

## THE LIVING NAME

## PART 1

### A Guide to Chanting with Absorption

#### INTRODUCTION

Of all Kṛṣṇa's various energies, one reigns supreme: His *kṛpā-śakti*, mercy-energy. Out of love, Kṛṣṇa comes to this world in the form of His Holy Name, making Himself easily accessible to even conditioned souls. However, we need to chant with full absorption and taste. Only when our chanting is infused with life, will Kṛṣṇa become pleased and make His divine appearance in our hearts. In the *Śrī Harināma Cintāmaṇi* (2.35) Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura explains that in this world of life and death only two spiritual entities exist: individual souls and the Holy Name of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The art of chanting is to bring the two together. All else is lifeless matter.

#### WHAT BRINGS OUR CHANTING TO LIFE?

Just as the five life airs animate the body with life, the five powerful practices in *The Living Name* can enliven the chanting of the Holy Name and turn it into a dynamic and transformative experience. Those five practices are:

**YOJANA** or alignment of body, mind and heart

**SAMBANDHA** or chanting with a sense of relationship

**SEVĀ** or chanting in the mood of service

**VIPRALAMBHA** or chanting in the right mood

**ŚARAṆĀGATI** or surrendering the very *self* to the Lord

These practices have been churned from the teachings of our great *ācāryas*, sacred *śāstra* and the experiences of exalted *sadhus*. They are interrelated: One first learns how to *align* body, mind and *heart* (*yojana*) to overcome distraction and thus embark on the path of full absorption. From here chanting in deep *connection* (*sambandha*) can be easily practiced, which brings one to the essence of *bhakti*: chanting in the mood of *service* (*sevā*). Hereafter, one learns to imbibe their chanting with the right *mood* (*vipralambha*) and with *surrender* (*śaraṇāgati*).



The chanter can either go systematically through these five practices or apply whichever he feels attracted to. As you apply yourself to these practices, you will go to the heart of the most accessible form of the Lord – His Holy Name.

*I do not know how much nectar the two syllables 'Kṛṣ-ṇa' have produced. When the Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa is chanted, it appears to dance within the mouth. We then desire many, many mouths.*

*When that Name enters the holes of the ears, we desire many millions of ears. And when the Holy Name dances in the courtyard of the heart, it conquers the activities of the mind, and therefore all the senses become inert.'*

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, quoted in *Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, Antya 1.99

# YOJANA

## Aligning the body, mind and heart in chanting to achieve full presence and attention

Just as one has to cross the three distinct gates, called *gopuras* in order to take the *darśana* of Lord Rāṅganātha in the Śrī Rāṅgam temple in South India, to approach the Lord of the heart, we also have to pass through three gates: by preparing the body, mind and heart. We have to learn to gradually tune inward by aligning ourselves while we chant. If we do so, we have done everything in our human power to approach the Lord for His *darśana*.

*By turning our body, mind and heart for proper chanting we show the Lord that we care and that we are eager to receive His mercy. He then will open the final gate, the very door to the altar, by His own sweet mercy.*



Preparing our body, mind and heart brings us to a state of presence, which is called *yojana*. In Sanskrit, *yojana* means to connect, join, harness or yoke. It comes from the verbal root 'yuj' which is also the verbal root of 'yoga.' The best English translation for *yojana* is alignment.

## ALIGNING THE BODY

When you begin our chanting of the Holy Name, either in *japa* or in *kīrtana*, you must start by aligning your body. That is the first gate to open.

It is said that both prayer and *japa* are best done sitting down in a posture that guarantees maximum concentration and presence. In other words, sit properly and choose a place where you are unlikely to be disturbed.

Next, pronounce each Name clearly! Aligning your body also includes making an effort to use and focus the voice on clearly pronouncing each Name. This invites the Holy Name to be present in its entirety, syllable by syllable. A truncated mantra does not have the same strength as the complete one!

Finally, make an effort to listen carefully to the utterance of each Name you are chanting. Again and again Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed us to hear ourselves chant the mantra.

## IN SUMMARY

Alignment of the body has three elements:

- 1) **POSTURE:** sit straight for better concentration
- 2) **PRONUNCIATION:** clearly utter the Holy Names
- 3) **LISTEN:** hear the Names as They enter your ears.

## ALIGNING THE MIND

The essence of mental focus is to return the mind to the chanting whenever it drifts because *bhakti* only happens in the present. Be present with each Name you chant! Remember that you have a chance to be with Kṛṣṇa – right now!

There are tools that can help you focus. Perhaps you can use a card with the individual Names from the *mahā-mantra* written on it while chanting (this is called *trāṭaka* meditation), or look at the divine forms of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa (deities, pictures). In your chanting, you can simply focus your inner eye on the Names as if reading the *mahā-mantra* or you may focus your attention on various limbs of the Lord by looking at His form.

## THE FIRST HARE

To help us capture the wandering mind try the technique of focusing the mind on the first *Hare* of each *mahā-mantra*.

This is how it works: When chanting, focus all your attention on the first *Hare* so it becomes a door through which you enter the flow of the entire *mantra*. Again and again, try to bring your full attention to the first *Hare*.

After you succeed in this, try to place your attention on the other parts of the *mantra* until you are able to concentrate on the complete *mantra*. Practice bringing the *mantra* into your mind and your mind into the *mantra*.

In other words - practice immersing yourself into the natural flow of the *mantra*. It is like entering a gentle, flowing river. You step into the river and the river moves you forward. Focus on the first Hare, keep your attention there, and let the *mantra* take you along its own sweet flow.

## IN SUMMARY

To align the mind means to:

- 1) relinquish thoughts of the past and future, and focus on being utterly present
- 2) keep bringing your attention back to hearing the Holy Names. Don't despair if the mind still wanders; just learn to catch it and bring it back. It is something one needs to practice... relentlessly.

Śrīla Prabhupāda reiterated the solution with encouraging words, 'What is controlling of the mind? You have to chant and hear. That's all. You have to chant with your tongue and hear the sound. That's all. What is the question of the mind?'

Morning walk, February 3, 1975, Hawaii.

## ALIGNING THE HEART

The third and final gate we have to cross is to bring a heart full of devotional feelings to our practice. How?

We begin by thinking about the Lord whose Name we are chanting and by evoking devotional feelings. But alas, our heart is bound with the rope of attachment to this world. To increase our attachment to the Holy Name we can only turn to the compassionate master of the surrendered souls, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and pray to Him to increase our affection for Him. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī recommends the following prayer for increased spiritual attachment

*aghadamana-yaśodānandanau nandasūno  
kamalanayana-gopīcandra-vṛndāvanendraḥ  
praṇatakaruṇa-kṛṣṇāv ity aneka-svarūpe  
tvai mama ratir uccair vardhatām nāmadheya*

*Oh Śrī Harināma, 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. Oh Holy Name, let my attachment for You increase more and more.*

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrī Nāmāṣṭaka 5

Or simply pray,

*My dear Rādhā, my dear Kṛṣṇa, please accept me in Your service.*

## IN SUMMARY

To align the heart means to:

- 1) think about the Lord whose Name you chant
- 2) chant with devotional feelings

Heart-aligned, or attentive chanting really means chanting with attachment for the owner of the Name.

## TRY THIS:

Strive for complete absorption by aligning body, mind and heart.

**Align your body:** Sit straight, pronounce each mantra properly and listen to each Name attentively.

**Align your mind:** Give up thoughts of the past and future; focus on the present and bring your attention back to hearing each Name

**Align your heart:** Think about the Lord and chant with devotional feelings

