There is one foundational principle of the bhāgavata philosophy, which is enacted and taught practically by Lord Caitanya Mahā-prabhu during his earthly pastimes. By understanding it you will be able to live and apply what Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu had come to teach us. This foundational principle is to establish a relationship with the Lord through the mood of separation. This is best practiced in kīrtana.

RECEIVING THE HOLY NAME

We have heard it so many times – in order to receive the holy name we first need to become focused. By being mindful to the sound vibration of the holy name we will bring the mind into connection with Kṛṣṇa. To do this we need to actually hear the mantra and stay with it all the time, which requires some focus, willingness, and prayer.

Our biggest problem however is that we feel disconnected and ‘dry’ while applying ourselves to the practice of chanting. We try to focus our minds on the sound vibration, but alas – the mind seems to be more difficult to control than the wind! What should we do? Where is our hope?

Our hope and solution lies in learning to chant in the mood of separation. This feeling of separation from Kṛṣṇa is possible for the conditioned soul because we have turned away from him. How do we come to this mood? It is by feeling: “Kṛṣṇa, I really need you!”

LEARNING FROM THE LIVES OF GREAT DEVOTEES

After the death of his mother, the five-year-old boy Nārada Muni left his home and went into the jungle. There, under a banyan tree, he sat down and meditated according to the instructions of the four great saints who had visited his home. While Nārada Muni was meditating under the banyan tree, the Lord appeared to him.

Nārada Muni was so overwhelmed by the darsana of the Lord, that he became so absolutely moved and lost both the vision of himself and the Lord. Everything disappeared. He became frantic and most eager to see the Lord again, but the Lord said to him:

“I regret that during this lifetime you will not be able to see me anymore. Those who are incomplete in service and are not completely free from all material things can hardly see me. Oh Nārada Muni, you are virtuous. Only once you have seen me in person, and this is just to increase your desire for me, because the more you hanker for me, the more you will be freed from all material desires.” (Srimad-Bhāgavatam 1.6.21-22)
When the Lord disappeared, Nārada Muni was thrown into an ocean of abject inner pain. Imagine what happens when a poor man receives a touchstone which can fulfill all of his desires, and then all of a sudden loses it. What will this poor man do? For the rest of his life, he will try to find this jewel again.

In the same way that Kṛṣṇa disappeared from Nārada Muni, he appears and disappears from our lives as well. For example, he appears to us at the beginning of our Kṛṣṇa consciousness by giving us some taste which is so strong that we leave the material world behind. Otherwise how could we attempt to live a life which is completely different from what we had learnt and seen before? Kṛṣṇa is present to some degree or another when we read the Bhāgavatam. It is said that by reading the Bhāgavatam the Lord appears within our hearts. To some degree or another, we have experienced this as well. And Kṛṣṇa also appears in our lives when we sing kirtanās. At other times we have feelings of deep appreciation and connectedness. In this way we know Kṛṣṇa is there.

But then he leaves us… And we experience states of dryness, separation, disconnectedness, etc. In Christian theology, these phases are known as the “dark nights of the soul.” You feel desperate because you don’t feel any love of Godhead left.

The question is what will you do then. Will you say: “Oh, I’ll get another Lord. This is just too much for me.” Or will you understand “I need to become purified now. There is a reason why the Lord does this to me. He wants to increase my hankering for him.”

Don’t despair! Understand Kṛṣṇa’s principle of wanting to increase your attachment to Him.

Kṛṣṇa said to the gopīs: “The reason I do not immediately reciprocate the affection of living beings even when they worship me, O gopīs, is that I want to intensify their loving devotion. They then become like a poor man who has gained some wealth and then lost it, and who thus becomes so anxious about it that he can’t think of nothing else. [...] I acted as I did only to increase your attachment to me. Even when I removed myself from your sight by suddenly disappearing, I never stopped loving you. Therefore, my beloved gopis, please do not harbour any bad feelings toward me, your beloved.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.32.20-21).

Let us see what Nārada Muni did, when the Lord disappeared from him: He became determined to meet the Lord again and concluded, “Thus I began chanting the holy name and fame of the Lord by repeated recitation, ignoring all the formalities of the material world. Such chanting and remembering of the transcendental pastimes of the Lord are benedictory. So doing, I traveled all over the earth, fully satisfied, humble and unenvious.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.6.26)

Let us also choose this response to Kṛṣṇa’s hiding and thus continue to worship him in this mood of separation.

To be continued… (In the next part you will learn how to exactly chant in the mood of separation.)

By Śacīnandana Swami. April, 2015.