

Śaraṇāgati

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HOW REAL IS YOUR REALITY?

“After having collected wood to cook his evening soup, Milarepa the yogi returned to his cave. When he looked inside he was shocked! On his simple bed sat a wide-eyed demon addressing four others who occupied the tiny cooking space in the cave. At first Milarepa decided to act fearlessly. He approached the demons and asked them to make room, but the demons reacted with terrifying screams and finally attacked him in full force.”

When Denpo, our Tibetan guide told us this story, he immediately caught my interest. It was in September, 2000. Together with two friends and a young couple, I was on my way to Mountain Kailash in East Tibet.

As it turned out, our four-wheel drive Jeep was just passing by the cave where Milarepa’s trials had taken place. We asked the driver to change his route and soon all of us stood before the dark cave like Milarepa had done so 800 years ago, ready to hear more.

“Before Milarepa took to the spiritual path he had been an accomplished sorcerer, well let us say familiar with the

black arts. Even though he possessed the skills by which he could fight demoniac influences, he was helpless against the superior strength of these demons. The more he tried, the more he encountered the usurpers sheer inexhaustible array of ferocious weapons and terrifying illusions.

Finally, as he fell to the ground almost unconscious, he turned prayerfully to Marpa, his enlightened guru, in a gesture of utmost surrender. The strength of his devotion towards his guru turned out to be his greatest force – by the help and by the power of his guru-*bhakti* he overcame the mystical strength of the demons. They collapsed into each other and then vanished into thin air.” Denpo threw his hands up into the air and with a kind smile he said: “Gone, finished – no problem!”

On the spiritual path, regardless of tradition and school, it is common to meet “demons” who impose almost insurmountable obstacles upon the searcher. What are they and what is the stuff they are made of? Often these “demons” are projections of our inner enemies who are made of the subtle stuff that our dreams and fears consist of.





There is another example which demonstrates this truth. In 1521 the founder of Protestantism, Martin Luther sat down to translate the Bible from Latin into German in order to make the holy scriptures accessible to the common people. By acting in this way, Luther deliberately circumnavigated the authority of the priests who up to that time held the prerogative to interpret and speak from the holy text. In revenge, the powerful Catholic Church excommunicated

Luther and thus his life was in constant danger. Luckily one of his rich supporters was bold enough to offer him shelter by hiding him in the tower of his castle in Wittenberg.

Luther described how one evening, as he was working on his translations, Satan suddenly appeared before him and threatened him: “Stop translating!” Luther was troubled. However, having taken shelter in the Lord, he confronted Satan and when Satan did not want to leave, Luther threw a glass container with writing ink at him, all the while invoking the Lord. Finally the devil vanished. When you visit the tower today, you can still marvel at the large black spot where the inkpot hit the wall.

What was going on there? It is very possible that Luther, like so many genuine spiritual searchers was confronting “his enemies within”. In other words, the five demons in Milarepa’s cave and Satan in Luther’s hideout in Wittenberg and innumerable inner and outer difficulties are all manifestations of the classical six inner enemies – lust, anger, greed, fear, envy and bewilderment, who manifest together to attack.

The boy-saint Prahlāda expressed it like this: “Except for the uncontrolled mind, there is no enemy.”

THE WORLD AS A MIRROR

The world acts as a mirror – often an unwelcome mirror to reflect our own fears back at us thus allowing them to become visible and more tangible. Why? So that we can deal with them!

There is an instructive story in this connection:

Once there was a dog who had heard of the famous castle with a million mirrors. When he finally found it, he saw one million dogs growling at him and then moving in to attack. Shocked he ran away. Another dog – let us just call him the Happy Dog – found the same castle and saw one million dogs greeting him enthusiastically and approaching him to play. Same place, different consciousness. Same world, different experience.

Each one of us knows how the world seems to change for someone in love. We seem to meet supportive people everywhere and even when the “weather outside” turns bad it is not a problem because we seem to carry our own good weather inside. A person who is angry and impatient, however, sees reasons to be dissatisfied from all four directions: North, South, East and West:

“If your mind is calm, this is the best day of your life” the Chinese monk Wu Li said.

By projecting our thoughts and emotions onto the world, we will surely distort reality. We will see and feel things, which do not really exist. And the world will get back at us – as our minds become distracted by so many thoughts and emotions, we will lose contact with ourselves. What we need to do on these occasions is pull our minds away from the situation, allow ourselves to calm down, and then turn towards our spiritual practices in order to regain the right perception.



❖❖❖ A PRACTICAL SUGGESTION ❖❖❖

In the Vedic literature there is a technique which I would like to suggest to my readers. It is called *śāstra cakṣu* – looking through the eyes of the scriptures.

In these old wise scriptures we can find saints and even God talking to us and supplying enlightened perspectives to the situations we face in our lives. My suggestion is to apply these instructions to your daily lives and observe how your “reality” changes.

In our little *āśrama* we have tried this method by sticking simple post-it notes onto the mirrors. They contain only one sentence messages which have magically transformed the reality of our lives. Here is the best one for you:

“I am an eternal soul and not this material body.”

It might be difficult for you to imagine how this simple message has affected our lives – but since it sticks to the mirrors, we are constantly being reminded to think and act on the spiritual platform.

By superimposing the scriptural perspective upon the material “reality”, we have learnt in a practical way to apply and profit from the ancient wisdom of the saints and the Lord, and we have seen how we have become more tranquil even against the constant demands on our time and energy. We have learnt to “step back” from the “all-absorbing” speed of modern life and rest in eternity, even if it is only for a short time.

Only a “breath of eternity” can change everything. Like it did so for Milarepa. Please try it!



This is how I would suggest that you try this method:

- Step 1)** Consciously step back from the situation in your mind. Inhale deeply and then exhale.
- Step 2)** “Breathe” into your heart space by directing your attention towards the heart when you inhale.
- Step 3)** Remember the perspectives you have heard, and exchange it with your previous state of mind.
- Step 4)** Observe the shift in your feelings, when you introduce the eternal wisdom into your life.
- Step 5)** Act upon your insights and see how your life changes.

By learning this simple technique you will step back from the all absorbing speed of everyday life, take a breath of eternity and gain the strength to deal with even the most complex situations from a spiritual perspective.

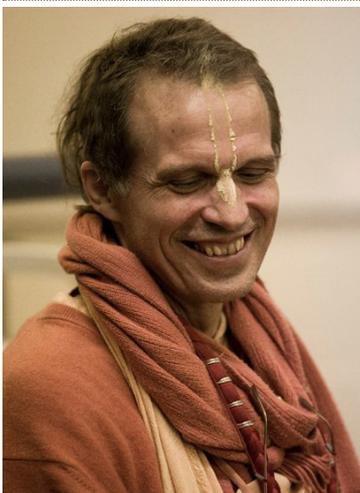


Photo by Mickey Shah

❖ MEET ŚĀCĪNANDANA SWAMI

Important events over the next two months:

May 20th-27th Kṛṣṇa Samādhi Seminar, Goloka Dhāma, Germany

June 2nd-3rd 24h Kīrtana, Birmingham, UK

June 16th-23rd Japa & Kīrtana Retreat, Croatia

June 23rd-30th Summer Camp, Croatia

July 6th-15th „Fruska Gora“ Summer Camp, Serbia

You can find a more detailed schedule at www.saranagati.net