

24. Glorify the Lord's Name

EMBODIMENTS of Love! Only when we realise the preciousness of the diamond will we take care to safeguard it. Likewise only when we are aware of the value of chanting the Lord's name will we make the effort to practise it and benefit from it.

Devotees recite or sing the names of the Lord in two ways. One is *Keerthanam* and the other is *Sankeerthanam*. *Keerthanam* is done individually and benefits only the devotee concerned.' *Sankeerthanam* is done collectively for the good of the world as a whole.

Keerthanam is of various kinds. First is *Guna Keerthana*---praising the qualities and attributes of God through song. Second is *Bhava Keerthana*---expressing the inner feelings and emotions of the devotee. Reflecting the feelings of peace, companionship, yearning, filial love or sweetness experienced by the devotee, these songs give vent to the emotional outpouring of the devotee. The third is *Leela Sankeerthanam*---praising in song the sports and divine play of the Lord. This is done through singing the *Ashtapadi* (of Jayadeva) or describing the sports and miraculous deeds of the Lord. The *rasa krida* is also in this category. The fourth is *Nama Sankeerthanam*---singing the names of the Lord. This is the most efficacious of all forms of devotional singing. But in actual practice the devotees derive joy from singing all types of devotional songs.

Special significance of Nama Sankeerthana

What is the special significance of *Nama Sankeerthana*---singing the names of the Lord? "*Nama*" is made up of three letters: "*Na*" "*aa*", "*ma*". All music is based on the seven *swaras*---the seven notes. According to the science of numerology the letters "*Na*", "*aa*" and "*Ma*" have the numerical values: 0, 2 and 5 making up seven in all. The seven notes are *Sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, da, ni*. The *Gopikas* made use of these seven notes to combine music, rhythm and devotion in the *Rasa Krida* dance with Krishna. In this group dance, the *Gopikas* were so completely lost in devotion and song that they experienced oneness with the Divine.

In this way, *Sankeerthan* (community singing) in praise of Krishna became popular and helped to develop devotion and promote collective prayers for the welfare of the world.

Similarly community singing in the name of Rama also came into vogue. Numerologically, the letters in the name of Rama (*Ra+aa+ma*) add up to seven. Besides the seven notes, the mystic number seven is associated with many sacred things like the seven islands, the seven oceans, the seven sages and so on. In accordance with this concept, seven-day festivals and *yajnas* are held.

Threefold purity essential

Not all realise the potency and efficacy of reciting the Lord's name. The first requisite is purity of thought, word and deed. The name that is uttered by the tongue should be meditated upon by the mind. What is uttered and dwelt upon should be hailed by clapping the hands. This threefold concentration on the Divine name---unity of mind, speech and action---purifies the heart and nourishes the feeling of devotion.

Better than recounting the qualities of the Lord, singing His glories or relating His exploits and teachings, the chanting of the name is supremely edifying. If merely the Lord is described as *Dayamaya* (the embodiment of kindness) there may be many who qualify for that description. If the term "*Leelaamaamusha vighradu*" (One who has assumed the human form as a sport) is used, it may apply to any number of persons.

Guru Nanak was the initiator of the practice of community singing of devotional songs. He believed that through such community singing the common man can ennoble his life and experience the presence of the Divine in everyone. Through that experience, one can become a knower of the *Brahman (jnani)*. Ratnakara, who led the life of a highway man, became the sage Valmiki after prolonged meditation on the name of Rama. He got the illumination out of which the Ramayana was born. Moses was another great figure of old times who achieved God-realisation by continuously dwelling on the name of God.

Community singing of bhajans

When the chanting of the Name is done in community singing, it should be in a form in which the entire group can participate easily. The tune, the rhythm, etc. should be such that all can follow the *bhajan*. If the lead singer takes up a song that is not familiar to others, the response from the group will be poor. There will be no enthusiasm or genuine participation. Their minds, will be distracted. When all the devotees participate in the *bhajan*, the vibrations that are produced will generate joy and harmony.

Many who organise mass singing on special occasions are not aware what kind of *bhajans* should be sung then. A person who has an individual style of his own may sing as he likes in private, but he is not suitable for community singing.

There are some rules to be observed in conducting community *bhajans*. *Alapana* (elaboration of a *raga*) may be done in *keerthana* (individual singing), but it is wholly out of place in community *bhajans*. Hence, in such *bhajans* the accent should be entirely on the Name.

Today we are having the *Akhanda Bhajan* (nonstop twenty-four-hour global *bhajan* by Sai devotees all over the world). This is being done not for the sake of one individual, one nation or one community. It is for the welfare of humanity as a whole.

The bhajans that are sung permeate the ether in the form of sound waves and fill the entire atmosphere.

Thereby the whole environment gets purified. Breathing in this purified atmosphere, our hearts get purified. Reciting the Lord's name is a process of give and take. Singing the Lord's name should become an exercise in mutual sharing of joy and holiness. It should be remembered that the sounds we produce reverberate in the atmosphere. They remain permanently in the ether as waves and outlast the individual uttering the sounds.

Today the atmosphere is polluted by unholy and vicious sounds. This results in the growth of evil thoughts and feelings, which lead to evil deeds. If the atmosphere has to be purified, it has to be filled with pure and sacred sounds. Hence the need to cultivate purity in thought, word and deed.

Singing should be vibrant and soulful

Community *bhajans* should not be treated as a pastime. When thousands of persons join in singing *bhajans*, they should be fully absorbed in the devotional process and the ecstasy of that experience. The singing should be vibrant and soulful and not mechanical or drawling and uninspiring. It should combine *bhava* (feeling), *raga* (melody) and *tala* (rhythm). What delight can be experienced when all sing in chorus, with the same feeling, in the same tune and to the same timing! When there is such unity the Divine can be experienced.

The songs should glorify the Name rather than describe the attributes of the Lord. When attributes are praised some may develop doubts. If for instance, the Lord is described as *Karunaamaya* (the embodiment of compassion), some ailing devotee may ask why the Lord is showing no compassion towards him and offer relief. Similar doubts may arise when the sports or exploits of the Lord are glorified. But when the song is confined to the name alone, these doubts don't arise. Hence, the devotee should install the name firmly in his heart and sing with fervour. *Samyag keerthanam* = *Sankeerthanam*. *Sankeerthanam* means singing extremely well. This means that in community singing, the participant should sing with full-throated joy and deep feeling. He should not bother about his voice or his musical ability. Purity of feeling will make up for everything. Picture the Lord in your heart and utter the Name---then you will feel the joy of singing the. Name. You will also evoke joy in others.

The name Rama is made up of three *bijaaksharas* (root letters) associated with Fire, Sun and Moon. Symbolically, this means that by uttering the name of Rama, the fire principle will burn away one's sins, the sun principle will dispel the darkness of ignorance, and the moon principle will cool the fevers arising out of desires.

(Bhagavan concluded His discourse with the singing of the bhajan, "Harey Rama ! Harey Rama! Rama Rama! Harey Harey!")

Discourse at the Prasanthi Mandir, on 8-11-1986, the day of Akhanda Bhajan.