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PS.

We wish you many deep insights in reading part 2 “Unlocking the secret of the Holy Name”

Part II

The Keys to Unlocking the Secret of the Holy Name

After understanding in brief what happens as devotees approach the ocean of the holy name, it is of great benefit to hear further instructions on the secret science of developing love of Godhead by chanting.

1. Avoid the Stumbling Blocks

Progress in chanting can be compared to a journey that can come to an abrupt halt if serious obstacles present themselves—landslides or mad elephants on the road, for example. The main obstacles that stop our spiritual progress are the three A's: *avidyā* (ignorance), *anarthas* (unwanted habits), and *aparādhās* (offenses).

It is absolutely necessary that devotees avoid offenses to the holy name. If they focus the mind on the task of not offending the holy name, the remaining two A's are likely to disappear automatically. In *Bhāgavata-ārka-marīci-mālā* (thirteenth ray, text 51), Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura translates *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 6.1.12 as follows:

Just as a disease is activated if proper food and medicine are not administered in a disciplined manner, so one will never obtain the result of chanting if one does not chant the holy names under the proper rules and regulations, such as chanting a prescribed daily number of rounds. *The process of chanting is that one should always chant the holy name without any offense or duplicity while trying to progressively increase the number of rounds.* Following the prescribed method for chanting, hearing, and remembering the Lord's names, forms, qualities, and pastimes yields the most auspicious results (Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, trans., ŚB. 6.1.12, emphasis added).

The holy name is certainly the most merciful of all forms of Lord Kṛṣṇa, but just as a master may withhold his mercy from an offensive servant, so the holy name may choose to withhold His mercy from an offensive chanter.

Scripture tells us that there are ten offenses to be avoided while chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. Most readers are probably familiar with them. (For those who are not, I have dealt with them in detail in my book *The Nectarean Ocean of the Holy Name*.) Each of these offenses is stated in the negative; they are “do nots.” But each therefore indirectly points to a positive injunction. The prohibitions presented as the ten *aparādhās* can thus be seen as instructions for us to develop specific saintly qualities and to do certain things. Expertise in one's practice or *bhajan* is defined as the ability to avoid these stumbling blocks. What follows is a list of the positive injunctions related to the ten offenses as they are presented in *Harināma Cintāmaṇi* (ch. 13, texts 38–41):

1. Diligently give up all blasphemy of Vaiṣṇava *sādhus* by praising them. (Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu also advises that the same mouth that has blasphemed devotees should be used to praise them. When someone drinks with the mouth a dangerous poison, he can be cured by drinking with the same mouth life-giving nectar.)
2. Adopt the pure understanding that Viṣṇu is the only truth.
3. Accept the guru that promotes the holy name with utmost sincerity.
4. Accept the scriptures that glorify the holy name as supreme.
5. Believe in your heart that the holy name is completely pure and spiritual.
6. Have faith that the holy name is identical with the Lord.
7. Attentively discard all the motivations that lead to sins, because it is motivation, not action, that is the seed of sin.
8. Preach the glories of the pure holy names only to those who possess faith in the names.
9. Entirely give up all impious and self-serving ritualistic activities.
10. Meditate on the holy name without distraction.

Let me add one helpful personal perspective to help us avoid offenses: Always consider yourself a humble servant of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, of the Vaiṣṇavas, and of all living entities by giving up the erroneous conception of “I” and “mine.” These ideas are based on the false understanding of ourselves as enjoyers and controllers. Repeating “I am a servant” as if it were a mantra can effectively destroy the basis of offenses, the false ego.

By adopting these positive mental attitudes we can successfully avoid all ten offenses and soon awaken the kinds of feelings for Kṛṣṇa that lead to pure love.

Other Ways to Successfully Stop *Nāmāparādha*, Offenses Against the Holy Name

It can be quite troublesome to counteract offenses against the holy name once they have been committed; therefore, intelligent chanters move carefully through life, taking no risks. If one pinpoints the sources of offenses and diligently avoids them, the happy day will soon arrive where the pure holy name will appear.

Ultimately there is only one way to overcome all the *namāparādhās*—either those committed in the past or those we are committing in the present:

*nāmāparādha-yuktānām
nāmāny eva haranty agham
aviśrānti-prayuktāni
tāny evārtha-karāṇi ca*

“Only incessant chanting of *hari-nāma* can effect the purification of one who is infected with *nāmāparādha*. Indeed, the tireless chanting of *hari-nāma* is the only way to achieve the goal of human life, love of Kṛṣṇa.” (*Padma Purāṇa*, *Svarga-khāṇḍa*, 48–49)

Only tireless chanting can completely remove the effects of past offenses and prevent them from raising their ugly heads again.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura tells us what tireless chanting means in our practice:

Tireless chanting means that other than the time needed for eating and sleeping or other activities related to bodily maintenance, one should chant with feeling [here he uses the word *karkuti*, which literally means “intense contrition”]. Such chanting will lead to the destruction of the ten offenses. No other auspicious activity or penance is effective in this regard. (*Harināma Cintāmaṇi*, ch. 13)

We can become offenseless chanters only if we avoid bad association and accept the association of devotees who are single-mindedly focused on the holy name. It is contact with pure devotees that helps us direct our full attention and intention toward developing pure love for Kṛṣṇa.

Good chanting does not depend on our adherence to mechanical rules. It is not a matter of just doing the do’s and avoiding the don’ts and then our job is done. No, not at all! Chanting is an offering of the heart—a heart filled with feelings of humility, a desire to surrender, and a sincere service attitude. It is ultimately a loving call to Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. This means we need to chant with a firm understanding of our relationship with Them (*sambandha*). “My Lord, I have a relationship with You. I have lost my way in the world of temporary relationships, but my real life is with You. My real home is with You. You are my real safety.”

To put our heart into the chanting, in other words, we must feel separation from the Divine Couple. We want to be with Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa again and serve Them. And we pray for that through our chanting of the holy name. But how can we feel separation if our hearts are dry? If we cannot cry for Kṛṣṇa, cry to cry for Kṛṣṇa. That’s all!

We must understand all these things if, in due course, we wish to awaken to the heart of a sincere *sādhaka* and then from there step forward toward advanced and affectionate chanting. Only affectionate chanting can lead us into deep practice, and only if we find shelter in the depths of the ocean of chanting will we be saved from the

disturbing waves of offenses (*nāmāparādhā*) that can completely push us away from our goal.

We learn the art of chanting with affection from affectionate chanters, pure devotees who can teach us by their example and who can show us how to personally serve the Lord.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī explains in his *Krama Sandharba-ṭīkā* on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 6.2.19 the benefit of affectionate chanting:

The holy name can be chanted in two ways: ordinarily or with affection. The ordinary, offenseless chanter will reach the Lord's divine abode, but the Lord comes near only to an affectionate chanter, so an affectionate chanter attains the Lord's personal service.

2. *Anarthas* and *Avidyā*: Cure the Twisted Heart

Before beginning to ascend to the platform of steadiness (*niṣṭhā*), devotees have not yet been able to full-heartedly and exclusively devotee themselves to the service of Kṛṣṇa and therefore find it difficult to absorb themselves in the chanting. As described earlier, they are torn between their old attachments and the increasing light of their new convictions. According to Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura (in *Nāma-bhajana*), devotees who have yet to reach *niṣṭhā* suffer from four afflictions:

1. they have strong love for the fleeting world;
2. they identify the soul with the material body made of flesh and blood, and with the subtle body made of mind, intelligence, and false ego;
3. they have knowledge of, and attachment to, things other than Kṛṣṇa; and
4. they have an extremely subservient mood toward *māyā*.

These four inner dispositions do not allow them to fly freely in the winds of the divine breeze brought by the holy name but force them to struggle against gravity. What should they do? It is extremely helpful for such persons to worship the Lord's deity. It may be too demanding for "earth-bound" devotees to worship Kṛṣṇa only in His name, but their perturbed minds may be strengthened by the acceptance and love they will feel when they worship Kṛṣṇa's deity. Deity worship will help them increase their attachment to Kṛṣṇa.

In his *Bhajana-rahasya* Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura offers the same powerful solution for gaining affection for the Lord. "Worship Him in His Deity Form!"

Arcana (deity worship) gives devotees who have not yet been able to develop one hundred percent faith in *nāma-bhajana* a sublime feeling of having a relationship with the Lord. They feel their service is accepted and even feel loved by the Lord.

They may also become more acquainted with the Lord's divine form! All these are wonderful results that can help practitioners feel closer to Kṛṣṇa and overcome their apathy, allowing them to actually turn to Him with genuine feeling when chanting.

Another powerful way to increase attachment to Kṛṣṇa is to chant the prayers spoken by great spiritual masters. By their mercy these great souls have left us with a treasure house of *aṣṭakas* and prayers by which we can develop our attachment to Śrī Śrī Rādhā Kṛṣṇa and the holy name. Here, I will quote one of my favorites by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī:

*agha-damana-yaśodā-nandanau nanda-sūno
kamala-nayana-gopī-candra-vṛndāvanendrāḥ
praṇata-karuṇa-kṛṣṇāv ity aneka-svarūpe
tvayī mama ratir uccair vardhatām nāmadheya*

O *śrī hari-nāma*! You manifest in many forms, like Aghadamana (the subduer of the Agha demon), Yaśodānandana (the son of Yaśodā), Nandasūna (the son of Nanda Mahārāja), Kamalanayana (the lotus-eyed), Gopīcandra (the moon of the *gopīs*), Vṛndāvanendra (the Lord of Vṛndāvana), Praṇatakaruṇa (the compassionate master of the surrendered souls), and Kṛṣṇa. O holy name, let my attachment for you increase more and more.

The Six Gosvāmīs were always reciting prayers and bowing down in a scheduled way while devoting themselves to their *sādhana*. By following their methods we will certainly enter into their stream of feelings for Kṛṣṇa.

The best way to help ourselves to fly free is to seek the company of true devotees, because if we listen to the narrations of Lord Kṛṣṇa and the holy name from such persons, our heart can quickly be straightened and healed of its twisted condition. We can be purified simply by receiving such persons' mercy and powerful blessings. Neophyte devotees will thus learn how to chant correctly and quickly come to the stage where they sincerely aspire for *prema*.

This is the second time in this book that we have discussed the power of Vaiṣṇava association. One might therefore wonder, "Where can I find such pure devotees? I do not see any pure devotees where I live." Some readers might even be the only persons in their town who aspire for pure *bhakti*.

But take courage! These great souls are not like you and me. They are never inaccessible—not even after they have left their physical bodies! In *Bhāgavata-ārka-marīci-mālā* Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura records a nice verse about taking shelter at the lotus feet of the *nāmācārya*, Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu declared for all time that anyone who has even a slight contact with Haridāsa Ṭhākura is very dear to Him

and will get His full support. Haridāsa Ṭhākura is not dead. He is very much alive! And his sincere followers live in his company!

I offer my humble obeisances to Śrī Haridāsa Ṭhākura, who by Lord Caitanya's mercy revealed the devotional service of chanting the Lord's holy names without deviation, and who is the spiritual master for awarding happiness to the devotees. (*Bhāgavata-ārka-marīci-mālā*, thirteenth ray, introduction)

Haridāsa Ṭhākura spoke a powerful prayer for *nāma-kṛpā* (the mercy of the holy name). Devotees who enter the spirit of this prayer in a regular way will find it an amazing support in their chanting:

*kṛpā kari' nāma-rūpe āmāra jihvāya
nirantara nāca prabhu dhari tava pāya*

O Lord! Be merciful and appear on my tongue in Your holy name; dance there constantly, O Lord! I fall at Your lotus feet and beg You.

*rākha inḥā lao tāṇhā tava icchā mata
yāṇhā rākha deha more kṛṣṇa-nāmāmṛta*

You may keep me in this world or take me to Your abode as You please, but whatever You do with me, feed me the divine nectar of Your names.

*jagajjane nāma dite tava avatāra
jagajjana-mājhe more kara aṅgīkāra*

You have descended to this world to distribute the holy name, so kindly also consider me one of those You intended to bless.

*āmi ta adhama tumi adhama tāraṇa
ubhaye sambandha ei patita pāvana*

I am the most lowly, whereas You are committed to the uplift of the lowest; this is our eternal relationship, O Savior of the fallen!

*acchedya sambandha ei tomāya āmāya
yāra bale nāmāmēta e adhama cāya*

On the strength of this unbreakable connection between us, O Lord, I beg You to shower me with the nectar of the holy name.

(*Harināma Cintāmaṇi*, 11.53–57)

If we live far from great devotees—either ancient or current—we can certainly listen to their recorded words and derive the benefit of associating with them through their *vāṇī*. Many devotees around the world have reported how associating with Śrīla Prabhupāda through his books and listening to his recorded lectures has opened long-locked doors in their spiritual advancement.

Also, we can install one of Kṛṣṇa’s greatest devotees, Tulasī Devī, in our home. Of course, when there is an opportunity to have “direct contact” with “walking saints,” we should avail ourselves of this rare blessing.

(We will hear more on this important point in part III of this book, where a comprehensive manual for *nāma-bhajana* will be revealed and in which Lord Caitanya will be introduced as the “*sādhū* par excellence.”)

3. Humility Is the Key

As devotees become more and more purified in heart, tears of genuine humility will wash the remaining impurities from their eyes. As they look at their previous ego state, where they solidly identified with their universe of self-created illusions, they will naturally feel drawn to Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s glorious instructions, which relieve one from the dictatorship of *ahaṅkāra*. These instructions advise us how to approach constant and affectionate chanting:

*tṛṇād api sunīcena
taror api sahiṣṇunā
amāninā mānadena
kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ*

One should chant the holy name of the Lord in a humble state of mind, thinking himself lower than the straw in the street. One should be more tolerant than a tree, devoid of all sense of false prestige, and ready to offer all respects to others. In such a state of mind one can chant the holy name of the Lord constantly. (*Śikṣāṣṭaka* 3)

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura composed a beautiful song about this third *Śikṣāṣṭaka* verse in which he encourages us to do everything in our power to develop the four qualities necessary to practice *nāma-bhajana*. His words offer us practical guidelines on how to become qualified for constant chanting.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa kīrtan

*śrī-kṛṣṇa-kīrtane jadi mānasa tohār
parama jatane tāhi labho adhikār*

If you desire to engage in chanting Kṛṣṇa's names and glories, then do everything you can to gain the qualifications necessary to do so.

*tṛnādhika hīna, dīna, akiñcana chār
āpane mānobi sadā chāḍi' ahañkār*

You should give up all false pride and always consider yourself to be insignificant, without possessions, and lower and more humble than a blade of grass.

*vṛkṣa-sama kṣamā-guna korobi sādhan
prati-himsā tyaji' anye korobi pālan*

Practice the virtue of tolerance by emulating the trees. Give up all vindictiveness and look after other creatures.

*jīvana-nirvāhe āne udvega nā dibe
para-upakāre nija-sukha pāsaribe*

Do not give distress to any other being in order to maintain your body; forget your own selfish concerns by serving others.

*hoile-o sarva-gune gunī mahāśoy
pratiṣṭhāśā chāḍi' koro amani hṛdoy*

Even if you possess all good qualities, do not try to profit from them by seeking prestige. Keep your heart simple.

*kṛṣṇa-adhiṣṭhāna sarva-jive jāni' sadā
korobi sammāna sabe ādare sarvadā*

Know that all living beings carry Kṛṣṇa in their hearts, so you should offer them respect under all circumstances.

*dainya, doyā, anye māna, pratiṣṭhā-varjan
cāri gune gunī hoi' koroha kīrtan*

Cultivate the four qualities of humility, tolerance and compassion, respect for others, and indifference to worldly honors, and chant the holy name.

*bhakativinoda kāṇḍi', bole prabhu-pāy
heno adhikāra kabe dibe he āmāy*

Bhaktivinoda cries out with the following plea at the Lord's lotus feet:
“When, O when will You make me qualified to chant Your holy name?” (*Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka*, Song 3, from *Gītāvalī*)

Much has been said about humility, but how do we develop tolerance? How to develop the right mind-set? The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (5.1.16) gives us a clue by pointing out that the body we have received is the product of our karma. Everything else in this world works automatically by the material energy's power. We cannot avoid the enjoyment or suffering due us. We have earned them; they come according to our previous karma. When we suffer unpleasantness or mishap, we are exhausting our bad karma, and if something good comes, we should know that it is coming from the storehouse of our good karma—a stock we are also exhausting as we enjoy.

But we should also know that it is a useless endeavor to try to accrue only good karma. Both types of karma keep us bound to this world. Bad karma is simply an iron chain, while good karma a golden one.

Those who understand this will naturally become tolerant. But such tolerance should not be confused with fatalism, or the blind acceptance of destiny. While it is a fact that each of us has a large stock of karmic reactions waiting to mature and take effect—reactions we will not avoid—it is also a fact that the vast and free kingdom of our spiritual life, our soul's right to practice *bhakti*, awaits us. And the *śāstra* promises that the karma of those who become empowered by the holy name—even the karma that has already manifest in them—will gradually become completely extinguished.

4. Guideline for All Devotees: More on Tolerance

In what manner should devotees wishing to advance perform their devotional service, including chanting their *japa*? What should their attitude be when relating to happiness and distress, conditions that tend to visit the mind repeatedly and disturb it? Neophyte practitioners are often carried on waves of materialistic feelings that agitate the mind and make it difficult to concentrate on the holy name. Śrīla Prabhupāda calls the following verse the “guideline for all devotees”:

*tat te 'nukampāṁ susamīkṣamāṇo
bhuñjāna evātma-kṛtaṁ vipākam
hṛd-vāg-vapurbhir vidadhan namas te
jīveta yo mukti-pade sa dāya-bhāk*

My dear Lord, one who earnestly waits for You to bestow Your causeless mercy upon him, all the while patiently suffering the reactions of his past misdeeds and offering You respectful obeisances with his heart, words, and body, is surely eligible for liberation, for it has become his rightful claim.
(ŚB. 10.14.8)

According to the general understanding of this verse, devotees should tolerate the disturbing reactions of their own misdeeds and remain fixed in devotion. They should also expect the Lord's glance of mercy and offer Him their respectful obeisances with heart, words, and body.

But Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura offers a deeper understanding. He says that both happiness and distress are the results of *bhakti*. Happiness comes when *bhakti* is performed correctly, and suffering arises when devotees commit *aparādhās* (offenses). However, both the sweet and the bitter results are simply Kṛṣṇa's mercy. "It is just like a father who sometimes makes his son drink milk and sometimes the bitter juice made from *nimba* leaves. The devotee thinks, 'I do not know, but the Lord, like a father, knows what is good and bad for me. Sometimes He embraces and kisses me, and sometimes He slaps me. I, His devotee, have no power at all over karma and time. He alone, by His mercy, makes me experience happiness and distress and makes me serve Him.'" Such a devotee considers his situation in the same way King Pṛthu considered his when he said: "O Lord, please bestow upon me whatever You think is best for me like a father who doesn't wait for the son's demand but who does everything for his son's benefit." (ŚB. 4.20.31)

In other words, the devotee should remain tolerant and steady in *bhakti*. Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains further: As remaining alive is the cause of a good son receiving his inheritance, the devotee's staying alive in this world with steadiness on the path of *bhakti* is the cause of his receiving freedom from *samsāra* and service to the Lord. (from Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's commentary on *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.174).

As long as we are living in this world, we have to expect disturbances, distractions, and tests of our tolerance and persistence. It, therefore, helps to keep this encouraging verse in mind when we are forced to cope with difficulties. This verse offers a useful guideline to keep us focused on the right understanding and give us steadiness in our *nāma-bhajana*.

5. Three Most Powerful Rules

A. Chant with a feeling of connection and eagerness

While chanting we should maintain the mood expressed in this wonderful prayer:

May my mind always be eager to see You, just as unfledged birds cannot live without their mother's presence, as hungry calves anxiously wait to drink their mother's milk, and as a wife remains absorbed in thoughts of her husband when he is away from home. (ŚB. 6.11.26)

This text expresses a devotee's great eagerness to experience a relationship with Kṛṣṇa and ultimately to serve Him as a wife serves her husband. It also refers to chanting with gratitude and appreciating the mercy we have already received, as expressed in the

first two analogies. And it certainly expresses the key to advancing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness: eagerness.

B. Contemplate the meaning of the mantra while chanting

Śrīla Prabhupāda informed the world of the root meaning of the *mahā-mantra*—a meaning that includes all other meanings: “My dear Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, my dear Kṛṣṇa, please engage me in Your service.” At other times he told us that the mantra is simply a prayer for acceptance. In his master work, *Śrī Caitanya Śikṣāmṛta*, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura recommends that we use Śrīla Gopāla-guru Gosvāmī meditations while chanting. Careful analysis of these short meditations reveals that they are intended to help us achieve the different levels of devotional service as enumerated by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī. Such prayers and meditations also prove that chanting is the practice by which devotees are guided from initial faith (*śraddhā*) to pure love of God (*prema*).

How do we use these meditations?

We may chant our rounds and progress slowly from one meditation to the next. There are no hard and fast rules as to how to use them. Perhaps we will go from one meditation to the next each time we begin a round. Perhaps we alter the meditations every two or three or four rounds. As we become more familiar with them, personal experience will dictate how to progress through the meditations. Remain open to the dynamics of your own practice!

HARE: he hare, mac-cittam hṛtvā bhava-bandhabān mocaya

Hare! O Hari, please steal my mind and deliver me from the bondage of material life.

KṚṢṆA: he kṛṣṇa, mac-cittam ākarṣaya

Kṛṣṇa! O Kṛṣṇa, please attract my mind to You.

HARE: he hare, sva-mādhuryeṇa mac-cittam hara

Hare! O Hari, please steal my heart with Your sweetness.

KṚṢṆA: he kṛṣṇa, sva-bhakta-dvārā bhajana-jñāna-dānena mac-cittam śodhaya

Kṛṣṇa! O Kṛṣṇa, please purify my mind by giving me knowledge of how to worship You through Your devotees.

KṚṢṆA: he kṛṣṇa, rucir bhavatu me

Kṛṣṇa! O Kṛṣṇa, please may I develop taste for You.

KṚṢṢNA: he kṛṣṇa, nāma-rūpa-guṇa-līlādiṣu man-niṣṭhām kuru
Kṛṣṇa! O Kṛṣṇa, please make me steady in hearing about Your name, form, qualities, and pastimes.

HARE: he hare, nija-sevā-yogyam mām kuru
Hare! O Harā, Rādhā, please make me suitable for serving You.

HARE: he hare, sva sevām ādeśaya
Hare! O Harā, Rādhā, kindly reveal my own service to You.

HARE: he hare, sva-preṣṭhena saha svābhīṣṭa-līlām śrāvaya
Hare! O Harā, Rādhā, please let me hear Your cherished pastimes with Your consort Kṛṣṇa.

RĀMA: he rāma, preṣṭhayā saha svābhīṣṭa-līlām mām śrāvaya
Rāma! O Rāma, please let me hear Your cherished pastimes with Your consort, Rādhā.

HARE: he hare, sva-preṣṭhena saha svābhīṣṭa-līlām darśaya
Hare! O Harā, Rādhā, please let me see Your pastimes with Your beloved.

RĀMA: he rāma, preṣṭhayā saha svābhīṣṭa-līlām mām darśaya
Rāma! O Rāma, please let me see Your pastimes with Rādhā.

RĀMA: he rāma, nāma-rūpa-guṇa-līlā-smaraṇādiṣu mām yojaya
Rāma! O Rāma, please engage me in remembering Your name, form, qualities, and pastimes.

RĀMA: he rāma, tatra mām nija-sevā-yogyam kuru
Rāma! O Rāma, please make me qualified for service in Your pastimes.

HARE: he hare, mām svāṅgīkṛtya ramaṣva
Hare! O Hari, making me Your servant, please enjoy.

HARE: he hare, mayā saha ramaṣva
Hare! O Hari, please enjoy with me.

C. Chant with Heart-rending Lamentation

Sincere chanters of the holy name realize quite early in their practice that they cannot attain real *kṛṣṇa-bhakti* by their own endeavor. Whatever they try to achieve by using their

speculative abilities, their knowledge, or any other endeavor just does not bring about love of Godhead. What can they do?

Seeing no alternative, the devotees cry for the mercy of *sādhū* and guru, calling out to the Lord: ‘O Kṛṣṇa, deliverer of the fallen souls! I am Your eternal servant. Yet I have fallen into this material ocean only to suffer. O Lord, be merciful and bestow the shelter of the dust of Your lotus feet.’ At that moment the merciful Lord places the devotee at His feet and offers comfort.

(*Śrī Caitanya Śikṣāmṛta*, sixth rainfall, third shower)

This comfort is especially offered by the most merciful incarnation of the Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Here is a very suitable prayer to the incarnation of unconditional mercy:

Now it is the age of Kali. My enemies, the senses, have become very strong. The splendid path of pure devotional service is blocked by millions of thorny bushes. I’m weak and agitated. Alas! Alas! Where can I go? O Lord Caitanyacandra, if You will not give me your mercy now, what can I do? (*Śrī Caitanya-candrāmṛta* 6)

And in another prayer from the same book:

Alas, alas! How will the desire-creeper of pure devotional service sprout in the desert of my heart? In my heart there is only one hope. I shall call out the name of Lord Caitanya. Then I shall never again lament. (*Caitanya-candrāmṛta* 43)

By Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s merciful glance, which can still be received today if we call sincerely for His mercy, the exalted stage of pure devotion, which is sought after by the greatest souls, will not be far away.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī deals with the need to take shelter at the lotus feet of Lord Caitanya in his *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Particularly instructive for our present discussion is the section in *Ādi-līlā*, ch. 8, verses 29–31.

If one chants the exalted holy name of the Lord again and again and yet his love for the Supreme Lord does not develop and tears do not appear in his eyes, it is evident that because of his offenses in chanting, the seed of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa does not sprout. But if one chants, with only slight faith, the holy names of Lord Caitanya and Nityānanda, very quickly he is cleansed of all offenses. Thus as soon as he chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, he feels the ecstasy of love for God.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura gives a lucid explanation of these Three Most Powerful Rules in his booklet *Nāma-bhajana*:

With a happy heart one should recollect the meaning and form of the Nāma. Also one should pray to Kṛṣṇa, which will lead one onward on the path of *bhajan*. If one does not do this, many births will pass by in vain and one will lead life in frustration like the *karmis* and *jñānīs*.

6. Enter the School of Surrender

When we have reached the stage of developing intense longing for the unattained *prema*, it is imperative that we enter the school of surrender in order to become qualified for such a rare treasure. If devotees do not develop a deep desire to take shelter in full surrender under Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet, they will not experience love of Godhead. Of course, it is not easy to surrender fully while we are still materially conditioned. But at least we should have a conscious intention to practice the six processes of surrender. By sincerely desiring to increase our surrender to Kṛṣṇa, our intention will strengthen like the growing light of a steadily increasing fire. And as the fire of surrender strengthens, it will proportionally devour any remaining corners of darkness in the heart until full surrender takes over.

The six symptoms of surrender are the devotees' well-protected treasures. Surrendered devotees:

- dedicate themselves, body, mind and soul, to Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's service;
- accept things that are favorable to the path of devotional service;
- reject everything—whatever it is—that opposes devotional service;
- accept Kṛṣṇa as their only protector; in other words, they know that nothing and no one else can save or protect them;
- have not the least doubt that Kṛṣṇa alone maintains them;
- and firmly and sincerely believe that they are very insignificant and therefore feel genuinely humble.

In other words, surrendered devotees consign themselves to Kṛṣṇa's merciful hands, knowing well that not a blade of grass or a grain of dust moves without His will and power. This understanding increases the devotees' inclination to take exclusive shelter in that form of the Lord that has so mercifully agreed to appear on their tongues as the holy name.

For those who wish to increase their mood of complete surrender, I would highly recommend they read Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's song collection, *Śaraṇāgati*. To help us enter the spirit of these prayers, I will quote one song here:

Acceptance of the Lord as One's Sole Maintainer

1. By what personal understanding or by what power has one such as me come into Your shelter? Surely it is Your mercy alone, for as Doyā-moya [He who is filled with mercy] and Patita-pāvana (savior of fallen souls) You are ever-engaged in delivering the fallen.
2. My only hope, O Lord, is that You are full of compassion and mercy. There is no one more in need of Your mercy than me. You will surely drive away all my fears.
3. No one else in the world has the power to rescue me. O merciful Lord! By Your decree, kindly deliver this vile and lowly sinner!
4. I have given up everything and come to Your lotus feet, O Lord. I am Your eternal servant and You are my maintainer. You are my sole protector, O Lord of the universe!
5. Everything is Yours. I am merely Your menial servant, so it is certain that You will deliver me. I have chosen Your lotus feet as my only shelter. I no longer belong to myself.
6. Bhaktivinoda weeps as he humbly takes shelter of Your feet. Forgiving all his offenses and affording him a taste for the holy name, now please kindly maintain him. (*Śaraṇāgati* 3.1)

Let me ask you a question: Don't you think that Kṛṣṇa will become mercifully inclined toward you if He hears you sincerely praying in the mood established by this or similar songs? When devotees take the holy name in this mood, the remnant of their material vision and futile self-centered endeavors will be wiped from their hearts. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's powerful words can open their spiritual eyes and create a mood of devotion in their hearts – a mood highly conducive to chanting with true humility. When we chant with humility, we can then full-heartedly concentrate on the short meditations given by Gopāla-guru Gosvāmī.

And what is the ultimate result of chanting with such meditations? Listen to Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's enlivening words as he inspires us to chant with true humility:

Thus when the tongue glorifies the Lord with counted or uncounted names, the mind sees Kṛṣṇa's form, the heart perceives Kṛṣṇa's qualities, and the soul in trance sees Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. (*Śrī Caitanya Śikṣāmṛta*, sixth rainfall, third shower)

7. Aspire for *Prema* while You Chant

If we wish to attain any goal, we have to remain mindful of it while we are engaged in whatever activities bring it about. Even though it seems, often, that most of our attention

must be used just to keep ourselves on course, somewhere in the back of the mind we have to remain aware of our destination. After all, reaching the destination is the only reason we have undertaken the journey.

We must remain conscious of the goal of our spiritual practice: to attain *prema-bhakti*. Such awareness is called *nirbandhini-matiḥ*, “undivided attention.” Only those who focus their attention in this undivided way can hope to attain perfection.

Or, to say it differently: while performing *sādhana* (spiritual practices) we must remain aware of the *sādhya* (the goal of those practices). Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura insists that we must maintain this awareness from the beginning of our spiritual journey. “From the very beginning of this practice, the devotee must adopt this concentrated attention, and he should be careful not to give it up because of distraction or inattention.” (*Śrī Caitanya Śikṣāmṛta*, first rainfall, seventh shower). In this connection he quotes:

*acirād eva sarvārthaḥ
sidhyaty eṣām abhīpsitaḥ
sad-dharmasyāvabodhāya
yeṣāṁ nirbandhini matiḥ*

Those who are eager to awaken their spiritual consciousness and who thus have unflinching, undeviating intelligence or concentration on their goal certainly attain the desired goal of life very soon.” (*Nārādīya Purāṇa*, quoted in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya* 20.106)

When discussing this important verse in relation to chanting the holy name, the verse would read: While chanting the holy names, fix your mind on the perfection of chanting: *prema*. Then you will quickly attain your goal: pure love of God.

Mental concentration (*dhāraṇā*) is but one step on the gradually ascending *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* ladder, and it always follows *pratyāhāra*, the retraction of the attention from distractions.

A chanter well trained in the science of *japa* will learn to develop this concentration without having to practice *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. By the holy name’s mercy the mind will become completely still—the end result of all yoga practice. Once the lake of the mind becomes free from the constant waves of acceptance and rejection, it begins to resemble the calm surface of a lake on a windless day. When devotees chant with this calm and focused attention, the splendors of the spiritual world, including Kṛṣṇa’s form and qualities, become reflected in the mind and the devotees experience deep happiness. It is impossible to compare this happiness with any other type of happiness, because other types of happiness appear just like insignificant straw on the street, totally ashamed to appear before *hari-nāmaṇanda* (the pleasure of chanting Hari’s name).

8. The Magic Formula

In his *Śrī Harināma Cintāmaṇi*, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura gives us a magic formula that summarizes how to cultivate chanting and to attain our original position. His formula has three aspects:

- the company of saintly devotees;
- a peaceful and secluded place to chant; and
- a determined attitude.

“One attains his natural glory on the strength of these three things.” (*Harināma Cintāmaṇi* 15.103)