

MANGO AS SPIRITUAL GUIDE

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This is the mango season. That has set me thinking. *Acharya Nagarjuna* is a great Indian philosopher. Many traditions regard him as a Tantric *Acharya*, in some other traditions he is regarded as an Ayurvedic expert and in yet others, even an Alchemist, but I am yet to come across a story of his being associated with horticulture. I will not be surprised if I discover that some traditions believe him to be a horticulturist. But as far as his knowledge about the mango is concerned it is universally accepted that what he says is but natural and common wisdom.

Nagarjuna in his letter talks to the king about different categories of mangoes. They are special varieties whose appearances and degrees of ripening can be categorised as follows:

- 1) those not ripe but appear ripe;
- 2) those ripe but appear not ripe;
- 3) those unripe and appear unripe; and
- 4) those ripe and appear ripe.

He was extrapolating this with reference to people we come across in our daily lives. In terms of preference, obviously the kind of mango we must choose is the one belonging to the last category, as it is ready to be served and there is no risk of waste involved.

The second preference should be given to, in my opinion, to the second last. Because it does not deceive you, you can just discard it right away or wait for it to ripen. Then the next in order of selection should be the one mentioned in number two. It involves some chances of waste but at least you can use it after some testing before cutting to see if it is really ripe. The one you must avoid is the first category of mangoes. Choice of the mangoes in any case is not a big deal and much insignificant, in comparison to the selection of people whether it is a matter of a *kalayanamitra* or spiritual friend, or an associate in mundane affairs.

These days if we look around, there is no dearth of people who are likened by *Nagarjuna* to the first category of mangoes. They are those who have acquired special tricks to project themselves as friends. They cannot only be risky for spiritual path seekers but also to the society as a whole. Spiritual friends should not only be spiritually ripe but should also appear to be so. They must be morally clean, compassionate, have association with good people. People promoting themselves as spiritual gurus with tricks are particularly dangerous.

There is great chance of getting themselves corrupted, if already not corrupted, by name, fame, wealth and position in mundane areas also, a friend should be an upright person, with clear mind and wisdom. A friend can be depended upon as your *mitra* not because of your position or money power. It is not necessary that your friend or for that matter a political leader is a rhetoric speaker or writer. It is the inner values of the person that count. This will remain true as long as the values placed on honesty and truthfulness have not vanished from this earth.