



Muktananda



I never got what Muktananda was all about.

I saw him in Satsang and Darshan maybe 50 times. His talks were superficial, he would tell jokes that were not funny, he would give Shaktipat (Initiation into Shakti, the Divine energy) by hitting devotees over the head with a peacock feather and not pay any attention to them while doing it. Yet, he was surrounded nightly by a thousand people, including a multitude of celebrities, who worshipped him.

I hung around him when he was in Los Angeles in the winter/spring of 1980-81, mainly to see what was going on and to partake of the sweetness and ecstasy of

Satsang. The chanting was incredibly beautiful and moving. It brought forth a most engrossing and soothing sadness.

Yet, it did not seem that Muktananda was causing this because I felt it even

before I met him, and also after he was long-dead. It was Satsang itself, the music, the instrumentation, and dozens or even hundreds of people singing sacred music together which brought forth the sweetness and bliss. The whole package had just the right mix of everything to create sweetness: free programs, good food and gentle Satsangs that required nothing from attendees. Of course, as around any guru, once you got closer to the source, you got burned.

I was in the company of hundreds of spiritually oriented people and a few real seekers. I felt a little lost and lonely and I became part of something far warmer than the Zen world I had left behind. Satsang was held in a huge semi-permanent tent that could accommodate maybe 800 people, but over a thousand would show up every night. Hundreds had to wait outside or in an improvised second auditorium connected by an audio feed. There were massive amounts of food available at nominal cost.

The tent was located on the beach in Santa Monica, now home to several luxury hotels. It seems Santa Monica's yuppification during the late 80's drove out any spiritual energy whatsoever. The nights were cool and the days sunny.

In order to get closer to the whole experience, I volunteered to be on the security staff, which means I got to be everywhere and see everything and everybody, including Baba close up.

There were perhaps fifteen of Muktananda's 100 swamis there. During the programs, he was surrounded by a phalanx of orange-robed swamis and one or two Rottweilers, who liked to bite you if you tried to pet them. He sat in a high chair overlooking the huge audience. There would be a lot of chanting prior to his talk. You could feel the worship by the hundreds there as they laughed at his Nasrudin jokes that only an insider could appreciate.

At the end of the program would be a long Darshan, where each person came up for Baba's blessing, hoping to experience Shaktipat, the awakening of the kundalini, when hit over the head with a peacock feather. I never got anything because my kundalini had awakened twelve years before.

There were so many people that the Darshan line required devotees to approach four abreast. You can imagine how much time each got. However, when a celebrity approached, he would be tipped off by a swami, and he or she got a lot of air time.

Every couple of weeks we would hold a "Dancing Supta," where instead of the

usual chanting and the long boring Muktananda talk, 800 people (all that would fit in the tent) would circle around the "band" in the center, usually led by his eventual successor, Nityandanda, who now has a small ashram in Walden, New York.

Some of the circling dancers (us), would go into deep states of bliss. At this time, his attendant would "freeze" in the middle of a step and stand motionless in an impossible-to-maintain position. During these Suptas, instead of working security, since Baba was not there, I worked the sound board, which controlled the volume and mix of sounds throughout the tent, balancing instruments and voice.

To me, it was much more a rock concert than spiritual "upliftment," which was the term the swamis used. On the other hand, with all the like-minded energy, blissful states were plentiful for me, and for everyone.

The purported purpose of Siddha Yoga was to awaken the Kundalini energy, which, through its subtle upliftment, caused the sweetness and bliss I felt and a gradual purification and eventual recognition that the self is everything, bliss and love. I never heard anyone talk about the disappearance of self, only about filling the self with love.

People were always talking instead about their experiences, such as seeing lights, feeling ecstatic bliss during meditation, or seeing Baba coming as a vision in a dream and imparting some special something. This is all external stuff on the level of mind. One night a week, one of his devotees would give a talk about how much Muktananda meant to him/her and what experiences the devotee had. These were the even more boring nights. The other nights with Baba and chanting were the ecstatic nights. But it was hard to put up with the guru worship since he was obviously not my guru.



I thought all this rock-concert aspect and guru worship rather funny, but enjoyed the juice of a thousand people chanting and working together. It cured my human loneliness.

The ashram he left behind was just as sweet. On some nights 250 people would come, with the same sweet chanting and Amrit (food).

On October 2, 1982, Muktananda died. The worlds of thousands of Siddha people all over the world were darkened. Just a year before he died, he named his successor, whom he called "Nityananda." Everyone knew he would be his successor, because Muktananda's teacher Baghavan Nityananda (1897-1961 see photo on right), whom he absolutely worshipped, was so named. It was clear that Muktananda knew he was going to die soon. There were a hundred or so very disappointed swamis who had hoped for that position themselves.

Nityananda's sister was so upset and cried and moaned until Muktananda also ordained her, giving her the name Chidvilasananda. A video was made of the ceremony when they were both ordained. It was called "The Passage of Power." I still have a copy.

A few months later, after Baba died, the brother/sister team took over. They appeared lost in their new roles.

Two or three times they came as a couple to the Santa Monica ashram. I was made head of security and of the bodyguards because of my previous experience at the tent on the beach. I enjoyed this even more than being one of many around Muktananda.

As head of security, people actually listened to me for instructions, as opposed to the Zen centers and monasteries, where, as a junior monk, only the mountains listened to me, and then not well.

Spiritually, I was going nowhere during this time. I was feeding off the energy of the crowd, but at least it was warmer than Zen. I had come in out of the cold. I had totally lost the highly focused inner direction that I had when with Kapleau, when I was single mindedly doing self inquiry. Kundalini or no, I was going in the right direction then.

Kundalini was the obstacle that scared me and stopped me; then I went to Sasaki. Had I stayed with him, I would have been O.K. too. But he was too tough for me and the mountain too cold.

But by the time I moved to LA in 1973, all was lost. My direction and energy were gone. I was treading water all through Seung Sahn, Maezumi, Tien-An, the Dalai Lama, and Kozan. Siddha yoga was a pleasant parking place.

Chidvilasananda and Nityananda had a falling-out in 1985. The battle became brutal. She initiated the schism by accusing him of sexual indiscretions. I didn't see why that was a problem, because it was no secret that Muktananda

was doing exactly that for years. Other swamis accused her of greed and wanting it all.

Personally, I never did see the connection between sex and attainment. Robert was a householder for much of his life and it didn't slow his enlightenment. Nisargadatta was a householder and smoked biddhis. Seung Sahn's teacher's teacher was a drunk. Free John was a womanizer as was Sasaki (He may still be at 104.) These are external things, associated with the body-mind; they are of no import whatsoever.

A lot went on in the Ganeshpuri ashram in India. Nityananda and my friend, Shankaranada, were "detained" until Nityananda surrendered any claim in the Sida Yoga organization. They both escaped in the middle of the night.

Siddha yogis all over the world were devastated by the feud and forced to take sides. Chidvilasananda had gained control of all the administrative and financial assets of Siddha yoga, while Nityananda was a refugee with his much smaller following. His picture disappeared from her ashrams all over the world. She was rewriting Siddha history.

After she became boss, when she came to the Santa Monica ashram, I was still made head of security. This happened three or four times. We also traveled to San Diego and other local sites.

During Darshan, she would do the same guru-thing as Muktananda did. As her chief of security and bodyguard, I sat on her left, at her feet, and watched every person that came up for her blessing. Actually, she paid more attention to the devotees than Baba ever had. Of course I loved this role even better, because I was the one who protected her and sat by her feet while 500 people came up. Now that was heady stuff. I could just as easily been a bouncer at a Sting concert.

About a year later, I was fired as a volunteer head of security because one of the swamis, Durgananda, ratted on me to Chidvilasananda that I was not the greatest devotee in the world and was badmouthing her whole setup.

I guess in this way I was like Robert with Yogananda; I didn't see the point of all the practices, the chaos and the patent guru worship. I didn't see what Siddha Yoga offered anyone who wanted to know themselves, ultimate truth, the Absolute. I was only interested chanting, Satsang and hanging around the incredible sweetness of the ashram.

I must say that my chanting experiences were extraordinary, especially the perceiving of a non-moving self, while the world, my mind and my body swirled around it. The inner world of light intensified and was everywhere. It is always there, but the chanting drives the mind inward and one can see it.

Sometimes Nityananda would come to Santa Monica for his own Satsang, set up in a different location by his own devotees. These were very interesting times as the whole situation came very close to violence on several occasions. Nityananda and one of the swamis were followed by some of her henchmen and threatened. I know; I was with one of the Swamis when it happened. The threats were of physical injury and disrupted Satsangs, which happened.

I remember when some of his Satsangs were picketed by Chid devotees and Satsang cancelled because so many of the attendees were unfamiliar faces. Each side videotaped the other. Previous Nityananda Satsangs were stink-bombed. The Santa Monica police department was there to prevent violence.

Once, when I was in a car with Shankarananda, we were accosted by Chid "mercenaries" and henchmen who yelled at Shanks that he and Nityananda should leave town and get out of the guru business. These were interesting times. Shanks kept a lot of people around his apartment in Santa Monica as he expected a mid-night visit from Chid's stormtroopers.

Unbelievably, Shankarananda still respects her.

The main practices for outsiders were chanting, repeating mantras, reading the scriptures, doing volunteer work around the ashram, and trying to follow Muktananda's advice, "Love thyself." Of course, that was the rub; what self was he talking about and how do you love that which you do not know? How do you find that self when I had looked endlessly and found nothing?



[Nityananda](#), unlike Chid, was very quiet and unassuming. He did not stand out. He did not appear to have anything special. This to me is a mark of some attainment. He is a fantastic drummer and I highly recommend his chanting tapes. They are better than anything else out there. Nothing touches them. If you want bliss, the tapes will give it to you. I have not seen him in maybe 20 years, so I have no idea how or what he is like now. Perhaps he has become as deep as Muktananda's teacher.

Siddha yoga, in my estimation, cannot take you beyond life and death. I know this may offend thousands of Siddha Yoga people out there, and maybe Baba's way can and does lead to enlightenment for some. However, although self was talked about all the time, I did not get a clear idea where it fit into the picture, and how loving oneself, when you don't know what self was, could help.

How do you generate spontaneous love? The blissful states of chanting were entirely different from love. Therefore, there are ecstatic states, relatively easily attained, and then a command to love yourself, as if you knew what self was and how to generate love.

Muktananda's swamis also tend to be negative towards Advaita, including Shankarananda, who didn't like any of my teachers. Shanks would expand this to mean that a lot that passes for Advaita is just talking head stuff, without any practices or effort; all was just an intellectual understanding. He calls it California Advaita. I agree with that. Most of what now passes for Advaita is talking head stuff, without any practice or juice.

The real stuff requires turning inward for a time, longer or shorter, in a journey towards self discovery. Without this work, the practice is lifeless.
