

From : Sri Mayapur Chandrodaya Mandir

Date: February 5, 2015

Speaker : HH Bhakti Rasamrita Swami

Subject : SB 6.3.31

tasmat sankirtanam visnor jagan-mangalam amhasam

mahatam api kauravya viddhy aikantika-niskrtam

"Sukadeva Gosvami continued: My dear King, the chanting of the holy name of the Lord is able to uproot even the reactions of the greatest sins. Therefore the chanting of the sankirtana movement is the most auspicious activity in the entire universe. Please try to understand this so that others will take it seriously."

PURPORT: We should note that although Ajamila chanted the name of Narayana imperfectly, he was delivered from all sinful reactions. The chanting of the holy name is so auspicious that it can free everyone from the reactions of sinful activities. One should not conclude that one may continue to sin with the intention of chanting Hare Krsna to neutralize the reactions. Rather, one should be very careful to be free from all sins and never think of counteracting sinful activities by chanting the Hare Krsna mantra, for this is another offense. If by chance a devotee accidentally performs some sinful activity, the Lord will excuse him, but one should not intentionally perform sinful acts.

HH Bhakti Rasamrita Swami: Hare Krishna!

Before I begin I seek the blessings of all the assembled devotees and especially of my exalted seniors many of whom are present here and in front of whom I am required to speak today. I pray that my words may be meaningful, faithful to the teachings of the parampara and also give some pleasure to the Vaisnavas.

The topic for today is also a cause of great pleasure and the topic is sankirtana. Sukadeva Goswami mentions here that the congregational chanting of the holy name can uproot even the greatest of sins. And this theme recurs many times in the Bhagavatam and also in the other Vedic scriptures. For example, the very last verse of the Srimad Bhagavatam indicates the same thing.

nama-sankirtanam yasya sarva-papa pranasanam

pranamo dukha-samanas tam namami harim param

which means I offer my humble obeisances to that Supreme Personality of Godhead Hari by chanting whose names all sinful reactions are completely destroyed.

The word is sarva-papa pranasanam - pranasanam indicates not just nasanam or destruction but pranasanam which means complete destruction, thorough destruction.

pranamo dukha samanasa - by offering obeisances to that Supreme Lord Hari all one's miseries are also destroyed.

And of course this is one of the features of devotional service that it completely uproots sinful reactions so that they never again recur. It is the ultimate atonement. vidhya aikantika-niskrtam, the word niskrtam is translated by Srila Prabhupada here as atonement.

In the Sixth Canto Srila Sukadeva Goswami says

kecit kevalaya bhaktya vasudeva-parayanah

agham dhunvanti kartasnyena niharam iva bhaskarah (SB 6.1.15)

Meaning, that with the very glimpse, just as with a very first few rays of the rising sun the fog and the darkness of the night is dissipated. Similarly with the barely a glimpse of the chanting, of the onset of pure devotion to the Lord all sinful reactions are completely eradicated.

So in this way there are numerous references about how devotional service and the chanting of the holy names in particular destroys sinful reactions but that is not the ultimate goal of chanting the holy name as the scriptures also describe at other places.

For example in the Caitanya Caritamrta Srila Haridas Thakura clearly explains that the true result of chanting the holy names of the Lord is not destruction of sinful reactions and liberation or moksa. The real purpose of chanting the holy name and the ultimate fruit is the development of ecstatic love for the lotus feet of Lord Krishna.

So this is what the sankirtana movement is all about. It is meant to give to the whole world ecstatic love for the lotus feet of Lord Krishna. Therefore it will be very helpful for us to understand deeper the purport of the word sankirtana which appears in this verse and after which our whole movement is named.

There are two parts to this word, the first one is sam and the second part is kirtana. So let's talk about these two parts beginning with kirtana.

Kirtana comes from the word kirti which means glory among other meanings. So to glorify someone or something is kirtana. Srila Prabhupada explains that the word kirtana from a grammatical point of view can mean glorification or description of anything. However the true purport from a Krishna conscious point of view is that kirtana is glorification of the Supreme Lord. So Prabhupada says,

"There is nothing like Kali kirtana, for example. Kirtana means Krishna kirtana."

However because the word kirtana can be grammatically understood in different ways many people interpret the word differently and give different purports to it which are not in keeping with true understanding of Bhagavata dharma.

In 1970 the devotees approached the authorities of the University of California at Berkeley to be allowed to give some classes on Krishna consciousness to the students. The faculty members considered the proposal and rejected it. There was a newspaper article sometime later in the Los Angeles Times. And one of the professors named Professor Staal was quoted as saying, that "the Hare Krishnai..or the devotees spend too much time chanting to be able to develop a philosophy." (laughter) What he implied was that it is just sentimental, they don't have philosophy, they just chant and dance.

Does it sound familiar? Remember somebody called Prakasananda Sarasvati in Varanasi? (laughs)
So he considered Caitanya Mahaprabhu as sentimentalist who was simply chanting and dancing with the common population on the streets.

And Professor Staal was quoted to say many other things which were not very favorable to the Hare Krishna movement and naturally Srila Prabhupada took strong exception to it. And he shot off a letter to the Los Angeles Times explaining the whole purpose of the Hare Krishna movement. And Professor Staal he wrote privately to Prabhupada saying he didn't want to continue talking in the press but they'd rather talk privately. So Srila Prabhupada in that article had quoted Bhagavad Gita, so Professor Staal said that Bhagavad Gita doesn't say that you have to constantly do kirtana and chant

the names of Krishna.

The exchange of letters is long but I am only giving you the essence. Srila Prabhupada wrote back to Professor Staal saying,

"But indeed the Bhagavad Gita does emphasize that we have to do constant kirtana", and he quoted the fourteenth verse of the ninth chapter of Bhagavad Gita:

satatam kirtayanto mam yatantas ca drdha-vrtah
namasyantas ca mam bhaktya nitya-yukta upasate

which means that the great souls constantly do kirtana, they chant the holy names. My holy name, Krishna says. They endeavor with great determination, they are always offering obeisances to Me and they always engage in worshipping Me.

And then Professor Staal wrote back to Prabhupada and said,

"I'm not convinced that all the scriptures that you cite ask us to only chant the names of Krishna."

For example, he said,

"You have quoted the satatam kirtayanto mam verse from the Bhagavad Gita. But the word kirtayantah can be understood differently from how you have explained it. kirtayantah can mean simply describing, glorifying, reciting, repeating, etc. and it refers to songs, hymns, descriptions, conversations and so on. This is how many commentators have presented it.

Sankaracarya has merely repeated the word kirtanam and not explained it but Ananda Giri who is a mayavada sanyasi, who is a follower of Sankaracarya he has explained kirtayantah as follows, and he says,

'kirtayantah implies vedanta sravanam pranava japas ca, which means that kirtayantah means that one should hear the Vedanta Sutra and one should mutter Om!' ..like that.

And another commentator Hanuman he said, has translated kirtayantah as bhasya manah simply taking about.

So here it doesn't imply that you have to keep talking about Krishna. "

And he pointed out furthermore,

"This verse, the fourteenth verse you have quoted doesn't indicate that everyone must chant always. It only says that, some great souls do it. (laughs) You see, the Bhagavad Gita is very broad minded in its approach," Professor continued. So he said, there are so many options given in the Bhagavad Gita and one can follow any of these options, of different paths that are delineated therein."

So you see how different people will interpret the verses of the Gita which are fairly straightforward and present things which are completely different.

I want to share a personal experience in brief with a certain mayavadi sanyasi. When I was a brahmachari and I was walking down the street one time in South Bombay, I saw a pandal and it advertised a speech on the Bhagavad Gita by a very famous sanyasi, who is a mayavadi sanyasi. And he has his whole mission named after him. So I knew that Prabhupada said that we should not

hear from mayavadi's. But curiosity got the better of me. Let's hear what he says, why is it, what is it that these people are all about!

As I entered the pandal, everybody was sitting, I was the only person moving as I came in from the back. And as Providence would have it, he was discussing this satatam kirtayanto mam verse. (laughter) And he saw me, because I was with a Vaisnava tilaka, he must have immediately understood that I am Hare Krishna. And he immediately changed track (laughter) and then he performed a mock imitation of a Hare Krishna devotee in a rather crude way which I cannot repeat here sitting on the vyasasana.

And then he launched into a long winded speculative explanation of what the word kirtayanto mam meant. Of course I didn't stay for it. I left after a few moments. He was saying satatam kirtayanto mam doesn't mean we simply have to chant Hare Krishna Hare Rama all the time.

So anyway we see from these examples that the word kirtana can have so many meanings and from depending on what philosophical point of view we have.

So Srila Prabhupada replied to Professor Staal and said,

"Well I can only cite you references on the authority of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu who said kirtaniya sada harih - Always chant the name of Hari. And as far as Ananda Giri's explanation on kirtayantah being chanting, glorifying, describing, yes of course I agree. But glorifying whom? So Krishna says in this verse satatam kirtayanto mamimam means Me, so we have to..means Krishna, so we have to constantly chant about Krishna.

Moreover in the Bhagavad Gita Krishna says, veda-vit, vedanta-krt, that He is the knower of the Vedas and He is the compiler of the Vedanta. So what better opportunity for hearing Vedanta, of Vedanta sravana than to hear it from the compiler of the Vedanta Himself."

So the exchange of letters went on like that for some time. So even though as devotees of Krishna for us the word kirtana means Krishna kirtana but not everybody sees it like that. Therefore it helps to qualify the word kirtana. And the word that qualifies the word kirtana here is the prefix sam.

Srila Prabhupada explained that sankirtana, the word sam indicates samyak, which means perfect and complete. And he gives a very interesting explanation of why this sam kirtana is complete kirtana. First and foremost it is complete. Sam kirtana is complete kirtana because it exclusively refers to complete kirtana of the complete Supreme Lord. So it cant refer to anybody else, so it sets to rest any doubts, and doesn't leave any scope for any ambiguity.

So sam purna sam indicates completeness like we have in the word sampurna which means completely complete. When we take Jagannath mahaprasadam in Jagannath Puri, its an etiquette that if you are being served prasadam, mahaprasadam you never say no! Even if you have eaten a lot you shouldn't say no, you should say sampurna. (laughs) I am full, purna means full and sampurna means completely full.

So samyak kirtana, complete kirtana, because it is glorification of the Supreme Lord and Srila Prabhuapda give another connotation or meaning to this. He says that kirtana becomes complete not only when it is chanted but also when it is heard. Only then it is complete. In other words sravanam plus kirtanam equals sankirtanam. Someone chants and someone hears Prabhupada said. One may also hear the chanting oneself.

Then Prabhupada goes on to explain at another place about the significance of the sam in sankirtana. And Prabhupada quotes this in numerous lectures right from 1966 onwards bahubhir militva kirtayati iti sankirtanam. He quotes this very often, which means that kirtanam which is performed bahubhir- by many people, militva- coming together is called sankirtanam. And that is even better than kirtana which is done by one person.

And there are numerous references in other scriptures. I will just quote one and we will conclude because we are running out of time. It says camatkara visesa posat, the qualities which distinguish sankirtana from kirtana is that sankirtana is exceptionally wonderful, camtkara visesa. And posat means it is very nourishing. And the same thing, the phrase is repeated there as well, bahubhir militva kirtanam sankirtanam.

So in this way, of course the word sam has many other meanings and one could look into that and all of them ultimately refer to how sankirtana is a complete and perfect process of kirtanam.

OK, we will stop here. Thank you very much.

Question: One mayavadi we were arguing with him and we gave him this explanation some of these points, not all of them that you made today. But then in desperation he made one argument that in Bhagavad Gita there are 700 verses and you only have one verse. So it must not be very important this satatam kirtayanto.

Maharaj: Well but this similar theme is repeated many many times in many places. And you have man-mana bhava mad-bhakto verse for example. So we have to see the also other verses also in Srimad Bhagavatam and we have to see the different sections of the Bhagavad Gita in the proper context.

So of course some times it is futile to get into too many discussions with them. So one should know when to say Hare Krishna, just give a little prasadam and come away. I devotee I know has a policy when he gets into an argument with some non devotee he just gives him prasad, so he doesn't let him speak. (laughter).

Yes, Maharaja, one last question.

Mahavisnu Swami: Prabhupada also told us that small kirtana and big mrdanga. Big mrdanga is the printing press. That's even bigger kirtana.

Maharaj: So HH Mahavisnu Maharaj is mentioning that Srila Prabhupada explained that there is small kirtana with the mridangas and there is big kirtana with brhad mrdanga, printing press. So the book distribution is also sankirtana. Yes.

Maharaja: OK, thank you very much. Srila Prabhupada ki jaya! Gaurpremanande Hari Hari bol!