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FOLLOW YOUR SACRED LONGING

Sacinandana Swami's 2014 New Years Message

Let me take the opportunity of the upcoming calendar year to first thank you for reading this New Year's message. You and I are together here connecting through these words, and it's my great honor to meet such sincere spiritual aspirants. I hope in the future we will have many more opportunities to meet and share realizations – and not only in cyberspace.

Lately I've been asking myself what's stopping us from living the life we long for, and I've had to conclude that we're usually our own worst enemies. Instead of living fully, we allow fear, selfishness, and anger to govern us, standing passively by despite their tyrannical rule. We throw ourselves into our own prison! Someone once told me, "There are as many ways to sabotage yourself as there are people in the world."

Even saints have the ability to sabotage themselves. Have you ever wondered what Prahāda Mahārāja, Nelson Mandela, Buddha, Mother Teresa, and Jesus have in common? Despite their foibles, they've each managed to rise above their inner weaknesses – or at least they've tried very hard to do so.

In the old days, Indian warriors who could afford them bought their warhorses in Afghanistan. To decide which horse could withstand the pressures of warfare, the warriors designed a test. They would lead a horse into a corral. Then, at various intervals, they'd have a man enter the corral, shout aggressively, and threaten the horse with a stick. The stronger horses always leapt the corral's fence to

escape. They wouldn't tolerate the threat. The weaker horses, however, were easily broken. When a horse leapt the fence, the warriors knew they'd found a horse they could rely on in combat.

Our lives are full of unacceptable threats. Some of those threats come from outside us, like the man with the stick, and some are interior – fear, anger, greed, frustration. What can we do to overcome these threats and "leap the fence"?

To overcome weakness and self-sabotage, we have no other resort but to draw on our innate spiritual strength. Please don't doubt that you have such strength. You were born with it.

WE LIVE IN AN AGE OF MASS-DISTRACTION

Spiritual strength can help us overcome the greatest obstruction in the pursuit of our own self-interest: distraction, or thinking other things more interesting or more important than self-realization. These other subjects are often related to the petty gratification of the senses, which binds us with the rope of attachment to a life of spiritual and material compromise.

FOLLOW YOUR LONGING

My own spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, clearly expressed the need for the sacred dimension:

"The need of the spirit soul is that he wants to get out of the limited sphere of material bondage and fulfill his desire for complete freedom. [...] He wants to see the free light and the spirit. That complete freedom is achieved when he meets the complete spirit, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. There is dormant affection for God within everyone; spiritual existence is manifested through the gross body and mind in the form of perverted affection for gross and subtle matter. Therefore we have to engage ourselves in occupational engagements that will evoke our divine consciousness." SB 1.2.8, purport

We all have desires, but to long for the spiritual means to desire something beyond what this world offers. Spiritual longing is native to the soul. The word's earlier roots hint at the lengthening of hope, or what we call aspiration. Spiritual longing broadens the heart while softening it with a sweet kind of pain. Fear of that pain is why we often suppress our spiritual longings and allow them to turn into the shackles of material attachment. Sacred longing then turns into longing for things that can't satisfy the soul.

We should know that suppressing sacred longing never destroys it. To long is part of the human condition. Rather, suppressed spiritual longings still rise to the surface of our consciousness, but focus themselves wherever we're open and vulnerable – often on





our attachments. These misfocused longings even draw us into various sorts of addiction. We all know about addiction. It tends to focus on a need for position, success, affection, friendship, or some other emotional comfort, and it often begins its expression through small moments of gratification, perhaps as insignificant as eating a chocolate bar when we're lonely. Often, before we know it, we've grown into habits we can't seem to shake, habits that go against our integrity.

We should know that our material attachments, serious or not, are really a suppressed longing for the sacred dimension, where we can find perfect love. We long for something to touch us to the core, to love us so completely that we will do anything – and let go of anything – to stay in contact.

But we have to do our part to dig deep, so part of the work of spiritual practice is to shift our focus back to the sacred at every opportunity and allow spiritual, not material, longing to fill us.

If you want to feel alive with spiritual longing, you need to come in contact with the sacred dimension in your life and to remain in that awareness as much as possible. You'll know when you've touched that dimension because you'll feel yourself escaping the confines of matter; the bird of your soul will take to the free air.

Here's a small meditation to help you find your sacred longing:

THE FACE IN THE DARKNESS

I shall never forget it; that shining face in the midst of darkness which moved me like no other face and which now stays with me because of its silent message.

Let me share that unforgettable experience with you:

When I was staying at the side of Govardhana Hill (a sacred hill in Vṛndāvana, India), I sometimes walked around it, circumambulating it in an act of worship. Once I stopped at Rādhā-kuṇḍa (one of several sacred lakes surrounding Govardhana Hill) for a sacred bath. Time passed by so quickly that everything became late. Only when the night had settled in did I continue walking. The path was totally dark. A waning moon, no visible stars and because of a power cut not a lamp was lit.

Take some time away from your busy life to sit where you won't be disturbed. Allow the sounds that usually fill your life to sink into the quiet. Then ask yourself, "Do I feel my connection with the Lord?" Listen in silence for the answer.

Are you in contact with the Supreme, or have you lost touch? Are you only thinking about spiritual realization or actually living it? Is your Kṛṣṇa consciousness alive or dry and theoretical?

These kinds of questions and their honest answers can awaken the voice of your own longing – one you may be ignoring or have been putting off until you have more time to listen. Allow that voice to sing louder and reach your ear.

Then follow it.

A tip: Once you've come in contact with your spiritual longing, strengthen it with spiritual practice. Let your spiritual practices support whatever changes you feel you need to make in your life so that you can follow your longing with inner strength.

Here is an inspiring message from Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura on the topic of longing:

*O fishlike soul,
why do you become repeatedly entangled in Māyā's net,
being allured by insignificant pleasures?
When you are thus trapped in the network of illusion
you remain in a spiritually weakened condition.
Please serve the Lord of your heart,
and with the strength gained by bhakti (devotion)
swim freely in the ocean of love for Kṛṣṇa."*

(Gītāvalī, Śreyo-Nirṇaya)

Dear readers, I pray each of us will successfully find and follow our sacred longing this year. I'm confident that if you do so, this New Year will be your best ever and a steppingstone to a more fulfilling life. In closing, let me say how honored I am to share this message with you. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be of some small service to you.

Wishing you all the best and lots of spiritual strength,

Śācinandana Swami

Śācinandana Swami, Germany, Dec. 31th, 2013.



As I was walking I would switch my torch on and off from time to time in order to conserve the old battery, which had to last for another 2 hours before I reached where I was living. Occasionally I came very close to some sleeping cows and once I even almost bumped into a bull who was resting on the path. “Never awake a raging bull”, I thought.

But then I made a mistake. While I was not paying attention, I tripped over some sleeping monkeys. They screamed in shock and fright. And then one of them - perhaps the leader of the troop – attacked. I still bear the scar on my leg where his claws struck.

When I reached Kusum Sarovara (The Lake of Flowers) a light went on in the distance so I switched off my torch, confident that I would just need to follow the light and make my way forward. All of a sudden I felt something was there lying on the path in front of me. The next thing I knew was I had almost collided with a person. It was only by instinct that I felt him – by the instinct of a night-roamer. The lamps in the distance were not bright enough to illuminate the objects and people nearby. So as not to step on whoever or whatever it was, I quickly side-stepped to the left and then skipped forward. When I had caught my balance, I turned around to see who or what it was that I had avoided, switching on my dying torchlight.

I was not prepared for what I saw in that dim light. It was a *sādhu* (holy man) dressed in reddish cloth with a turban, sitting cross-legged on a checkered blanket in the darkness. There was something about his face: It was aglow. Yes, it was surrounded by a warm yellowish light. Only the face – nothing else! He was sitting there meditating but because of a divine presence within his heart, he exhibited a distinct radiance. As I looked closer I felt totally attracted to his face and person. Oblivious to the world around him – the increasing dark night, the stray animals such as cows, monkeys and dogs, the occasional late pilgrims – he was in his own world celebrating a happy meeting with the Lord in his heart.

He had no concern for what was around him – he did not need the world any longer, and nothing from it, because he found the Lord in his own heart. There is a saying: In comparison with what lies within us – what lies without us is of little significance. This *sādhu* had definitely realized this.

To a real devotee Kṛṣṇa is always visible within the heart. Śrīla Prabhupāda (my spiritual master) wrote in his final days: “If one has been raised to the platform of pure devotional service, Kṛṣṇa is always visible within the core of one’s heart. One who has attained such perfection is all-beautiful in transcendental bliss. The present Kṛṣṇa Consciousness Movement is an attempt to keep Kṛṣṇa in the center, for if this is done all activities will automatically become beautiful and blissful.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 10.13.8)



I hope the *sādhu*’s face will remain with me for a long time to come and that I will remember his wordless instruction – to be absorbed in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa, even in the midst of distraction, be they complicated relationships, disturbing thoughts or monkeys in the dead of night.

May the following prayer to the moonlike Lord destroy that inner darkness:

“Oh, when will I attain the treasure of Kṛṣṇa and place him in the core of my heart, thus relieving my burning soul?”

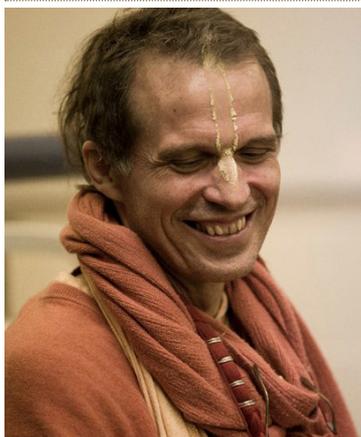
I will nicely decorate the walls of my heart place my beloved Lord there, and gaze upon his beautiful moonlike face.”

(Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura)

As I stood in awe, watching the *sādhu*’s blissful face, I remembered that the whole point of our spiritual practice is to always remember Kṛṣṇa and never forget him. That brings light to our hearts. Without that light we shall keep on roaming in the darkness of ignorance and forgetfulness. What is the point of such a life?

☪ Śācīnandana Swami, India, Dec. 2013.

Photo by Mickey Shah



☪ MEET ŚĀCĪNANDANA SWAMI

upcoming seminars & events:

Jan. 17-19	Yoga Expo Munich, Munich, Germany
Jan. 30	Gaura-līlā Evening, Dharma Castle, Germany
Feb. 1	12 hour Kīrtana, Berlin, Germany
Feb 8-13	Seminar & Vyāsa-pūjā celebrations, Zagreb, Croatia

Read more: www.sacinandanaswami.com