

## SINGING THE NAME

The present Age, often condemned as *Kali Yuga*, is in fact, the age in which one can attain liberation most easily. This is revealed in every scriptural text. The reason according to them, is that one can be liberated now by the *Sadhana* of *Nama Sankirtana*—singing the glory of the Lord, and listening to the Name being sung. Among the nine steps of devotion, *Shravanam* (listening to the Name being sung) and *Kirtanam* (singing the Name) are mentioned as the best. *Kirtanam* is singing the Names which denote the glory of the Lord and *Sankirtanam* means “*singing the Names continuously, aloud, without interruption, and without hesitation.*” Whereas *Kirtana* can be by one individual and can promote one’s own spiritual progress, *Sankirtanam* is by a group of people. It can help the process of liberation not only for the members of the group, but it will also be beneficial to those who listen and even to those beyond the circle of listeners; the whole world can benefit by the vibrations. *Sankirtanam* is generally described as of four types, with distinct characteristics. They are: (1) *Guna Sankirtanam*, (2) *Leela Sankirtanam*, (3) *Bhava Sankirtanam*, (4) *Nama Sankirtanam*. Let us examine these types in some detail.

### Signs Of Weakness In The Devotees

*Guna Sankirtanam* aims at describing and adoring the *Gunas* or attributes and qualities of God, in order to exalt Him and win His Grace. But God is *Gunateeta*, beyond *Satwa*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*; He is really attribute less. Ascribing qualities to Him is lowering His Glory. They exist in the imagination of the devotee and praising God as possessing them can give the devotee only momentary satisfaction. *Leela Sankirtanam* is the second. The entire Creation represents the *Leela* (play) of God. Not only that. Its maintenance (*Sthiti*) and dissolution (*Laya*) are also God’s *Leela*. How can anyone describe the manifold *Leelas* of God? They take diverse forms. As *Leela*, one can imagine that the entire Universe can disappear! His *Sankalpa* (will) is all-powerful. Whatever happens, good or bad, is God’s *Leela*! Unless one has cultivated an attitude of equanimity towards good and bad, one cannot claim to have understood God. The *Sadhakas* (spiritual aspirants) of today are happy when something good happens; when something bad comes about, they slide into contrary thoughts. When the entire Creation is the Cosmic *Leela* of God, to demarcate a few and sing in terms of those few reveals only feebleness of vision. The third is *Bhava Sankirtanam*. Devotees who are attached to this path of adoration adopt one or the other of six special (*Bhavas*)—approaches, attitudes or relationship to God—and attempt to derive consummation thereby. It must be said that all the six are deficient and based upon limited conception of Godhead.

(1) The *Shanta Bhava*: This emphasises that the devotee endures whatever happens to him gladly as coming from His Grace. In the Mahabharata, Bhishma is pictured as

the supreme model of this type. But, he on his own volition, postponed the moment of his death in order to acquire the merit of having cast off the body on an auspicious day! He believed that the *Uttarayana* (the six month period from Sankranti Day, January 14th) half of the year was more holy and that death before the sun crosses the Tropic of Capricorn would result in an evil future! When God is both Time and beyond Time, who is man to divide Time into good and bad? The happiness or misery awaiting one cannot depend on the time of death. Believing so is a sign of weakness in the devotees of God.

### **Servant-To-Master Relationship Of Devotion**

(2) *SakhyaBhakti* is devotion to God as a close friend. Arjuna is quoted as the one who was liberated through this type of relationship. But, Arjuna was mostly lost in the human aspects of friendship and kinship and often strayed away from the devotion due to the Divine. He attained closeness to the Lord so easily that he failed to recognise the significance of the proximity that was awarded to him. They were such friends that Arjuna addressed Krishna familiarly using the word for '*brother in law*'. This indicated only a human kinship; so, Krishna confirmed that relationship and justified that loose expression of familiarity when He brought about the marriage of Arjuna with His sister Subhadhra! So, even the *Sakhya* attitude cannot be fully rewarding.

(3) *DasyaBhakti* is the name for the next type. This highlights the attitude of the servant to the master. Hanuman is the classic example of a devotee embodying this type of devotion. He was at the service of Rama at all times. Though encased in the form of a monkey, he had mastered the sixty-four branches of learning and the meaning of the four *Vedas*; he could recite the six *Shastras*. He was physically, mentally and spiritually a redoubtable hero. Nevertheless, he served Rama with no trace of ego in thought, word and deed. He had achieved purity of all three. But, the *DasyaBhakti* of Hanuman was not free from defects. His service was steadfast and total to God as Rama. He was not attached to God as Krishna or as bearing any other name. The *Vedas* declare that God has a thousand names and He can assume a thousand forms. Hanuman's allegiance was limited to only one name and one form. *DasyaBhakti*, therefore, leads to a partial vision of the Universal Absolute.

(4) *VatsalyaBhakti*, the fourth, advises the *Sadhaka* to adopt the relationship of a mother to her child. The example held before the aspirant is that of Yashoda and her adoration of the child Krishna. She recognised only this one relationship, though others praised Krishna as *Mathurapuri-Nivasi* (He who lives in the city of Mathura) and worshipped Him as *Gopihridayavasi* (He who is installed in the hearts of the *Gopis*). When Uddhava came from Mathura, Yashoda enquired about her *Gopala*. "*I do not know the Krishna who lives in Mathura or in the hearts of Gopis. I am asking you*

about my child Gopala," she insisted. Thus, the *VatsalyaBhakti* too leads to a certain amount of exclusiveness.

### **Lack Of Total Awareness Of God**

(5) The next type of devotion is called *AnuragaBhakti*. The *Gopis* of Brindaavan are the best examples of advocates of this path. Many crooked, prejudiced and perverted people do not recognise the purity and value of this path. Many interpret it wrongly according to their own bent of mind and take to wrong paths. Narrow minds and narrow ideas can ruin one's life and the lives of others, like pests destroying the crop. The *Gopis* had the dual feeling of both lover and loved. Duality is caused by ignorance; the mind breeds the duality of likes and dislikes. *Janma* (birth) is the cause of *Karma*. *Karma* causes sorrow and joy, the dual reactions.

(6) *MadhuraBhakti* is the last path and Radha is the unique example of *Madhura Bhava*. The moment the name of Krishna was uttered, she lost herself in indescribable Bliss. In spite of this, even *MadhuraBhakti* posits duality. So, *Bhava Sankirtanam*, in its various forms, does not confer total awareness of God. Let us consider the fourth form—*Nama Sankirtanam*. This can grant full happiness to all people, in all places and at all times. There can be nothing greater or more gratifying. The names Rama, Hari, Hara, Sai, Baba, Krishna—having each two syllables are all derived from the word *Prema*, which is the essence and core of the *Atma*. *Prema* or Love has to prompt our thoughts, penetrate our words and promote our actions. The word *Nama* has great significance numerologically. 'Na' is equal to zero. 'A' is equal to two and 'Ma' equals five, the total being seven, indicating that the *Nama Sankirtanam* needs seven elements for success: *Shruti, Laya, Raga, Tala, Bhava, Prema, Samhita*. Seven denotes the seven *Swaras* (musical notes), the seven *Rishis* (sages), the seven days of a week known as the sacred *Saptaha*. *Sankirtanam* must be done with emphasis on tone, tune, and timing, attitude and attachment, and the attainment of the highest good. It is not singing for singing's sake. The melody must emerge from the heart, from genuine Love, which is so ardent that it is *Tapas* itself. *Sankirtanam* from such *Sadhakas* will certainly liberate the individual and transform the community and the world. *Premaswarupas* (embodiments of love)! Even if you are unable to do *Dhyana* or *Japa*, engage yourself in singing the Name of God, without fear and with faith.

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