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By resolving negative happenings promptly, we free ourselves to flow with life's rhythms and accept all things as they are

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Recently I had the opportunity to attend a gathering of the Council of Hindu Temples of North America in Flint, Michigan. During the evening ceremony, the resident acharya at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Pennsylvania, Swami Pratyagbodhananda, received an award on behalf of Swami Dayananda Saraswati. In his acceptance speech Swami offered a charming explanation of Aum Namah Sivaya, one of Hinduism's foremost mantras for japa: "Aum is to invoke, Sivaya means 'to God Siva,' and Namah means 'to surrender.' You should all chant Aum Namah Sivaya for one minute at 8am, 12 noon, 4pm and 8pm." That was the sadhana he gave to everyone.

Of course, that is what "Aum Namah Sivaya" means, but usually the word surrender is not used for namah. We would generally say it means to prostrate, to praise, worship, revere, but Swami said, "to surrender." He went on to explain that all our frustrations in life, our stress and unhappiness come from not surrendering, not accepting what is as it is. If we can accept what is, if we can surrender to God Siva, then we won't have that stress, we won't have that unhappiness. All we have to do is surrender.

I immediately thought of my guru's explanation of surrendering to God Siva. In his book Dancing with Siva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Gurudeva, uses the dance analogy, that all of life is the dance of Siva. Life is Siva in motion. It is His dance, and we can either flow with the dance or we can resist it. If we are able to dance with Siva and not resist or fight against it, then everything goes well for us. Said another way, dancing with Siva is the ability, the philosophical ability, to accept what is as what should be. The challenge, of course, is that there are so many problems in the world that we wish weren't there.

But when we surrender to God Siva, we can clearly see that all that is occurring is an expression of what was set in motion previously. It's all working itself out. We can't stop that which was set in motion from expressing itself; we can only direct it. We can channel it, but we can't totally eliminate it unless the whole world is doing tapas, but that's not very realistic. We can influence it for the better, but it will still continue to work itself out, as the past expresses itself in the present through the unfailing cosmic law of karma. A guru in our lineage, Chellappaswami, had a succinct way of stating this insight: "There is not one wrong thing."

Being able to accept the world as it is, accept our life as it is, is the practice of surrendering to or dancing with Siva. This does not mean we should be fatalistic or not try to make improvements. The attitude of fatalism is: "If everything is as it should be, why should I even try? It won't do any good anyway." In truth, we can make strategic changes in our own life through the decisions we make. We effect our future, not only in this life but in lives yet to be lived, by what we do in the present. In the wider world, beyond our personal sphere, our ability to change things is limited and delayed by time. It is hard, for instance, to bring peace to the world by our individual actions. Even here we should not become discouraged. All our actions taken together can and do make a difference in the course of time.

One of the beauties of Gurudeva's teachings is that they are both conceptual and

pragmatic, containing the tools, the things to do, to control the forces of mind and emotion and manifest spiritual ideals in our life. Negative attachment to the past is one of the main obstacles to surrendering to God Siva, because it congests the subconscious mind and thus makes a person reactive, preoccupied and prone to instinctive emotions such as impatience, frustration, anger, resentment and despair. In such states it is impossible to maintain an attitude of surrender and acceptance. Far too many things in our life are wrong to sustain the consciousness that Siva's world is perfectly all right! One tool Gurudeva gives to eliminate life's burdens is called vasana daha tantra - writing down memories of the past that are emotional and negative and burning them up. Writing them down brings them out of the subconscious mind, and burning them up dispels the emotion and gives us the sense that they are gone.

Quite often, memories of the past are what bog down our spiritual life. Imagine you have a basement in a house (these days it's usually the garage), and you just keep putting things there with the promise that one day you will clean them out and organize everything. Often that day never comes. Life is so busy that you just keep storing more things away. Eventually, the basement is so full and congested that you can't find anything, and it is troublesome to even go there.

Our mind is like that. Life is so fast-paced that, day after day after day, we put experiences that are still bothering us into our subconscious without resolving them. This creates a growing burden.

But the mind has a wonderful mechanism to tell us when something is unresolved. Do you know what it is? Memory! We remember the experience on a regular basis. We may remember it several times a day. That means it is unresolved. The subconscious mind is displaying it unsolicited on our mental screen, letting us know it needs attention. If we ignore it for a time, say a week or two, the subconscious mind finally gives up reminding us. It says: "You don't seem to want to resolve this matter, so I will store it away." It dutifully puts it in the subconscious basement, or the subconscious garage.

To avoid building up a subconscious of unresolved memories, it is obvious what we need to do. We need to act on each experience while is it still alive in our mind, right? Do what's needed to resolve the matter. Sometimes just thinking about it is enough, when the problem is simply that we haven't taken the time to reflect deeply enough to fully understand it. Most such memories involve conflicts or

misunderstandings with people. Through reflection, we can come to see the other person's point of view. This broadens our understanding and makes us feel better about the experience. For serious disagreements that we can't come to terms with alone, we may need to talk with the person. Sometimes, to smooth things out, we need to offer an apology. And if that's not appropriate because of the nature of the relationship, we can offer a gift. We can also write down the problem and burn it up. If we do this mental maintenance on a regular basis, we avoid filling up the subconscious with unresolved negative experiences.

Why is this important? Because Divinity is on the other side of that barrier of emotion. Our soul nature can be obstructed by a congested subconscious. When we look inward in meditation, we are trying to see our soul nature, trying to see our Divinity, our superconscious. If the subconscious mind has a lot of unresolved matters in it, all we see is the subconscious mind. That's not much fun, so we don't look within very often. We keep distracting ourselves - "Let's go out to a movie. What's on TV tonight?" - because what's inside of us isn't that enjoyable.

But if we keep the subconscious uncongested, it is transparent; and when we look within, we can see right through it and perceive our Divinity. Those who want to live in and enjoy their inner self, their spiritual nature, need to keep the subconscious mind clear, keep it from piling up with unresolved negative experiences. In this way, seekers avoid clinging to the past and are better able to surrender to God Siva and accept the present as it is while at the same time working to create a positive future.

Gurudeva sums it up beautifully in Dancing with Siva: "The world is seen as it truly is - sacred - when we behold Siva's cosmic dance. Everything in the universe, all that we see, hear and imagine, is movement. Galaxies soar in movement; atoms swirl in movement. All movement is Siva's dance. When we fight this movement and think it should be other than it is, we are reluctantly dancing with Siva. We are stubbornly resisting, holding ourselves apart, criticizing the natural processes and movements around us. It is by understanding the eternal truths that we bring all areas of our mind into the knowledge of how to accept what is and not wish it to be otherwise. Once this happens, we begin to consciously dance with Siva, to move with the sacred flow that surrounds us, to accept praise and blame, joy and sorrow, prosperity and adversity in equanimity, the fruit of understanding. We are then gracefully, in unrestrained surrender, dancing with Siva."