

Things My Mother Never Told Me

Q&A with Brahmachari Uddhav Chaitanya

What we do with, and how we answer, the countless random questions that spontaneously crop up in our mind can define the fine black or gray line of our (in)sanity. 'Things My Mother Never Told Me' is a compilation of such questions, which need to be correctly interpreted and understood. Keep in mind that all questions and answers apply at the relative level. Since the ultimate goal is the Absolute, the best use of this dialogue would be to strengthen one's foundation and rise above intellectual jugglery.

What is the significance behind the different colors of cloth we see in Chinmaya Mission: the white, the yellow, and the ochre (orange)?

These are the colors that Pujya Gurudev set for his lineage of disciples, so actually, the story and reasoning ends here.

It is important to note that the color of the cloth by itself does not necessarily indicate the level of inner spiritual growth. The scriptures expound on the four castes and their meanings, disciplines, etc., but nowhere does it say that someone is spiritual if and only if he wears a certain color of cloth. This kind of understanding would totally nullify the essence of all our Upanishadic teachings.

In Chinmaya Mission, students entering the ashram as apprentices are instructed to wear only white cloth. This is the first discipline in a line of many. And it helps in many ways, for many reasons, the most important ones being: the loss of vanity, the conservation of mental energy, and the constant reminder of life's purpose and goal.

After completing their studies and stay at the ashram, those students who choose to dedicate themselves to Pujya Gurudev's work and Chinmaya Mission are initiated into the yellow cloth and given a new name. This new name acts as a new birth, especially since you have to go into a field of work where many people once knew you as 'the old you.' A new name indicates a new birth, a new attitude, a new purpose, a new vision. You can call this the intermediate stage, wherein the student is yet to ripen to be able to enter *sannyasa ashrama* and receive the ochre robe. Exactly when the ochre robe will be given to any *brahmachari* is the subjective decision of the spiritual head of Chinmaya Mission.

Being initiated into the ochre robe means one is ripe to enter *sannyasa ashrama* and continue his journey to the Self.

The Vedas specify the ochre robe for *sannyasa ashrama*, but there is no other color specified as such for the other three *ashramas*. This definition in the color of cloth is a discipline that our Gurudev formulated, and today there are other spiritual masters who have also adopted the same format for their lineage.

What symbolism do the yellow and ochre robes carry for you personally?

For me, the yellow cloth symbolizes the brightness of the midday sun that vitalizes and sustains us for dynamic action. But it must be selfless action, so that all our expressions are dedicated to the Lord, for a higher purpose, so that all actions are always a means to purify our instruments.

I see the ochre robe as the orange of the setting sun, where there is no more dynamic activity. All movement, all action—for attaining, achieving, or purifying—is already over and done. Now there is just a flaming, sacred, awesome presence and beauty.

Are there different kinds of *sannyasa*?

There are three kinds that I know of, but there are more:

- *Vividisha sannyasa*: one who is yet learning and perfecting himself to attain the Supreme
- *Vidvat sannyasa*: one who has already attained liberation
- *Atura sannyasa*: one who is initiated into *sannyasa* on his deathbed; there is initiation, but not realization.

Are all *rishis sannyasis*? And are all *sannyasis rishis*? What are the distinctions between these terms: *rishi*, *raja-rishi*, and *brahma-rishi*?

'*Rishi*' means 'a seer of mantras': *mantrah drashtaraha iti rishih*. For example, the seer of *Vishnu Sahasranama* is Rishi Veda Vyasa, and the seer of the *Gayatri Mantra* is Rishi Vishvamitra. One may be a hermit, sage, or *sannyasi*, but to be a *rishi*, one must be a seer of mantras, to whom mantras and their meanings are revealed.

One way to look at the terms '*raja-rishi*' and '*brahma-rishi*' is to consider them as a seeker's evolutionary stages of growth (lower to higher). Another way to look at these terms is as follows: A *kshatriya* who is a seer of mantras is a *raja-rishi*. A *rishi* who is a seer of mantras and is a knower of *Brahman*, is a *brahma-rishi*, like Raja Janaka and Rishi Vishvamitra (who was once a *raja-rishi* named King Kaushika). To be a *brahma-rishi* is to be established in the highest stage of spiritual accomplishment, and thus, the ultimate goal for every *rishi* is to be a *brahma-rishi*. Note that *brahma-rishi* does not refer to a brahmin who is a *rishi*.

Rishis can also be *prajapatis* (mind-born sons of Lord Brahma), who are also known as '*maharishis*.' *Maharishi* means 'great *rishi*,' referring to someone who is an accomplished seer, one who has accomplished something extraordinary, like Maharishi Veda Vyasa.

All *sannyasis* are not *brahma-rishis*, although by definition, the term *svami* (swami) means 'he who is one with the Self.'

There are stories of yogi *baba-jis* (*sannyasis*) who live for hundreds of years. Are they true?

Yes.

Do they live in physical form or in subtle?

Either. A few years ago, some *brahmacharis* and devotees were on a *Char Dham yatra* in India, and we got stuck in a traffic jam in Pippalkoti because of a landslide. We had no complaints though, because it was a scenic and beautiful place. Most of the *brahmacharis* got on top of the bus to have a better view. There we started discussing Vedanta through our *tarka-vitarka* on the text *Panchadashi*. We were talking loudly enough to be heard on the streets below. We must have been there for an hour or so.

Suddenly, on top of the bus climbs this old man in an ochre robe, and he asks us for permission to join the discussion. We were amazed at the mastery and ease of his references to the teachings in *Panchadashi*, the Upanishads, and *Yoga Vasishtha*. We wanted to know more about him, so we asked him to tell us more about himself. He referred to himself as Swami Purushottamananda and said he was happy to interact with disciples of Swami Tapovanji's lineage. He said he had personally known Swami Tapovanji, Swami Sivanananda Maharaj, and many more like them, in the distant past.

On further inquiry, we found out that he was 280 years old. We accepted this as a fact, not something to be questioned or discussed.

In the meantime, a devotee traveling with us came to us with salted peanuts. We asked the devotee to first offer them to the mahatma, which the devotee did. The mahatma took the peanuts, got up, and threw the entire packet on one side of the valley. The surprised devotee was about to ask him why he did that, when the mahatma said, "I don't [need to] eat to live. There is a colony of ants there in search of food, so I have fed them."

He then asked the devotee to check it out and the devotee returned confirming the fact. We were all amazed. After that, he left. He went up the hill and we never saw him again.

Yes, masters also come in subtle form, and there are many, but I can't give references here. Yes, all these experiences are also part of the unreal appearance of the world, but so long as they are needed to point you and your faith in a higher direction, use them for this purpose—as a means to the goal.

Are there spirits and ghosts?

Yes. They are beings existing in subtle body only. But a devotee of God doesn't have to think about, worry about, or fear such things.

Are there astral worlds?

Yes. If we believe in the existence of this world, then astral worlds also exist. 'Astral world' is another term for the 14 *lokas* described in *Shrimad Bhagavatam*. *Lokas* are different levels of consciousness or fields of experience, and Earth is one of them.

Does 'astral body' refer to the subtle body?

Yes. When the subtle body of a living person leaves (not dies) and travels out of his physical body, that subtle body is referred to as an astral body. Astral travel while living in a physical body is possible for highly evolved seekers, but it is not a prerequisite to Self-knowledge. It is not that all evolved seekers travel in their astral body. You cannot determine or judge a person's spiritual growth by whether or not he does astral travel.

Astral travel is only for those seekers who practice certain yoga *sadhanas* for that purpose.

We are often more fascinated with the process and aftermath of death than with life and living. From where do most *jivas*' causal and subtle bodies enter and exit their gross bodies? Is there any significance to the entry and exit points?

In *Aitareya Upanishad*, there is a reference to the *jiva* entering the body through the tenth hole—the top of the skull, which is known as *kapala*. This tenth hole is also known as *sahasrara* and *brahma-randra*. All *jivas* enter the body through the *kapala*, but their exit can technically be from any one of the other nine holes, or *golakas*—orifices of the sense organs (two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, genital organ, and anus).

Generally, if a *jiva* leaves the body from the lower orifices, then the *gati*, or path, of the *jiva* is bound for the lower worlds (below Earth, as given in the *Puranas*). If the *jiva* leaves from the orifices in the head (eyes, nose, ears, mouth), then he is bound for the higher worlds (above Earth). The *jiva* thus goes to its destined field of experience, undergoes various experiences, and comes back to Earth.

When the point of exit from the body is the same as the point of entry—through the *kapala*—it is deemed as 'a perfect exit.' When the final exit is from the skull, it is called *kapala-moksha*, which is how highly evolved beings leave the body. From the absolute standpoint, for a realized master (liberated while living), there is no death of, or final departure from, the physical body, but if we have to verbalize his attaining *mahasamadhi*, it could also be called *kapala-moksha*.

Can a *jiva* be reborn as an inert object?

Yes, a *jiva* can take the form of a man, animal, plant, and even an inert object. Take the example of when Shri Rama freed Ahalya-ji from her curse of being a stone. After a *jiva* finishes his experiences as needed, he moves on; I have heard Gurudev say that (*jivas* in) stones follow the same principle.

In his *Art of Living*, Gurudev refers to "stone-man," "man-man," and "God-man." It is important to note that all opportunities given in this world are for the growth and evolution of the *jiva*. Going to different planes of consciousness, like lower or higher worlds, is based on one's karmas throughout life and one's thoughts at the time of death.

The duration of stay in any field of experience is temporary. To go beyond all fields of experience is the ultimate goal.

Are there different types of *mukti*, different stages or methods of liberation?

- *Jivan-mukti* is *videha-mukti* (liberation from all body-identifications) and this realization is here and now.
- *Krama-mukti* is attaining *Brahma Loka* or *Ishta Loka*; at the end of the creation cycle (*maha-pralaya*), one merges into the Supreme.
- *Sadeha-mukti* is *mukti* along with the body, meaning there is realization at the time of departure from the body. Examples are Mirabai and Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

What is *samadhi* and how does one get it?

Samadhi is the natural state of existence: Being. You don't 'get' it; you have to stop getting everything in order to know it. In Sanskrit, it is known as *praptasya ka praptih*: attaining that which is already existing, already with you. You don't need to try to get it. Know *sadhana* to be the process of purifying the mind and disidentifying with all thought-stuff. Thereafter, whatever is to happen, will happen. You come to recognize your true nature as Being, instead of as a doer and enjoyer.

There are various texts that talk of masters going into *samadhi* and coming out of *samadhi*. What do these phrases mean if *samadhi* is Being, not coming and going?

Phrases like 'going into' and 'coming out of' *samadhi*, or meditation, are used for realized masters due to lack of better terms. There is never a time or place that a realized master is not in *samadhi*, that he is not one with the Self. So his sitting down 'to go into meditation' is just something that we see and verbalize; all of this is in fact our own projection.

Sometimes such phrases are used to describe the stages of growth of highly evolved seekers. They are in learning to abide in the Self—to elongate and expand their stillness in Awareness—which means they have already purified and disidentified with all thought-stuff: thoughts of I-ness, my-ness, and the world (which is nothing but an extended thought of multiplicity).

Such phrases are also used to indicate the difference between the two types of *samadhi*: *savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa*.

Savikalpa samadhi is a lower form of experience in meditation as compared to *nirvikalpa samadhi*. *Savikalpa samadhi* is a state of being, a state of stillness, but this stillness is bound by time and space. A *bhakta's darshana* of *Bhagavan* is *savikalpa samadhi*, because the devotee still has a sense of duality and the sense of time, space, and object.

First the seeker enters into 'realms of meditation' through a concentrated mind. Concentration is not a result of meditation—it is a prerequisite. As the seeker progresses, he glides into deeper states of stillness, but such states are temporary because the mind inevitably starts its play again, due to the force of imposing *vasanas*. This is 'coming out of' the state of stillness or bliss. When it is said a seeker has reached *savikalpa samadhi*, which is definitely a high and accomplished state of meditation, it means that there is still some *vikalpa* in the mind, meaning, the I-thought (and perhaps other thoughts) still exist in the mind. Note that it is possible for the I-thought (*aham-vritti*) to exist without other thoughts (*idam-vrittayaha*), but not the other way around.

Nirvikalpa samadhi is only Silence. When the seeker/observer stops doing/observing and merges into Silence, *savikalpa* transforms into *nirvikalpa*. But know that the observer cannot 'do' the merging; it just happens. There is no 'coming out of' *nirvikalpa samadhi*. This is Being beyond time and space, and this Being extends into wherever you are and whatever you are doing, though technically speaking, in actuality, there isn't even a 'you' left.

If there isn't a sense of individuality left in the realized master, then there isn't a 'realized master.' If this is so, then what we see as 'a realized master' . . . is he just a projection of our mind?

The realized master is Existence in action. Everything is in fact Existence alone. But our focus is on the action, the instruments of action, the false entity known as the doer of the action, the consequences of the action, and so on. These are projections, but Existence is not a projection.

Existence in action does not require a doer to do a deed. Existence in action refers to the conscious principle throbbing with energy. Energy here refers to the spontaneity (will) of

that conscious principle. It should not be understood as the will or impulsiveness of an individual. Consciousness expressing is, again, that which cannot be put into words. It has to be directly experienced. And no, this is not a cop out; there's just no way around it because our instruments are just too limited to grasp the Truth.

But if our instruments are too limited to know the Truth, how will we know It?

You know 'you,' but you will never know 'You.' Don't worry. You'll cross that bridge when you come to it. And yes, you will come to that bridge. And yes, You will know; in fact, You already do.