant to Me

First, Baba destroyed my clich[?]d notions about gurus and spirituality. Then - with the startling immediacy of his presence, his vigor and verve, his fluidity, his naturalness - he woke me up to the reality of a profound life force. Meditation became tender and juicy with his mantra, and I began sensing the presence of God in myself and others.

Susanna Sheffield, art dealer

Houston, Texas

Baba's teachings have changed my understanding of God from an abstract concept to a living reality. God's grace gradually becomes more apparent - to me in me.

Nityeshwari Bordoy, executive administrator

Mexico City, Mexico

Instead of forever striving for some future perfection, I have learned through meditation to accept and enjoy the present. I have identified God in myself and all living things. This allows for a serenity I never had before.

Harmon Lisnow, civil servant

Austin, Texas

Baba has given me whatever I have today, both materially and spiritually. My husband, my children and my home are Baba's prasad. Baba's advice that husband and wife should look on each other as Siva and Parvati, showing love, respect and devotion for each other, not only brings husband and wife closer but makes them both full of love for God.

Jyoti Nanda, housewife

Bombay, India

I detested the idea of having a guru. Yet Baba Muktananda had such a soothing effect that felt that I had found the ultimate in my life. His abounding love made me his own forever.

Madam Gopal Sharma, translator

New Delhi, India

Baba poured out his love, despite my stupidity, even reassuring me during my last visit by telling me, "You are always with me." Not "I am always with you" - no trace of ego.

Dr. Jayant D. Desai, ophthalmologist

Queens, New York

He spoke like a king, walked like a panther and laughed like a child. In his presence, spirits were lifted, doubts dissolved, questions answered from within and hope burnt bright.

B.R. Nanda, historian

New Delhi, India

When I took an intensive, I concentrated on the sound of his voice, his belly shaking with his sweet laughter, his hand movements, his presence. When my mind became quiet, an insight dawned: "He is holy, I can believe him, I can follow him."

Bhagavati Nash, retired

Queens, New York

Meeting Baba was like stepping into paradise. Everything glowed. Everyone seemed very happy. I went to see him every day. The more I listened to him, the more I chanted such ecstasy possible.

Margot Gorski, researcher

Melbourne, Australia

I can best describe my transformation in meeting Baba by saying that a profound deepening of my reference point for "self" occurred. As a result, my life has a sense of cohesion about it - even in the midst of chaos and death. Amazingly, this

knowing has not diminished with time, nor with his passing; it only gets richer as my life unfolds.

Jannie Sagert. Ph.D., Stress Management

Austin Texas

After Baba took samadhi, he came very close to me and now he is living in my heart. I can share with him my happiness and see him language. I can share with him my sadness and see him crying. My Baba was so mysterious; for me he became my best friend.

Volker Graul

Borgholzhausen, Germany.

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