

Śaraṇagati

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YOUR BEST FRIEND FOR THE YEAR 2013

After my last walk in India, in December of last year (2012), I went to an Ayurvedic hospital to prepare my body for the many opportunities in 2013. I wanted to be fit as a „fiddle“ and the treatment was successful. During my last conversation with Dr. Raju, I asked him how I could maintain what I had got - thinking that he would give me some advice on a good diet, proper exercises and a sattvic lifestyle. I was mistaken...

„The most important thing is a strong *sankalpa* - an inner resolve. All the best medicine and therapy in the world would be ineffective without such a commitment. On the other hand, with such a *sankalpa* you would almost not need anything else“ - said Dr. Raju and then he looked intensely into my eyes to see if I had understood. What he said made so much sense so I decided to find out more about *sankalpa*.

What is a *sankalpa*?

In the *Mokṣa-gītā* - a text on spiritual practice, I found a warning about the wrong type of resolve.

Just as a silkworm is caught in its own cocoon, similarly, man is caught in the vast net of birth and death by his own sankalpa and desires. (Mokṣa-gītā 6.4)

The text goes on to explain how the materially bewildered mind dreams up countless mental desires and then determines to fulfil them. That creative determination or affirmation takes strong roots within the heart - and binds a person to this world of birth and death. That, is a *sankalpa* - a strong mental creation. Thus, many of the trillions of well-intentioned new year's resolutions in actuality enforce a person's material existence rather than freeing him or her from limitations.

Destroying the tree of material entanglement

There is a very powerful technique for spiritualising our lives. Material desires and activities generally cause material entanglement. However, when one's desires and actions are utilised for the service of the Supreme Transcendence, then the very things which cause one's perpetual bondage become the destroyer of the tree of material existence.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa asks:

„Oh good soul, does not a thing, applied therapeutically, cure a disease which was caused by that very same things?“ (SB 1.5.33)

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains: „For example, milk preparations sometimes cause disorder of the bowels, but the very same milk converted into curd and mixed with some other remedial ingredients cures such disorders. Similarly, the threefold miseries of material existence cannot be mitigated simply by material activities. Such activities have to be spiritualized, just as by fire iron is made red-

hot, and thereby the action of fire begins.“ (Purport to SB 1.5.33) Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains in this connection (Purport to SB 11.2.36) that even ordinary activities, like brushing one's teeth, can be spiritualised - provided they are connected with Krishna. Śrīla Prabhupāda clarifies:

„In that condition of spiritual consciousness, the contributor, the contribution, the consumption, the performer or leader of the performance, and the result or ultimate gain —everything — becomes one in the Absolute, the Supreme Brahman. That is the method of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.“ (Bhagavad-gītā purport to 4.24).

It is as if ordinary well water becomes mixed with Ganges water and thus instantly it is transformed into a Holy River. Thus, a spiritual *sankalpa* acts like a bow which an archer takes up to shoot his arrows far beyond the range of his unaided abilities. It moves us into action and often out of our comfort zone, which can be like poison mixed into our drinking water that kills the natural enthusiasm of the soul.

A *sankalpa* gives us life and ideally an inner connection with God. In times of need, our *sankalpa* shows us the way like stars that twinkle in a dark night sky. But you need to treat it like a good friend, and then cultivate it.

How to find one's *sankalpa*?

A spiritual *sankalpa* springs forth from the depths of our heart where our deepest desires are buried. It is a desire behind the many desires so to speak. For example - a person may



strongly desire to travel to India. If, however, he or she does not go deeper to find the spiritual meditation behind such a desire, then one will surely remain disappointed even upon physically arriving there. But if that person could understand that behind this desire lies, for example, the desire to be closer to God or to nourish oneself spiritually - then he will be satisfied even if one does not go physically to India - because there are other (less expensive) ways to become absorbed in spiritual life.

Let me suggest to you a simple method by which I use to find my *saṅkalpa*:

Step 1: Try to find a peaceful place and time where the „outside noise“ of people and your own thoughts calm down.

Step 2: Go inside your heart and ask yourself again and again what matters most for you and why. Usually before doing this step, I take help from a sacred text (scripture or prayer) to re-frame my mind and connect it with the more essential things. A tip: If you have actually found a spiritual *saṅkalpa*, you will usually feel a „glowing yes“ or get energized from it in some ways. If this sign does not appear, keep going deeper like a pebble that sinks towards the bottom of a well.

Step 3: Come up again into your normal consciousness and align your actions and other factors with your *saṅkalpa*.

Step 4: Pray for help, share your *saṅkalpa* with your near and dear ones. You will see for yourself: Miracles will unfold.

You will be tested!

In the school of life there are always tests - which ultimately serve our purpose only. These tests are there to make us stronger in our determination. When your *saṅkalpa* gets tested, remember that your life is a unique gift to you personally and that you are expected to find your own path which is true to yourself. You can not live the life of another. Just like eating and breathing is something that only you yourself can do - a *saṅkalpa* is also highly personalized. Let me clarify:

Once a disciple went to his master asking him: „What is the best way to please the Lord?“ - „Go to the burning ghat and insult the dead“ - was the unexpected answer. The disciple promptly did as he was told. When he returned, his master asked him if the dead had responded. „No, they remained silent“ - said the student. „Then go and praise them instead.“ The disciple obeyed and afterwards his guru asked him again if the dead had responded. „No, they didn't.“ „Good!“ - said the guru. „In order to please the Lord you should do exactly like they did. People will scorn or praise you when you follow your spiritual life. Don't become swayed by either



critique or scorn by ordinary people. But remain open and curious to receive input from the saintly. In that way you will quickly find your own true path.“

Stay focused and connected

To help you stay focused on your *saṅkalpa*, there is a powerful mantra which can be chanted either as the last thing you do before resting or the first thing in the morning.

kāyena vācā manasendriyair vā
buddhyātmanā vānusṛta-svabhāvāt
karoti yad yat sakalam paramāi
nārāyaṇāyeti samarpayet tat

Oh Lord, I offer to you whatever I do according to my nature, using my body, words, mind, senses, intelligence and purified consciousness. I give all this to you - thinking it is for your pleasure. (SB 11.2.36).

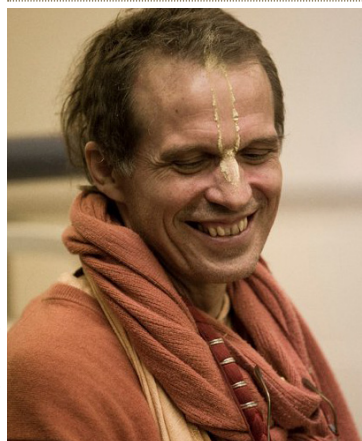
Conclusion

It can be strenuous to navigate one's life through a world where constant change seems to be the only constant. However, for someone who discovers his or her *saṅkalpa*, the universe starts to move in their favour, and the fact that everything changes becomes the greatest opportunity to make a new start.

I wish all of you the best year ever and please continue to give me your good association, well wishes and kind support.

Yours in seva, Śacīnandana Swami

Photo by Mickey Shah



MEET ŚACĪNANDANA SWAMI

upcoming seminars & events:

Jan. 18th-20th Yoga Expo, Munich, Germany

Jan. 26th- 27th Radhadesh Mellows, Radhadesh, Belgium

Feb. 21st-25th Vyāsa-pūjā, Zagreb, Croatia

Mar. 10th-15th Kīrtana Melā, Śrīdhāma Māyāpur, India

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