

Śaranagati

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OUR WELL-WISHER IS ALWAYS OUR WELL-WISHER

A true well-wisher always has our best interest in mind, whether or not we understand his intentions. In this connection I would like to share a beautiful legend a devotee from Kazakhstan told me. It's about Genghis Khan and his falcon, and it contains two important lessons for our spiritual life.

Even today we find Genghis Khan's legacy impressive. Wars are often motivated by the insatiable hunger for new territory and wealth, as well as by the cruel retaliation wreaked on those who refuse to accept another's rule. The wars Genghis Khan waged are no exception, and Genghis Khan certainly saw himself as a world ruler ("Genghis Khan" means "universal ruler" or "emperor of the universe"). He must have been an organizational and strategic genius, because he created one of the most disciplined and effective armies in history. He also managed to hold onto whatever territories he conquered throughout his life. He conquered more land than Alexander the Great. His lands included most of China; he brought Baghdad to its knees, conquered Poland, and threatened Vienna. Persia (present-day Iran) and Afghanistan fell into his hands, and even Moscow surrendered to the hardy Mongol riders who attacked with their bows and arrows on their small, quick horses. Genghis Khan must also have had a huge ego. But he was intelligent and educated enough to know how to rule effectively. To unify his empire he introduced a sophisticated legal system, a cohesive system of written language, government reforms, and religious freedom. In his army he welcomed Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, and tribals. He granted women more rights than was usual at that time, and he severely punished thieves. By the time he died his empire stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the Adriatic Sea.



Like people everywhere, Genghis Khan's subjects imagined themselves to be the center of the universe, the greatest of people, favored by the gods. They justified their warlord's unrelenting conquest by claiming that he had been chosen by the gods to unite the world's people. But late during Genghis Khan's amazing career something happened that changed this perspective. Let us hear the legend as it is told even today around the fires of Kazakhstani herdsmen.

Early one morning, Genghis Khan and some of his companions mounted their horses to go hunting. With him was his favorite falcon. Although Genghis Khan and his men were usually successful in their hunting, today they found no prey. Even the falcon, who could see further afield than its human master, could find no animals to hunt. By evening the great Genghis Khan was so disappointed that he sent his companions back to camp; he did not wish to take his frustration out on them.

As his men departed, Genghis Khan decided to continue into the forest. He was exceedingly thirsty. Throughout that long, fruitless hunt he had drunk only the little water he had carried in his flask. Now he hoped to find a river. But before he had gone too far he came across a large rock from which water was dripping. Overwhelmed now by his thirst he took out the silver cup he always carried and held it under the flow.



When the cup was a little more than half full he brought it to his lips, but before he could drink the falcon, who had been circling overhead, suddenly dove, hitting the cup and spilling the water.

Genghis Khan was annoyed. He yelled a command at the falcon and then turned to fill his cup again. But as he raised his cup for the second time the falcon again attacked. Each time he tried to drink, his falcon would fall from the sky and knock his cup to the forest floor.

Genghis Khan flew into a rage. He cursed at the falcon, and even told it that although it was a beloved pet he would kill it if it attacked again. And aside from the anger he felt at the falcon's attacks, in the back of his mind the great warlord worried that his men would see him unable to control his bird and find him weak.

The next time Genghis Khan held his silver cup under the dripping water he drew his sword. As soon as the falcon swooped Genghis Khan reached upward and skewered the bird. The falcon died instantly. When Genghis Khan turned his attention back to the rock – he had yet again spilled his water – he saw that the water was no longer dripping.

Angry, the emperor took his cup and climbed the rock, seeking the spring from which the water had come. How surprised he was when he saw the spring filled with poisonous snakes. If Genghis Khan had drunk the contaminated water he would have died immediately. The falcon had proven his well-wisher and saved his life.

Realizing this, Genghis Khan began to cry. He returned to the rock and found the dead falcon. Lifting it to his chest, he kissed it and carried it back to camp. Later, he ordered his goldsmiths to cast the falcon's image in gold with its wings spread. On one of the wings Genghis Khan had the following line engraved: "Whatever is done out of anger leads only to ruin." On the second, "A well-wisher is always a well-wisher – even when we don't see how his deeds are in our interest."

I don't know how much this experience changed Genghis Khan's policies, but I do know that he became wiser toward the end of his life. I shared this story because I feel the two sentences engraved on the falcon's wings are important for us – especially the second one.

ॐ Sacinandana Swami, December 2007

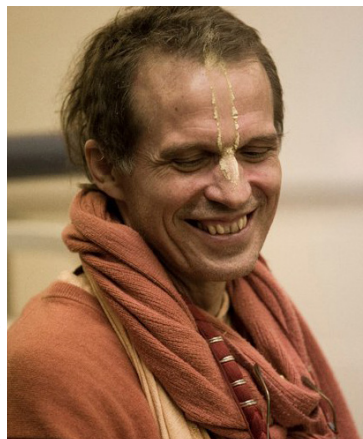


Photo by Mickey Shah

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A CRYSTAL I FOUND DURING KIRTAN MELA

I know of a mighty crystal
that gathers the light of Truth surrounding us
and turns it into a life-giving ray of realization,
powerful enough to raise the spiritually dead.

It is the crystal of service to Sri Guru
in the exalted company of saints
who are constantly absorbed in hearing and chanting
about the Lord and all His glory.

ॐ Sacinandana Swami, August 2013



VRNDĀVANA IS WONDERFUL

Vṛndāvana is wonderful.
The two sweet fair and dark splendors named
Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are wonderful.
Pure love for their lotus feet is wonderful.
He who has full faith in them and rises
to the spiritual world is wonderful.
The rare soul who understands
these truths is wonderful.

ॐ Śrīla Prabhodānanda Sarasvatī Ṭhākura,
Śrī Vṛndāvana Mahimāmṛta, 1.57