

# Eligibility through *Harināma*

Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura was concerned that indiscriminate dissemination of spurious *siddhapraṇālī* had resulted in immoral behavior camouflaged as spontaneous devotion, which had led to many persons being misguided and also to diminished public regard for Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s movement. The proclivity for catapulting oneself onto the uppermost echelon of spiritual attainment without sensible consideration of one’s actual eligibility was a theme that Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura found necessary to address repeatedly, for neophyte devotees were prone to be allured by persons who in all respects seemed like *premi-bhaktas* and promised immediate entrance into the highest realms without having to undergo primary practices of purification.

In accordance with the genuine *praṇālī* (path) of *siddhas* (perfect devotees), Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī’s approach to *rāgānuga-bhakti* stressed *kīrtana* over artificial *smaraṇa*, emphasizing that all other processes of *bhakti*, including *smaraṇa*, could be properly executed only in conjunction with and by the mercy and strength derived from *nāma-bhajana*; that chanting of the holy name was itself *siddha-praṇālī*; and that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu had declared chanting of *harināma*, particularly the *mahā-mantra*, to be the only *praṇālī* for Kali-yuga, whereby all persons can attain *sarva-siddhi* (complete perfection):

***hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare  
hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare***

***prabhu bale, “kahilān ei mahā-mantra  
iha japa’ giyā sabe kariyā nirbandha***

***ihā haite sarva-siddhi haibe sabāra  
sarva-kṣaṇa bolo ithe vidhi nāhi āra”***

The Lord said, “I have told you the *mahā-mantra*. Chant it regularly according to the prescribed system, according to a vow, and with one-pointed attention. By this you will attain all perfection. Simply chant always. There are no other rules for chanting, such as those governing proper time and place as are prescribed for other Vedic mantras.” (CB Madhya 23.76–78)

Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura insisted that *sādhana-bhakti* based on *nāma-bhajana* must precede admission to the *rāga-patha*; he emphasized the need to become free from *anarthas*, and that the means to do so was by the mercy of *śrī-nāma*:

We have no duty other than taking the holy name. We cannot actually take the name as long as we have *anarthas*. There is mostly *nāmāparādha*, and sometimes by chance maybe *nāmābhāsa*. One must from the beginning endeavor to become free from *anarthas*. By sincerely calling out to Bhagavān the *jīva* may attain *anartha-nivṛtti*—there is no other means.

He quoted Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī on the natural escalating course beginning with chanting the Lord's *nāma* (name), whereby realization of His *rūpa* (form and beauty), *guṇa* (qualities), and eventually *līlā* (pastimes) would progressively manifest:

*prathamam nāmaḥ śravaṇam antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhy-artham apeksyam. śuddhe cāntaḥ-karaṇe rūpa-śravaṇena tad-udaya-yogyatā bhavati. samyag udite ca rūpe guṇānām sphuraṇam sampadyeta, sampanne ca guṇānām sphuraṇe parikara-vaiśiṣṭyena tadvaiśiṣṭyam sampadyate. tatas teṣu nāma-rūpa-guṇa-parikareṣu samyak sphuriteṣu līlānām sphuraṇam suṣṭhu bhavati. tatrāpi śravaṇe śrī-bhāgavata-śravaṇas tu paramaśreṣṭham.*

*The practice of sādhana-bhakti begins with hearing the holy name, which purifies the heart of the devotee. Thereby he becomes qualified to hear descriptions of the Lord's form, which then gradually awakens within the heart. Consequently the qualities of the Lord progressively arise within the heart. As they manifest fully, the specific aspects of His service and pastimes gradually awaken. In this way the holy name reveals the Lord's form, qualities, and pastimes in all their splendor and beauty and in all their different branches.<sup>1</sup>*

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī also cited Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's similar comments, given in his gloss on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.8.4, that a devotee engaged in *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana* does not need to separately try for *smaraṇa*, for *smaraṇa* is dependent on *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana*. He would also quote from Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's song "Kṛṣṇa-nāma dhare kata bala" (How potent is the name of Kṛṣṇa!):

*īṣat vikaśi' punaḥ dekhāya nija-rūpa-guṇa  
citta hari laya kṛṣṇa pāśa  
pūrṇa vikaśita haṣā vraje more jāya laṣā  
dekhāya nija svarūpa vilasa*

*When the Name starts to blossom in the heart, He reveals His own spiritual form and characteristics. He steals my mind and takes me to Kṛṣṇa. When the Name is completely manifest, He takes me to Vraja, where He shows me my personal form and role in Kṛṣṇa's eternal pastimes. (Śaraṇāgati)*

And from his own composition he would cite, *kīrtana-prabhāve smaraṇa haibe*: "The transcendental power of congregational chanting automatically awakens spontaneous remembrance of the Lord and His divine pastimes in relation to one's eternal spiritual form." He explained that apprehension of *līlā* is impossible by any means other than the mercy of the holy name, and that endeavors for *smaraṇa* without *nāma-bhajana* cannot be successful. He further elaborated:

Those who give up the process of hearing and loudly chanting the holy names as received from the mouth of devotees who are free from *nāmāparādha*, and to gratify their own senses display artificial semblance of *līlā-smaraṇa* in their impure, enjoyment-prone hearts, in this way attempting to imitate remembrance

of the Lord's pastimes, simply increase their thirst for material enjoyment born from aversion to the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

By chanting the holy name all *anarthas* will be removed. Then automatically *rūpa-guṇa-līlā* (the Lord's form, qualities, and pastimes) will be revealed. There is no point in making a separate effort to artificially remember the Lord's form, qualities, and pastimes. The Lord and His name are one and the same. This will be understood lucidly when the coverings in our hearts are removed. By chanting without offenses you will personally experience that all perfection comes from the holy name.

Without *śravaṇa* there is no *kīrtana*. First *śravaṇa*, then *kīrtana*.<sup>3</sup>

Unless accompanied by *śravaṇa* any attempt to perform *kīrtana* must be material. Repeated hearing gives rise to *kīrtana* and *smaraṇa*. By hearing *kīrtana* one begins to perform *kīrtana*, and from performing *kīrtana*, *smaraṇa* of Hari-kathā wakens.<sup>4</sup>

The name of the Lord and the Lord Himself are not two separate entities, but one. When the sound of the holy name passes over the lips, the conditioned sense of hearing and the conditioned consciousness initially process the sound as if it were material, and that is how it is perceived. As a result, only the external ear hears it. Since the other senses and the mind, which is the collector of sensory experience, are envious of the ear, which they consider to be an equal partner, the result is that such chanting does not effect the cleansing of *anarthas*.

We do not have the capacity even to theoretically know that the name and the Lord of the name are one. Yet just as piercing of the ear is one of the Vedic rites for a young child, when our spiritual ear has been pierced by the holy name the other senses give up their envy of the auditory sense. They no longer quibble with the ear, which alone can perceive transcendental sound. Then the flood of *prema* pours forth from all the spiritual senses and cleans away the contaminants of opposition and malice. Thereafter the Lord's beautiful form, qualities, associates, and pastimes are revealed in the name Himself, and experienced by the chanter as something quite distinct from his previous experiences in the mundane world. Then the kinds of worries and distractions of the mind that are typical of the conditioned living being cannot remain.

We should constantly pray to the holy name for His mercy. A person still filled with *anarthas* should not engage in *smaraṇa* of *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā*. When we learn to hear as we chant, the opportunity to remember will automatically arise. At that time *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā-smaraṇa* will become possible. There is no need artificially to try for it.<sup>5</sup>

*Smarana* is possible by the power of *nāma-saṅkīrtana*. The completely manifested name is *aṣṭa-kālīya nitya-līlā*. Realization of the name and service are not attained without *smarana* based on *nāma*. *Nāmāparādha-kīrtana* is not *nāma-kīrtana*. As the bud of the holy name begins to sprout just a little, the supramundane forms of Kṛṣṇa and His associates become manifest, and when it reaches the flowering stage, the fragrance of Kṛṣṇa's sixty-four qualities is experienced. When the lotus of the holy name fully expands, Kṛṣṇa's *aṣṭa-kālīya nitya-līlā*, although beyond material nature, manifests within this world.<sup>6</sup>

Those who have no material expectation regarding *sādhana* or the goal of *sādhana*, who simply desire to become the servant of Rādhā, the dearest of Madana Gopāla, under the control of the highest inconceivable spontaneous love, chant loudly and without offense the names of Kṛṣṇa, the king of *rasa*. As described in *Śrī Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* 2.3.144, those who desire to serve the lotus feet of Rādhā must constantly perform *nāma-saṅkīrtana*.<sup>7</sup>

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī would cite many sources, particularly *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, asserting the preeminence of *kīrtana* as the prime purificatory activity for Kali-yuga and accessible to all without pre-qualification. He explained that his definition of *kīrtana* as being in and of itself *siddha-praṇālī* was firmly founded in the earliest teachings of the Gauḍīya *sampradāya*, and thus his emphasis on *kīrtana* was for restoring the original and easiest path. He described how *svarūpa-siddhi* arises from sincere chanting:

I was extremely glad to see in your mail the very gist of all the sayings of *śāstra*. After deliberating over the matter in your heart you will realize that precocious thinking born of idleness can bear no actual fruit. We are tiny *jīvas* traversing the path of *vidhi*, yet are not inimical to *rāga*. *Rāga-kathā* is exalted, but it seems inappropriate that it should come from our small mouths. Hearing such big words from our little mouths, devotees whose life and soul is *bhajana* will laughingly push us away.

Having no idea of who Kṛṣṇa is, if a person tries to raise himself onto the path of *rāga*, he (only) exposes his laziness in attempting to raise himself to the highest level; the *mahājanas* proclaim this at every step.

Śrī Bhagavān (*nāmī*) and the name of Bhagavān (*nāma*) are a nondifferent entity. He who has a conditioned perception of difference between *nāma* and *nāmī* is absolutely required to serve devotees accomplished in *bhajana*, for rectification of his *anarthas*. To demonstrate this, the eternal associates of Śrī Gaurasundara have described the kind of *bhajana* such devotees perform. If we utter the name in parrot-like fashion, people will designate us as *prākṛta-sahajiyās* and thus decrease our self-conceit. But if we want to show all these *prākṛta-sahajiyās*, who are mired in their misconceptions—lamenting like a cow stuck in mud—the real glory of *rāgānuga-bhakti*, we ourselves must become expert in the art of *bhajana*, whereby others may be benefited.<sup>8</sup>

So take care to understand these topics well. *Bhajana* is not an external activity, nor for showing off. Loudly call out *nāma*; then the spirit of enjoyment in the form of laziness will not be able to devour us.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's *Krama-sandarbha* commentary on ŚB 7.5.18.

<sup>2</sup> CB Ādi 16.172 p

<sup>3</sup> Śrīla Prabhupādera Goloka-vāṇī 1.198.

<sup>4</sup> Śrīla Prabhupādera Goloka-vāṇī 1.296, 1.299.

<sup>5</sup> Letter (18 December 1932), *Patrāvalī* 2.118–19.

<sup>6</sup> *Gauḍīya* 13.213; Śrīla Prabhupādera Goloka-vāṇī 3.35.

<sup>7</sup> *Gauḍīya* 9.30.506.

<sup>8</sup> The analogy of a cow stuck in mud refers to a person caught in a misconception and who must suffer its sticky consequences.

<sup>9</sup> Letter (13 December 1928), *Patrāvalī* 1.62–63.