Answers to Basic Spiritual Questions of Sadhaks

Swami Shantananda Puri
Q.1. On which symbol or God should I meditate? Or which God should I choose for worship?

A. Ultimately there is only one God who is the Self (Atman) or the Supreme Conscious Being. Among all the other forms of Gods, a rough formula for choice could be in the following priority:

1. Self (Atman) or the Supreme Conscious Being
2. Supreme Being who only exists and manifests himself in the form of various forms (Gods).

In making your choice, consider that He is the highest, most ultimate, and the purest form of the God. In whichever form (Ram, Krishna, Christ, etc.) you worship, consider that He is the Supreme Being who only exists and manifests himself in the form of various forms (Gods). The Guru is the best judge to choose which form of God is the most suitable for you.
2. An Infinite God without form and without attributes (NIRAKARA & NIRGUNA)

3. A Supreme formless God with all attributes of love, kindness, compassion etc. (as in Christianity) (NIRAKARA but SAGUNA)

4. Any Personal God with form (SIVA, VISHNU etc.) and all attributes, according to one’s own preference.

Any one of these will lead ultimately to God Realisation.

Q.2. What is the difference between Self-realisation (Atma Sakshatkara), God Realisation and Mukti or Moksha (liberation)?

A. There is no difference at all. These are all different terminologies used to denote one and the same experience. By knowing the Self or God, one puts an end to the cycle of birth and death and the same experience is known as Mukti or Moksha.

The definition and concept of Mukti is different in different religions and systems of philosophy (viz. Jainism, Buddhism etc.).
Q.3. What is Ignorance and how does it cause sorrows, sufferings, lack of peace of mind, unhappiness etc.? How can we remove it?

A. Due to past conditioning, each individual identifies himself with the body-mind complex. Even though he himself is the immortal Supreme Consciousness of the nature of Bliss unlimited by Time, Space, Objects and Causation and not limited by a body, he superimposes on himself all the characteristics and limitations of the body—viz., mortality or death, ageing, unhappiness, relationship with others, and becomes unhappy. This state of wrong identification of the Self with the body is called ignorance. By knowing the Real Self i.e. who we really are, we dispel the ignorance.

For example, in a room where there are different bulbs of different voltages—zero watt, 60 watt, 200 watt, 1000 watt, the bulbs are different in colour, age, capacity and are vulnerable to breakage (death). But all these bulbs are fed with only one electric energy coming through a single set of wires but due to different conditioning (resistance), these bulbs run at different voltages, and hence undergo different miseries and sufferings. The same holds good for human beings. The body-mind complex suffers and sorrows, due to wrong identification. The bulbs are different in the nature of the electric energy which runs through them. The body-mind complex is different in the nature of Bliss unlimited by Time, Space, Objects and Causation and the body is not a different source of Bliss.

Meditation on the Lord is the most efficacious method for removing ignorance.
Q.4. Is a Guru necessary? Can we not proceed on this path on our own with the help of books etc.?

A. When this question was put to Ramana Maharshi, he quipped – “Is a mother necessary for a child?” He himself clarified elsewhere as follows:

The real Guru is God or your own Self, who resides in the heart. Except aspirants in a very high stage of evolution (who also may have had Gurus in their past lives), most of the devotees will not be able to take guidance from their own Self. So God, in His Grace, leers pity on the loving devotee and manifests Himself as a human form according to the devotee’s standards. Even though the external Guru is God or Self, He resides within the devotee, who works from within, the external Guru gives the right guidance. The external Guru is the real Guru, who resides in the heart. The real Guru is God or your own Self, who resides in the heart.

Chaos and confusion would result if the right of real experience could not be interpreted properly in our scriptures. Our scriptures and the books of other religions do not give guidance suited to the constitution and the individual has different constitutions and different physical conditions. Each devotee thinks intuitively that he is a man. Even though the external Guru is God or Self, the external Guru is also the internal Guru. The books, if not properly interpreted in the light of real experience, could result in chaos and confusion.

Q.4. Is a Guru necessary? Can we not proceed on this path on our own with the help of books etc.?
Q.5. How shall I find a proper Guru who will guide me? Can I change my Guru if the first one dies or if I find a more brilliant and acceptable Guru subsequently? If I find that my Guru is a hypocrite or a rogue indulging in sex and fraud, can I abandon him?

A. When once we increase our longing for God to a volcanic extent and pray to God to provide us with a Guru, we will definitely get the proper Guru in external form as verily the Self, the Sadguru in external form is verily the God. The Guru will walk into our life.

As the Sadguru in external form is verily the Self, the guidance will continue to pour even after the external Guru ceases to exist in his body. No Guru can be expected to live as long as we live. The Guru chosen once is verily the God-incarnate and he is not the human body, hence the question of abandoning him at any stage and elsewhere does not arise.

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When our longing for God becomes deep and intense, all guidance will flow from within. Further, when our longing attains a level where the mind is absorbed and merged with the God, the Guru will walk into our life.

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Q.6. I have some vague inclination towards God. It is all lukewarm. I do not feel inclined to read any books on religion or spirituality, as I find them confusing and sometimes mutually contradictory. How should I proceed?

A. You have to increase your longing for God—till it becomes an agony and a torture. For that purpose you should get such a holy company, you may even be of non-holy company, you may even read books on non-religious subjects and dark and gloomy conversations about them. In case you do not get such a holy company, you may seek the company of evolved souls, holy men and devotees of a higher order. The procedure mutually contradictory. How should I proceed?

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You in due course will become devoted to the deities of your own choosing, like Shiva, Buddha, and the like. The dearth of deities and the poor distribution of clothes and bread to the poor hospitals and old age homes, collecting aid for helping the blind, old and helpless in the world are all considered as satsang. In your spare time, you can also do some selfless social service. You can also do some selfless social service. These will also be considered as satsang. In your spare time, you can also do some selfless social service. These will also be considered as satsang. In your spare time, you can also do some selfless social service. These will also be considered as satsang. In your spare time, you can also do some selfless social service. These will also be considered as satsang. In your spare time, you can also do some selfless social service.
Q. Why do we need God? Where does He reside? How can we get Him?

A. Everybody wants to have unlimited happiness and to eliminate all sorrows, miseries, sufferings etc., from his life. God is the Super Bazar where alone you get genuine happiness.

As we have stated in an earlier answer, all these sorrows etc., are as a result of not knowing our own Self i.e. who we are in reality. Self is the key to one’s happiness and reality. Self is the key to one’s happiness and reality. God-realisation is the only answer to ultimate happiness.

The personal gods with form and attributes, being the manifestations of the very Self, should not be considered as a concession to the ignorant because they are also ultimately the Real because they are also ultimately real.

The regions like Kailash or Vaikunta where the personal gods are supposed to reside are as real as this world and can be seen in different planes of consciousness. The person who knows that he is the Real, gets God-realisation.

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To realise God or Self, there are infinite paths. Meditation, Prayers, Devotion and Self-enquiry are some of the more common

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methods.
Q.8. What is meditation and how does it differ from prayers? How should I do meditation?

A. According to a Mahatma, when you talk to the Lord and He listens, it is prayer. When He talks and you listen in silence, it is meditation. There are readymade prayers as in the Shanti Mantras of Upanishads and various Stotras (hymns of praises) in Puranas and those composed by saints of repute like Adi Sankara. One could also talk to God and praise Him in one's own words.

Meditation is defined in various ways by different masters. Continuously fixing the attention of the mind on a single thing, say God, and holding on to that thought without breaking the continuity is meditation. It is called Dhyana in Sanskrit.

It is the art of raising the intensity of our inward consciousness so as to merge with God, and holding on to that thought of the mind on a single thing, say "OM" in one's own words. One could also talk to God and praise Him in one's own words. The Super-conscious mind is so calm that even prayer done with an emotional upsurge leads to meditation and numerous established ways of doing meditation are left behind. These are the ultimate Absolute Duty. There are numerous established ways of doing meditation, so as to merge with God, and holding on to that thought of the mind on a single thing, say "OM" in one's own words.
Q.9. What is Diksha or Initiation? How does it help?

A. In the traditional way, whenever a Guru is approached by a seeker or aspirant, the former gives him a Mantra (sacred syllables) relating to the latter's spiritual needs. This is a preliminary and preparatory step to the actual spiritual powers. The Guru then teaches the aspirant how to use these Mantras and the latter begins to awaken his spiritual powers. There are various other kinds of Dikshas, through the eye, through touch, etc.

Q.10. What actually is a Mantra and how is its Japa to be done? How does it help in spiritual progress?

A. Sages (Rishis) of yore, after a lot of meditation and purification of their mind, used to get certain sacred syllables (say OM NAMAH SIVAY) through inspiration from God. They continued to recite them for years from morning to night, keeping their mind concentrated on them and considering them as the very manifestation of God. As a result, their mind becomes so pure that it attains a higher state of consciousness. They begin to experience spiritual powers. These powers are considered as secret and are contained in texts (like MANTRA MAHODADHI) which form part of Mantra Sastra (scriptures relating to Mantras), in Tantric texts and in Puranas also. Each mantra is to be accompanied by a gesture of aspiration (Namaskar) and not if practised by reading.
them from a book or text. The continuous Japa can lead to meditation, cessation of mind and even up to the Samadhi stage which results in God-realisation.

For Japa purposes, certain sects in Christianity use “Jesus, have mercy on us” as a mantra. Similarly, hymns from ‘Jap Ji’ of GURU NANAK DEV are also used by some as Mantras. If done with Faith, these are all effective.

There are a number of Mantras which are effective from each syllable of a Mantra, a particular energy emanates each of which is capable of eliminating a particular type of desires and destroying all the vasanas.

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In modern days, many of the Mantras are created by the Gurus themselves, either by creating new Mantras or by developing new Mantras from old Mantras. These Mantras are then taught to the disciples by the Gurus.

However, there are also many Mantras which are not created by the Gurus and are simply copied from various sources such as books or other Mantras. These Mantras are often used by the disciples of the Gurus and are taught to them by the Gurus.

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Q.11. What is 'NAMASMARANAM'?

A. Constant remembrance of God is the key to God-realisation. All people irrespective of caste, creed or sex (including those who haven’t been initiated by any Guru) can go on reciting mentally or loudly the name or series of names of God e.g.

(1) RAM
(2) HARE KRISHNA HARE KRISHNA KRISHNA KRISHNA HARE HARE
(3) HARI OM
(4) SRI RAM JAI RAM JAI JAI RAM

This is NAMA SMARANAM. While Japas are governed by a set of rules and Divine energies emanate which help in eliminating our conditioning (vasanas) and raising our level of consciousness, taking the name of the Lord can be done anywhere and anytime. If done with dedication and intense devotion Namasmaranam is considered to be as effective as Japa or meditation. Even for taking the name, if it is given by a Guru, it can be more effective.

There are also scriptural texts containing 108 or 300 or 1000 names of each God e.g. SIVA ASHTOTTARAM, LALITA TRISHATI, VISHNU SAHASRA NAMA STOTRAM etc. The regular recitation of these hymns of God’s names can also be categorised under namasman or prayers. In the case of certain Stotras (hymns) and ashtottaras, there are no rules for their recitation, similar to namasman. The regular recitation of these hymns of God’s names can be considered as prayers in the context of namasman. All people irrespective of God’s name or belief can have namasman, a form of meditation. 

V. Q.11. What is NAMASMARANAM?
Q.12. What are prayers?

A. Prayers are in effect talking to God. Prayers can take any one of the following forms:

- Praise of God and His glories or seeking material favours like promotion, getting a job or a son or money etc. or seeking spiritual favours like pure devotion, etc.
- Talking about one's problems in family, daily life, office or in meditation and otherspiritual aspects.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Paramhansa Yogananda, etc., used to talk to God daily. The book „Letters from Brother Lawrence“ or „Practising the presence of God“ used to be recommended by Swami Vivekananda.

Prayers can be done as a separate sadhana or be recommended by Swami Vivekananda.

Those who are constitutionally more emotional and those who find themselves unable to sit in Japa or meditation will find prayers as an easy method to keep the mind engaged in God and to develop concentration. Those who are constitutionally more effective in spiritual essays and allied texts will be more prone to Japa, Namaskaram and Sandhyavani (study of scriptures and allied texts) than prayers.

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- Praises in effect talking to God.
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- Talking about one's problems in family, daily life, office or in meditation and otherspiritual aspects.

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Q.13. During meditation or Japa, my mind never remains still even for a moment. As manytimes as I resolve to bring the mind back to God and concentrate, it slips away and is busy with various thoughts relating to worldly affairs. What shall I do to control the mind so that it can concentrate on God?

A. This is a problem which is common to 99% of the Sadhaks (seekers or aspirants). In Bhagavad Gita also, this very question is put to Sri Krishna by Arjuna.

For births and births most of us have been engaged in worldly affairs, running a family life, profession or business, the social life, politics etc. When all our life is engaged in worldly matters it is but natural that even when you sit for meditation, the mind continues to revolve around worldly matters.

According to Lord Krishna, the only means to control the mind are repeated practice (Abhyasa) and Dispassion. The mind cannot be controlled if one does not want to control it. The mind is like a river which flows and meanders in continuous meanders and meanders. The mind of those people who want to control the mind continues to revolve around worldly affairs when you sit for meditation, the mind continues to meander.

As per Gita, "The mind of those people who are engaged in continuous activities and wallowing or engaged in riches and enjoyment of sense objects can never be made to remain quiet."

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The question: Even though I have had initiation from a Guru and am practising Japa, meditation and Vairagya, I continue to be assailed by sexual thoughts and impulses of passion. Sometimes I like to indulge in sex and even otherwise have impure thoughts and indulge in sex, though I try to control myself. How can I get rid of such sexual tendency and thoughts which are becoming a hindrance to my progress in meditation and Yoga? Even though I have had initiation from a Guru, how can I get rid of these sexual thoughts and the desire to indulge in sex?

The answer:

1. Intensify Japa and meditation.
2. Daily weep before God in private.
3. Avoid reading all newspapers, magazines, fiction and books of sensational stories relating to sex.
4. Avoid the company of those people who indulge in sexual talks.

KAMA VASANA i.e. sexual attraction is extremely difficult to be quelled and even saints and sages have fallen a prey to it. During their Sadhana days. It is the grace of God alone which can completely annihilate this vasana. It is the grace of God and Guru alone which can completely quell and extirpate this evil desire, which is extremely difficult to get rid of. Intensify Japa and meditation.

KAMA VASANA: Sexual attraction is very difficult to be quelled and even saints and sages have fallen a prey to it. During their Sadhana days. It is the grace of God and Guru alone which can completely annihilate this vasana. The following methods could be used:

1. Intensify Japa and meditation.
2. Daily weep before God in private and pray to Him sincerely for His grace.
3. Avoid reading all newspapers, magazines, fiction and books of sensational stories relating to sex.
4. Avoid the company of those people who indulge in sexual talks.
5. Avoid the company of the opposite sex, especially when alone, even if they are good devotees of God doing sadhana and get out of such company with some excuse.

6. Try to go to Satsangs, participate in Bhajans, and cultivate the company of holy men who are highly evolved.

7. Talk to your Guru (if he is a mature and evolved soul) and some of them could help you with a special Mantra or a Bijakshara (a single syllable) which is specific for this vasana.

8. Read the autobiographies and biographies of old and latest saints like Tuka Ram, Jnaneswar, Purandara Das, Nam Dev, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Bhagavan Ramana, etc. daily.

9. Many suggest that one should look at the other sex as one's own mother or father as the case may be. In most cases, this theoretical advice fails.

10. According to some, the daily reading of LALITA SAHASRANAMA STOTRA and VISHNU SAHASRANAMA STOTRA also (if possible) has been found extremely beneficial. According to others, the daily reading of the methods suggested above should be combined with the rest of the prayer or the Vasana is the best but continuous and regular prayer to God is the first one of the Vasana is the best.
Q.15. What is PRARABDHA or destiny on account of past actions? Is our entire life pre-destined including God-realisation? What is the role of self-effort and free will? How does Prarabdha differ from Vasanas (past latent tendencies)?

A. Even scientifically, every action must have a reaction (Newton's law of motion). In the same way, if we do any bad action in this life, we cannot get away with it. Every action has an impression in our sub-conscious mind. This impression is called Vasana.

Apart from the impression that it leaves in the form of events and happenings, in the form of bad or good, it also has a secondary effect. Every action has a reaction. After the action is done, it is reflected in the form of Prarabdha or destiny.

Even scientifically, every action must have a reaction.
will be a conflict of vasanas and the stronger one whose impression is deeper due to more repetition will win the day and we will act as dictated by that vasana. Vasanas ... according to the script of the story. But while acting in a drama or cinema, the vasanas are completely pure.

In acting, every action and dialogue in a drama or film is memorized and rehearsed a number of times. The vasanas are not manipulable unlike the vasanas in our life. But while acting in a drama or film, we can choose to resist or overcome the vasanas and act according to our own free will. Similarly, while acting in life, we can choose to resist or overcome the vasanas and act according to our own free will.

Our mind is God. He only requires our self effort to direct and maintain our mind on Him and pray to Him. By preventing us from keeping our mind on God, our vasanas may become powerful. Keeping our mind on God will prevent our vasanas from becoming powerful.

If we continuously resist the power of the vasanas, we can fully overcome them. By reserving our vasanas, we can overcome the vasanas. By preventing the vasanas from becoming powerful, we can fully overcome them. By reserving our vasanas, we can overcome the vasanas.
Q.16. How can we remove the bad vasanas?

A. Theoretically it can be done by superimposing good vasanas but in practice it becomes impossible more often. Guru's grace is capable of removing all the bad vasanas. Similarly prayers to God are equally effective.

Each time a bad vasana propels your mind to do a bad action—say, playing cards for stakes or playing dice—fight against it. Delay or postpone the action and try to do some other action. Finally, despite all your efforts, you may succumb to your vasanas. It does not matter. If you continue to fight against your bad vasanas every day, inspire of your successive failures, each time your will gets strengthened little by little, so that a day will ultimately dawn when you will be able to exercise your free will unimpeded over coming the vasanas.

Occasional fasting, resorting to silence for a day every week or for a few hours everyday and breathing exercises called Pranayama are all very helpful.

The method of looking at the vasanas soon after succumbing to them impartially without judgement or criticism as detailed in method 11 of answer to question 14 regarding quelling of sexual thoughts and impulses holds good in this case too.
Q.17. How can we know whether we have got God or Self-realisation?

A. In the case of an individual who is Self-realised, the limited I or ego identifying with a particular body no longer remains as it has merged in the Supreme Consciousness. The Self or Atman is always ever liberated (NITYA MUKTA) and ever enlightened (NITYA BUDDHA). Anyone who thinks that he is Self-realised, anyone who thinks that he is not Self-realised, anyone who thinks that he is anywhere in between (NITYA MUKTA and NITYA BUDDHA) is not Self-realised. The idea that I am Self-realised never arises in him. He is always ever liberated and always ever enlightened. He is in the Supreme Consciousness of the Supreme Self. He is the Supreme Self in the Supreme Consciousness and forever. He is the Supreme Body and forever. He is the Supreme Body and forever.

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Q.18. What is Ego or 'I' and how does it harm us? How can it be removed?

Whenever an individual says “I have taken my lunch” or “I gave a talk”, he identifies himself with his body-mind complex. Actually every individual consists of different machines; it is the one God or Self who is activating all these machines to do their respective jobs and the machines have no right to consider themselves as the doers. In a workshop, where there are different machines doing different jobs, if we ask them to report their results, good or bad, leading to joy or sorrow, they would do so; but we, the human beings, are so stupid that we think those machines are doing them, and we experience joy or sorrow, happiness, health, and death and all other things. This is the self which we consider as “I”. The individual begins to think that he is the doer of all actions and for those actions the individual begins to think that he is the one God or Self who is activating all. If once we realise that we are not the doers and it is the one God or Self who is activating all, we have no right to the results of actions. Then the individual begins to think that he is the one God or Self who is activating all. If once we realise that we are not the doers and the doers are different from the Self, then this Ego or ‘I’ gets annihilated by constant Self-enquiry as to “Who am I?” as advocated by Ramana Maharshi. The Ego also gets completely eliminated. The Ego also gets completely eliminated. The Ego is nothing but the body-mind complex. Whenever an individual says “I have taken my lunch” or “I gave a talk”, he identifies himself with his body-mind complex. Actually every individual consists of different machines; it is the one God or Self who is activating all these machines to do their respective jobs and the machines have no right to consider themselves as the doers. In a workshop, where there are different machines doing different jobs, if we ask them to report their results, good or bad, leading to joy or sorrow, they would do so; but we, the human beings, are so stupid that we think those machines are doing them, and we experience joy or sorrow, happiness, health, and death and all other things. This is the self which we consider as “I”. The individual begins to think that he is the doer of all actions and for those actions the individual begins to think that he is the one God or Self who is activating all. If once we realise that we are not the doers and it is the one God or Self who is activating all, we have no right to the results of actions. Then the individual begins to think that he is the one God or Self who is activating all. If once we realise that we are not the doers and the doers are different from the Self, then this Ego or ‘I’ gets annihilated by constant Self-enquiry as to “Who am I?” as advocated by Ramana Maharshi. The Ego also gets completely eliminated. The Ego also gets completely eliminated.
Q. 19. According to Buddhists, ultimately there is no Self or Soul or God and it is all a void, a nothing (Soonya). Why can't we accept it?

A. Only those who have experienced or seen such instances, Ramakrishna Paramhamsa and Bhagawan Ramana are instances of God or Spirit. The same is the case here. On the contrary, you were yourself present in that place, do you know what nobody was there unless you experienced it yourself. Even Buddha is stated to have refused to comment either way when he was specifically asked whether there was a Soul (5004a) or nothing (5004b) that only represents a particular higher stage of consciousness, which is the mention of Void (Soonya) or That only represents a particular higher stage of consciousness.

Even in our scriptures like Devi Kalottaram, there is mention of Void (Soonya) or Mahasoonya. That only represents a particular higher stage of consciousness.

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Q.20. Some people say that merely reading or reciting blindly the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, Guru Bani (of Sikhs) etc. is of no use, unless we understand the meaning and adopt them in practice. Any sadhana done with faith and devotion is an effective sadhana. 

A. Any sadhana done with faith and devotion is an effective sadhana, provided it is done with faith and devotion. Otherwise, it is of no use. 

Faith (sraddha) is the key to God-realisation. Constant worship and devotion help in deepening our preoccupation with God. Have faith in God, have faith in the scriptures, have faith in our Guru. Have faith in the holy name of God. By faith, we mean that we trust in the power of God and His grace. 

In all the scriptures like Srimad Bhagavatam, Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram etc., it is clearly mentioned that all those who read or hear even a very small part of the scriptures will be raised in their consciousness in the body. The vibrations emanating from the words, each syllable of which is an energy capsule, will be absorbed by the body and mind and will increase our consciousness. 

Further, the level of consciousness and our fitness for higher spiritual experiences increase only when our body and mind is filled with satwa guna (pure consciousness). Just as earth has the quality of smell, water of taste, fire of form etc., the essential quality of space is sound. Hence the more the sound of such holy and religious texts goes in and out of the body, the more the sound permeates the body, the more the consciousness is increased. 

Constant remembrance of God is the key to God-realisation and anything which helps in it is an effective sadhana. Constant worship and devotion help in deepening our preoccupation with God. Have faith in God, have faith in the scriptures, have faith in our Guru. Have faith in the holy name of God. By faith, we mean that we trust in the power of God and His grace. In the west, in the churches, all the masses and prayers used to be conducted in the Latin language which was not known to many and similarly, in India, most of the poojas (worship) and prayers are conducted in Sanskrit language. 

Hence the more the sound of such holy and religious texts goes in and out of the body, the more the consciousness is increased. Hence the more the sound of such holy and religious texts goes in and out of the body, the more the consciousness is increased. Hence the more the sound of such holy and religious texts goes in and out of the body, the more the consciousness is increased.

Q.20. Some people say that merely reading or reciting blindly the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, Guru Bani (of Sikhs) etc.
Q.21. Is renouncing the family and worldly life and becoming a sannyasi (monk) essential for God-realisation?

A. While in family and worldly life, if one can do intense sadhana under the guidance of an evolved Guru, one can definitely reach a very high level of spiritual progress. For instance, Tuka Ram. What is essential is doing all our actions in life without attachment, remaining established in absolute celibacy (Brahmacharya Nishta) and without any desires or attachment for any worldly object including the family. He should be bereft of likes and dislikes and should be bear all the joys and miseries and duties of life without any emotions or attachments remaining established in absolute celibacy (Brahmacharya Nishta) and doing all our actions in life without any desires or attachment.
Q.22. Can’t we attain God by Karma alone, i.e. by doing service to the poor and the needy, to patients suffering from diseases, building schools, hospitals and temples, looking after the animals etc.?

A. The scriptures declare that liberation (on account of God-realisation) can result from Self-knowledge (Jnana) alone. Adi Sankara has declared unilaterally that while Karma is useful for purification of the mind it cannot be considered as a direct means for Self-realisation even to it. Ramana Maharshi also has emphasised and reiterated these views at the very start of his book – “Upadesa Saram”.

The sadhana for God-realisation has two parts. The first part is purification of the mind. The second part is God-realisation which is dependent upon the first. For people with preponderance of Rajo Guna given to a lot of dynamic activity like Arjuna in Bhagavad Gita and also for people whose faith in God and scriptures is not very strong in Bhagavad Gita and Norse, Vivekananda said, “It is good to be born in a church and not to die there.” We should know when to get out of Karma Yoga and when to stay."
move into the path of devotion or Jnana. Devotion or Bhakti automatically leads one to Jnana and vice versa. We come to know fully of the one whom we love. So also we begin to love the one whom we know as perfect.

Q.23. Many Sadhaks claim to have had visions of God, of divine light, of a blue pearl or heard various sounds like that of a flute or a veena (a stringed instrument) etc. Are they signs of God-realisation or at least do they signify substantial progress in the spiritual path?

A. As the result of persistent sadhana, some Sadhaks may get such experiences of God-vision, light, sound etc., but they disappear also after some time. They are all due to an uncontrolled mind and are not proof of God-realisation. They are mere experiences arising from an uncontrolled mind. Hence, they cannot be taken as a sign of spiritual progress or God-realisation.
The percentage of progress is very high in various ways and for everyone who has engaged in them will he less. It is believed, however, that even the mission of God is not fulfilled if he is not prepared to take advantage of the presented走过. He was not prepared to go on to America because first he was God-inspired. When the opportunity for God-inspired actions is presented, one may fall into the error of believing them as acceptable. So called inspired ideas are accepted without any judgment. When the mind gets completely purified and rid of likes and dislikes, desires and attachment, the voice of God can be heard. Till that time, the voice of God can be heard. Only when the mind gets completely purified can one be attributed to the inspiration come from God. Any claim that the command had come from God and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous and that they were spontaneous...
Q.25. Is ability to perform miracles like materialising objects or possession of mystic powers like divining the mind, predicting future events, healing diseases etc., a sign of Realised-Souls? How can we develop such powers?

A. While doing sadhanas by certain methods like Pranayamas of various kinds, Tantric Path, Kundalini Yoga and other yogic practices, one develops certain powers. These are signs of God-Realisation and they are useful in helping people to overcome their difficulties, to help them in their sadhana, and in some cases to uplift them from their deep trouble by going to some mystic personages. For a sadhak it is wise not to indulge in their demonstration but to ignore them and go ahead with their sadhana. Sadhanas are always advised not to be used in exhibiting the powers possessed in culture. Certain powers are considered in certain practices (like that of Pranayama and meditation) in order to be used to influence the devotees as they want. There are instances of people getting into deep trouble by going to some unscrupulous miracle-mongers. For a sadhak it is wise not to develop such powers or to possess the powers. These are signs of God-Realisation and not of Realised-Souls. However, some Siddhas (perfect masters) who inherit these powers as a result of sadhana in their previous births, are sometimes divined by some miraculous powers like healing the lamé or to help people in their distress. Some people have experienced some powers, and the same powers have appeared in the mind of other persons while doing meditation. These are signs of Realisation and not of Realised-Souls. There are, however, some Siddhas (perfect masters) who develop such powers like predicting future events, holding diseases like electricity, making objects or possession of objects, displaying the mind, etc. However, these powers are always advised against and not to be used by a sadhak.
Q.26. What is Samadhi state? How to reach it?

A. Samadhi state is the last stage of super-consciousness where one gets merged in the Supreme Self who is the Self of all. At that stage one is not aware of one's body, separate existence, feelings, thoughts, or actions. One is one with the All. Even those who reach the Savikalpa stage will finally reach Nirvikalpa Samadhi in due course.

Q.27. How can I know whether a person is a realised soul so that I could adopt him as my Guru?

A. As all the characteristics of a liberated soul delineated in the scriptures e.g., being alike to censure and praise, not giving offence to anyone are objective evidences, one can use them to give an acid test for distinguishing a liberated soul. But the following broad lines can be used with advantage:

1. He will not be attached to any possessions.
2. He will not be interested in the material world and will not be after earning money, fame, name, and fame. He will not be after earning money, fame, name, and fame.
3. He will not be interested in any acchees, passions, and in the material world.
4. He will be naturally humble, shunning all publicity and will not be after earning money, fame, name, and fame.
5. He will not be attached to any possessions.

In short, the following points can be used with advantage to identify a realised soul. But the characteristic features delineated in the scriptures are objective evidences, and one can use them to give an acid test for distinguishing a liberated soul.
Be still and know God. God has to be experienced in silence. He is not to be known through contemplation. Finally, if one can be in communion with God, it can be done while one is in the flow of life itself. One should treat all with equal vision, irrespective of caste, colour, money, education, etc. He likes to hear Bhajans, Namasankirtana (chanting the names of God), and Bhagavata Purana, Devi Dasa, Swamiji. Bhajans are helpful in concentration. Finally, God has to be obtained in silence, in stillness. "Be still and know God."
Q.29. Why should God give sufferings, miseries and sorrows to people?

A.

God never gives sufferings to anybody. All the sorrows and sufferings are of our own making, the result of our own past actions. For the river of life to flow, it requires a struggle, a friction. In the same way, it is only in suffering that many people begin to think—think of the difference in this spiritual world. It is only when they see suffering that they begin to think. If a boat requires a struggle to reach the bank, every sorrow is a ladder to approach God.

Every suffering is a ladder to approach God.

It awakens a slumbering man from his indifference to his spiritual weal. It is only in suffering that many people begin to think about God and praying to Him.

Q.30. How long will it take a Sadhak to achieve his goal of Self-realisation? Is it possible to assess one's progress from time to time?

A.

Nowhere it is laid down that after doing so much Japa or so many hours of sadhana God-realisation will take place. Further, we do not know how much of sadhana has to be done to achieve God-realisation. Hence, it is not possible to assess our progress from time to time.

As the entire progress takes place inside on an immeasurable plane it is not possible for anybody to assess their own progress on this plane. We have to go with the flow, that is, with every action we have to go with the flow. The only way to assess the overall progress on this plane is by what we achieve on the surface plane.

The Master told him, “Just as this boat requires two paddles, we require both joy and sufferings to run this boat of life.”

The “boat” of joy and sufferings to run this boat of life, we require both—joy and sufferings. However, the Master said, “just as this boat requires two paddles, we require both—joy and sufferings.”

It is God’s grace alone which is the most important factor in achieving God-realisation. Hence, there is no way to assess the progress inside on a plane that is immeasurable, unmeasurable. Hence, it is not possible for anybody to assess their own progress from time to time.

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As the entire progress takes place inside on an immeasurable plane it is not possible for anybody to assess their own progress on this plane. We have to go with the flow, that is, with every action we have to go with the flow. The only way to assess the overall progress on this plane is by what we achieve on the surface plane.
Lord Krishna's injunction is that one should approach a wise person well established in the knowledge of Final Truth and learn by questioning him thoroughly but in all humility in all matters relating to spiritual practice and the ultimate truth. The Scriptural injunction to the teachers is that one should never speak voluntarily on spiritual things unless questioned specifically. It is also a fact that there will be no end to all the doubts until and unless one gets God-Realisation. It cannot also be gainsaid that in the present days when people involved deeply in worldly life desire to do Spiritual Sadhana, they are beset with so many doubts and unless such basic doubts are got clarified to their satisfaction, they find themselves unable to proceed on the spiritual path. This book could be of some use to such seekers.

One night, when I was locked inside the Mown Mandir at Ambaji in Gujarat for 47 days, all these 30 questions mentioned in the book were brimming up in my mind one after the other in a sequence again and again compulsorily so that I was obliged to get up and note them down on a sheet of paper and then go to sleep. The answers were then attempted based on the knowledge gleaned from my own Guru, other saints and Scriptures. Actually many of these questions had been repeated so often to me during my days of wandering over many places. Ideally, a perfect answer to any spiritual question can only be in perfect silence. About...
Lord Dakshinamurthy who is the pioneer of the tradition of Gurus, it is told:

'Very silence explained in the eloquence of silence and all the doubts of his disciples were set at rest. In order to reach that stage of silence and all the doubts of his disciples were set at rest, it is essential in understanding in silence. It is essential in understanding in silence, it is essential in understanding in silence.

Hence the tradition of Gurus, it is told:

Swami Shantananda Puri