

# Shaktipat: The Spiritual Awakening

Excerpt from an Intensive talk in January 2008

By Lilavati

I always think of the Intensive as being at the heart of what we do here at the ashram – and it feels on these days that we powerfully connect to the essence of our tradition. The Intensive certainly held a central place for Baba Muktananda – Swamiji’s teacher. Baba developed this one-day program in 1974 as an appropriate form in which to give time-challenged Westerners *Shaktipat* or the awakening of the meditative energy. He revealed what had traditionally been a secret practice in India – only passed on to disciples who had prepared long and hard for the day. Baba, however, had the firm conviction that the awakening should be for everyone.

Baba wrote of Shaktipat, “it is a great and divine science. It is the secret initiation of the greatest of sages and has been passed on from Guru to disciple from the beginning of time”. In other words, it is a lineage and in the mid 1970s he empowered our Swamiji to give Shaktipat and instructed him to hold Intensives. He said of Swamiji, “he is able to carry my message to everyone. He has the power to make people experience the divine presence” and I have certainly found this to be true.

Although I never got to meet Baba in person, from everything Swamiji has said (and from what I experience at our Intensives) I feel like I can imagine what those early days would have been like. And, I think the highlight must have come as Baba

walked around the room to give the formal initiation ...I can picture him in my mind, prowling around the crowd like a lion, bopping each person on the head with peacock feathers, and touching them between the eyes in the area that is called the *ajna* or third eye – the centre of wisdom and understanding. With this act Baba’s own spiritual energy was transmitted to the seeker, and the seeker felt it as a little ripple, a great wave or a powerful surge within their being.

Baba held Shaktipat in the highest regard: he considered it to be the critical event in a person’s spiritual development because it is the moment when the spiritual potential of the individual is awakened. The Shakti (or spiritual energy), which we all carry as a dormant force within us, comes alive with the express purpose of guiding us. The awakening of this energy is (to quote one of Baba’s book titles) the ‘Light on the Path’ – it is the inner illumination that subtly and intelligently directs each of our unique personal journeys. As a consequence of the awakening (and a little nurturing of this energy), the process of meditation and self inquiry begins to flow naturally and powerfully.

Traditionally, Shaktipat is pictured in delightfully colorful terms: kundalini energy is described in the yogic texts as lying at the base of the spine, all curled up and snoozing like a serpent in summer, but – once

woken, through Shaktipat – it comes to life. With the right ‘feeding’ (meditation, mantra, etc.) this Kundalini serpent or Shakti energy grows stronger and more able to do its work. It starts to unfurl, moving up the subtle spine clearing out all the dross and bad feeling in each of the chakras (or energy centres) before it rests in the crown of the head bringing liberation.

Personally I like that description a lot, but if the thought of inner serpents makes you feel disconcerted then think of it simply as an inner energy – the kind we feel when we are at our best, when we are firing on all four cylinders (as my grandmother used to say). Joyful, peaceful, empowered. The kind of energy we sometimes have that gives us the strength and ability to move any bad feeling – things don’t faze us, we feel able not only to cope, but to make good decisions.

In my own experience, coming to the Intensive was quite simply the start of a paradigm shift in my understanding of myself. I wish I could relay to you that when Swamiji gave the touch, I saw colored lights, had great *kriyas* (physical movements of energy) cried or shouted halleluiah. All those things are quite normal for some people – they are part of the purification process of Shaktipat and you shouldn’t be scared of them. But, they weren’t for me. I actually felt a touch envious of those around me who were having these physical manifestations. But I was very ‘solid’ and scared in those days and I think the Shakti knew to treat me very gently.

What I did feel, was a sense of relief. I had been keenly, (even painfully aware) that there was

something in me that wanted attention –an inner need that was becoming very insistent, even if I didn’t quite know what it wanted. It was like half hearing a voice that I knew was trying to say something important but I couldn’t make it out. When Swamiji gave the touch something inside said, “Oh, that’s it! That’s what I wanted, that’s what I needed”. There was some kind of recognition. I didn’t consciously understand what it was, but I did know that it felt right and that was certainly enough to get me interested.

Now, when I say I had a paradigm shift in my life as a result of Shaktipat, you might imagine that I changed my life entirely – and on one level I did, but in another way I didn’t change it at all. On a mundane level, I still do the same job I did 15 years ago (much to my parents’ enormous relief!) I still live in the same flat; I still eat toast with vegemite in the morning, make my bed, take out the garbage, and visit my friends and go to the gym. But on an inner level, I live in an entirely different universe – it is as though I have moved from one world, to another parallel world – both appear the same to the outer eye, but they feel completely different. My world (before awakening) often felt limited, worrisome and sad: my world (post Shaktipat), when I get it right, is humming with energy and possibility, and a kind of burbling sensation of excitement that yogic texts call *spanda*. The world I live in now feels—more often than not—like a giant playground.

I know that I couldn’t have had this shift in my life without both the grace of Shaktipat and the wisdom and love of Swamiji. One of

Swamiji's great achievement is that he is able to give a practical form to the mystical experience – he helps us apply the ancient teachings in our real everyday life. He doesn't encourage us to abandon our families and go and live in a cave meditating and eating the occasional tuber and unsalted bowl of rice. He says instead, that it is a much greater accomplishment to use the understandings gained through the awakening and self-inquiry to live in the world – to deal with your family, to have a career, to negotiate worldly life, to cope with the vagaries of your mind.

Baba also wrote, "You don't need to change your home or your society or even your manners. All that you need to change is your understanding of yourself. Always remain aware of yourself as the Self. That is the essence of all spiritual teachings".

Now it would be tempting to think that once you get Shaktipat, that is it, you will be a ball of blue bliss scintillating through the universe. If that IS how you feel after awakening, then that's great. But let's be practical, it's not going to be like that for most people. As Baba wrote, "When you first receive Shaktipat, you may have an experience of That, [the Self], but to hold that experience, to become established in that experience, you have to practice".

It is for this reason – to help us establish a 'practice' that Swamiji gives us some invaluable tips: how to work with the mind and unblock bad feelings, how to find the upward shift inside of us, how to live our lives in a more intelligent manner. In short, how to find the Self, or what he beautifully calls 'the clear space of good feeling,' and become so

profoundly connected to it that we don't go crazy every time something bad happens to us. Wouldn't you love to not be affected by every little thing that happens to you? Well it is possible to be like that.

One yogic tool that we use is mantra. This might be a new experience to you so I wanted to say a few words about it. In essence, a mantra is a phrase in Sanskrit that we say inwardly, or chant out loud together. The mantra we use in this tradition is 'Om Namah Shivaya' which means, I honor the inner Self, I bow to Shiva or universal consciousness. It is a powerful meditative tool that takes attention away from our thoughts of worry or anger or sadness and focuses us instead on words that have a profound calming power.

You may like to think of it as having a practical use – and mantra certainly focuses the mind and points us to the highest place inside of ourselves – but you may also be attracted to its mystical elements. As we know - words have power – Swamiji often talks about the principle of matrika or the power of language. Om Namah Shivaya is what is called, an alive (or *chaitanya* mantra) and has an inherent power. It has been used effectively by thousands and thousands of meditators throughout the centuries to calm and uplift their minds. I love to think of this lineage when I repeat the mantra: all those fellow travelers—all the yogis, the seekers, the sages, the Saints – all of them turned their minds and their hearts to the mantra when they were troubled, or felt separate or just wanted to feel the strength and stability of these words. The mantra is a precious gift that we can use at any time.

The other day I was speaking with someone who was having serious trouble with his mind, it was acting up. He was plagued by negative thoughts, what Swamiji calls ‘tearing thoughts’. So I asked him what he did about it and he said that because he couldn’t believe any good things about himself he had made a tape of all the bad things he thought and he was playing it back to himself every night. The only problem was, he said, he felt worse.

We have a practice here of using what Swamiji calls ‘A-Statements’ (possible accurate statements) to pinpoint the feeling, but this was a different kind of practice—these were his tearing thoughts projected back to himself. I have to confess that I was horrified and I encouraged him to delete that tape and try listening to the mantra instead.

His approach reminded me of Baba’s well known saying that “our mind can be a garden of Eden or the greatest misery”. It is up to us. But that’s not to say it is easy. It is no small matter. To meditate is an act of a warrior – it is to come face to face with your mind and your feelings – and replace the tape of negative thoughts and emotions with something more positive. It is, as Swamiji says, to learn (through inner means) how to overcome any blocks you have and move – always – towards happiness and upliftment.

Meditation is a fundamental part of this yogic quest and, if you

haven’t meditated before, don’t worry because Swamiji will be giving instructions. Your job today is simply to relax, and to be open. Just accept whatever happens – or doesn’t happen to you – as the right thing. Try it on. Don’t argue with it; just see what happens to your inner space.

Take advantage of the Intensive – let’s face it, its not many days we get where we can forget the outside world and just focus on the inner. So this is your chance to let go, and enter deeply into your own inner space. For some of you it will be your opportunity to begin the practice of meditation, or (if you are already a meditator) to enliven and deepen your experience. It is the opportunity to have an experience that is both extraordinary and potentially transformative: the experience of Shaktipat awakening.

As Baba wrote: “It is essential to waken the inner Kundalini Shakti, According to Shaivism, when one acquires the strength of Kundalini...one no longer remains a limited, bound creature; one achieves total union with God. One merges with Shiva and becomes Shiva.”

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