

Love is the Door Chanting is the Key

AN INTRODUCTION TO KIRTAN
& BHAKTI YOGA SADHANA



SANT TUKARAM

Love is the Door Chanting is the Key

AN INTRODUCTION TO KIRTAN & BHAKTI YOGA SADHANA

The greatest romance is with the Infinite. You have no idea how beautiful life can be. When you suddenly find God everywhere, when He comes and talks to you and guides you, the romance of divine love has begun.

– **Paramahansa Yogananda**
(**Man's Eternal Quest**)

“We have come on earth solely to learn to know God. We are here for no other purpose. This is the true message of the Lord.” In these few words the great master, Paramahansa Yogananda, tells each one of us the purpose of our lives. On another occasion he said, “Dear Ones, do not take the Name of the Lord in vain but sing, live and drink the Name of my Beloved until you get all drunk with His Name.” These two quotes tell us everything we need to know about living in this world. If the veil of delusion were not so thick, what else would we need to hear? Why are we all not diving deeply into the Divine presence? Why aren't the temples filled with seekers after the nectar of Divine Love? All the great teachers, saints, sages and avatars come with the same message. They want to wake us up from the sleep of delusion.

In his amazing poem, *Thy Homecoming*, Paramahansa Yogananda describes an experience in ecstatic samadhi wherein he found himself, as he describes it: “...sitting on a little patch of the Milky Way, beholding the vast universe around me.” He writes, “I was running wild, dancing in my little body on earth, or skimming over the Milky Way, coaxing everything, every atom, every speck of consciousness, to open its gates and let Thy light shine through completely, driving darkness forevermore from Thy cosmic kingdom, which without Thee was a lonesome wilderness of matter.”

Can we imagine what the masters must feel like when they come back to this earth? Their only desire is to awaken other souls who are yet held by delusion and bring them into the realm of light and joy which they are experiencing. In divine consciousness there is no strife – only eternal blessedness. Yet the masters are also human. On one level it must be very frustrating to be in a world

where so few people can even conceive of wherein lies their own happiness! Paramahansaji writes, “Their desire is to redeem the whole earth, because every saint of God-realization knows there is no death for him. He is living in that Eternal Joy. Yet such saints are aware of the world's grief. They say to the Heavenly Father, ‘People are killing one another and suffering in many other ways. Why must this be?’ And God says, ‘I will send you back sometime to help them.’” (Man's Eternal Quest).

Perhaps we can sympathize with the great avadhut, Bhagavan Nityananda. The day before his mahasamadhi he remarked to a devotee who was close to him: “Everyone comes here for money and money only. The more they are given the more they seek; there is no end to their greed... Not much point in allowing this body to continue – hence samadhi tomorrow.” He repeated the last sentence three times. The disciple was, of course, deeply shocked! In tears he appealed to the Master to cancel, or at least postpone, his mahasamadhi.

Nityanananda replied: “It is possible only if a few devotees make a request; not any devotees but those with nishkama bhakti, bhavana and prem (i.e. desireless devotion, pure feeling and divine love). Even one such is enough and the samadhi will be cancelled. When such a devotee is present, even God cannot take leave without his permission, or be able to disengage himself from the bind of his pure love.”

Upon awakening into God-consciousness, the great Swami Sivananda traveled throughout India. He would often sit in crowded areas such as train station platforms chanting the Holy Names and imploring people to sing to God with him!

Here is the experience of Swami (Papa) Ramdas, told in his own words:

“After receiving the vision of the living form of Bhagavan Sri Krishna, Ramdas asked that he experience His all-pervading Form. Ramdas was then guided to Tiruvannamalai. After a thrilling darshan of Sri Ramana Maharshi, he retired to a cave on Arunachala mountain for *akhandajapa* (continuous repetition) of the *tarakamantra*: Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram. After twenty days, when he came out of the cave, he was blessed with the Universal Vision he was longing for: “He saw the Lord everywhere – in the trees, in the stones, in the grass, in the earth – and in all directions. The divine light was pervading and vibrating in everything. He felt thrills of ecstasy coursing through his entire frame, and he was running about like a madman, embracing everything that he could hold on to. He went to the trees and embraced them. A young man was passing that way. Ramdas ran up to him and embraced him also, because he saw his Beloved in everyone. The man was frightened and was about to run away, but Ramdas talked to him very sweetly, so the man could understand that Ramdas was not mad after all.”

After Swami Ramdas had finished the above narrative, someone asked, “And then?” Papa replied: “The bliss and joy came to be permanent, like a torrent rushing downhill till it finds a placid level of a limpid, ever-singing stream. This experience is called *sahaja samadhi*, in which you can never be cut off from the consciousness of being at one with the One who has become all. You feel you are one with all because you have perceived that all is He.”

Love is the Door

One saintly disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda, Brother Bhaktananda, would invariably welcome everyone to his classes, services, and meditations by saying: “Greetings and love to all of you.” The traditional “Namaste” or “Namaskar” greeting from India is also very beautiful for it recognizes the divinity in each and every soul. It conveys an attitude of honor, respect and reverence.

The great woman saint, Ammachi (Mata Amritanandamayi Devi), has been traveling the world for more than a quarter of a century. It is estimated that she has hugged as many as 25 million souls! We are all looking for love – real love – divine love.

Swami Sri Yukteswar, the Guru of Paramahansa Yogananda, is known as a Jnanavatar, an “Incarnation of Wisdom.” Listen to his words: “The heart’s natural love is the principal requisite to attain a holy life... Hence the culture of this love, the heavenly gift, is the principal requisite for the attainment of holy salvation; it is impossible for man to advance a step toward the same without it.” (The Holy Science.)

Paramahansa Yogananda tells us: “No one can find God without continuous love for Him in the heart... There is nothing greater than the love of God. If a devotee has found that, his work in the school of life is finished, (God Talks With Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita).

Sri Anandamayi Ma says: “This body tells of one sovereign remedy for all ills: God. Trust in Him, depend on Him, and accept whatever happens as His dispensation. Regard what you do as His service, keep satsang, think of God with every breath, and live in His Presence. Leave all your burdens in His hands and He will see to everything; there will be no more problems.”

The science of loving God – and all true, unconditional love, is God’s love – is called Bhakti Yoga. As delineated in the Bhakti Sutras by the great Rishi Narada Muni, and the Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu by Srila Rupa Goswami, love for the Divine can be cultivated through nine broad forms of devotional service: (1) *Sravaṇa*, reading about or listening to stories of the great saints and Divine incarnations, who are none other than God in human form; (2) *Kīrtana*, chanting the Names of the Divine with instrumental accompaniment; (3) *Smarana*, constant remembrance of God; (4) *Vandana*, mental worship, such as prayer or inwardly talking with the Lord; (5) *Pada-sevāna*, selfless service rendered at the feet of God and Guru; (6) *Dāsyā*, becoming the servant of God in all ways, with full surrender and humility; (7) *Pūjana*, formal worship with flowers, incense and other pure offerings, either outwardly or through the power of visualization (i.e., *manasa puja*); (8) *Sakhī-jāna*, loving God as your best friend; and (9) *Ātma-nivedāna*, offering one’s entire being, body, mind and soul to the Lord, completely and without reservation.

In Chapter 13 of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna describes three types of classical yoga: Karma Yoga, the path of selfless action; Jnana Yoga, the path of wisdom; and Raja Yoga, the path of meditation. It is in the following chapter, however, that Sri Krishna introduces Bhakti Yoga, the yoga of devotion, to his

worthy disciple, Arjuna. By applying Bhakti to the other forms of yoga, each one becomes truly effective.

In Karma Yoga we are advised to perform all of our actions without attachment to the results. Lord Krishna tells us that we are entitled to the performance of action only, and not to the “fruits” of our actions. This is not such an easy task in a world where most of our work is aimed at achieving some result. When we are able to perform all our actions as an offering to the Beloved of our hearts, however, Karma Yoga becomes a sweet and natural consummation of action.

Jnana Yoga is described as the yoga of wisdom, self inquiry, and discrimination. Sages, however, declare that the highest wisdom is Love. Parabhakti (supreme devotion) and Jnana are, in fact, identical. It is remarkable to note that the well-known Vedic scholar, Sri Vamadeva Shastri (Dr. David Frawley) has declared: “It is my view that Bhakti is the only real cure for our psychological and social problems today and that without it other forms of yoga, including Jnana are likely to be ineffective.”) Om Sri Ram Newsletter, No.6, Winter 1997-98).

Raja Yoga is often described as the “Royal Path to God-realization.” It works directly with prana, the life energy at the very core of our being. Raja Yoga is the path of meditation leading to complete absorption in the Divine consciousness in samadhi. Patanjali’s system begins with restraints and observances, called yamas and niyamas. These lay the moral and ethical foundation for the spiritual life. They are followed by asana and pranayama, to strengthen and purify the body, and stabilize the prana (life force). These preliminary practices lead naturally in prathyahara (interiorization of the consciousness), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi (union). Nevertheless, Paramahansaji tells us: “Techniques of meditation can take you to the door of God – but only love can open the door.”

It follows in Chapter 14 of the Gita that Lord Krishna reveals the supreme necessity of loving God. Arjuna asks how we can rise above worldly and body consciousness; how we can transcend the gunas, the three qualities of Nature: tamas (grossness and inertia), rajas (activating and energizing) and satva (pure and uplifting). These three qualities in a play of endless combination comprise all aspects of manifested creation.

Here is the Lord’s response: “He who serves Me with undeviating devotion transcends the gunas and is

qualified to become Brahman,” (XIV: 26). As Paramahansaji so beautifully clarifies in his commentary: “By Bhakti Yoga... By unswerving devotion to God, by love for Him so complete that one’s mind has no room for thought of self,” (God Talks With Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita).

Chanting is the Key

The last fifty years has seen an exponential blossoming of interest in all aspect of the art and science of yoga. Today the practice of yogasanas (postures) has become one of the most popular forms of exercise in America. Far beyond its physical benefits, however, yoga imparts a spiritual element which many find extremely appealing. Now kirtan, a decidedly spiritual practice, is coming into its own. When we chant, what we are really saying is, “I love you, Lord. I long to know You.” This is the cry of our souls to be reunited with our Divine Beloved. It is the essence of kirtan. Through devotional chanting the mind begins to turn within. Thoughts subside and the glory of the indwelling Spirit becomes revealed in ever greater ways. Chanting leads spontaneously to meditation, there to commune with the peace, joy and beauty of our own souls. That is why the great master, Swami Vivekananda, whose is known throughout the world as the consummate Vedantist, could say with finality: “Take the name of the Lord with all your heart... Let the heart open first, and all else will follow.”

We often hear kirtan referred to as the “heart of Bhakti Yoga.” Indeed it is. Yet kirtan also takes its place as a feature of the Karma Yoga and Raja Yoga systems as well. As we chant, we are not attempting to achieve any desired result. Chanting is an action which is intended to be done with the sole purpose of pleasing our Beloved. Hence chanting becomes a Karma Yoga sadhana (spiritual practice).

By putting our whole attention on the words of the chant, our minds achieve one-pointed concentration. This is termed “dharana” in Patanjali’s eightfold path of Raja Yoga, leading to holy communion in samadhi (complete absorption in the Divine). As Paramahansa Yogananda writes in his autobiography, “The sankirtans or musical gatherings are an effective form of yoga or spiritual discipline, necessitating intense concentration, absorption in the seed thought and sound.”

Just as there are techniques of meditation leading to interiorization of the mind and consciousness, so also,

there are techniques of chanting leading to the same goal. One method is often referred to as the “call-response” style of chanting. The chant leader sings a line and the congregation responds by repeating the same line. The effect of this practice is that both the leader and the group repeat the mantra or phrase alternately, once aloud and once mentally. During call-response chanting it is important to follow the mantra mentally when we are not singing out loud. In this way the consciousness will dive more deeply within with each successive repetition.

Another technique lies in increasing the speed of the chant, which helps to focus the mind and increase concentration. Although the chant may be progressing very rapidly, when all the instruments are literally “flying,” we may find that we are resting inwardly in the calm center of our being.

There is also the vibrational potency of the words themselves. The Sanskrit language is not a language created by limited human thought. There is an intimate relationship between the Sanskrit language, the chakras and the evolution of consciousness. Although the Sanskrit language represents cosmic or universal forces, it also embodies them. Each of the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet is installed in the body by Nature on the fifty petals of the chakras in the astral spine. In his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, Paramahansa Yogananda explains that there actually are one thousand petals or rays of divine light emanating from the Sahasrara Chakra, the “Thousand-petaled Lotus.” It rests just above the crown of the head in the spiritual body. In a footnote, he tells the reader: “Actually, the sounds are synonymous with the petals, i.e., vibratory powers. The fifty letters or sounds, in multiples of twenty, equal the one thousand petals of the sahasrara.” Thus Sanskrit has rightly been called the “Language of the Gods.” Chanting expressed in this sublime language, and to a large degree in its conversational derivative, Hindi, conveys an inherent harmony with spiritual consciousness.

Kirtan, then, is also a Mantra Yoga sadhana. By chanting the sacred mantras to musical accompaniment, we attune our entire being, body, mind and soul to the One who created us “in His image” through the holy cosmic vibration, OM. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1).

The Bhakti Yoga tradition declares that God is non-different from His Name. When we are chanting or repeating the revealed names of God, we are actually in the presence of God. The saints, therefore, give tremendous importance to the power of the Holy Name.

“He who knows that he knows nothing but the Name of God, knows everything.”

– **Sri Brahma Chaitanya**
(Gondawali Baba)

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna declares: “Of all yajnas, I am japa yajna.” “Yajna” is a sacrificial offering; “japa” means the repetition of the Lord’s Name. The constant recitation of the Name, then, is thus declared to be the highest and greatest offering we can make to our Beloved God.

There is no word in any human tongue that yields such a marvelous power, that mysteriously works for absolute good, as the Name, which stands for God. The Name of the Lord is the very expression of God as a mystic sound. To attune the mind to the sweet melody of the Name is to harmonize your life with the Life eternal. The music of the Name brings about the union of the soul with the universal Soul. When the soul loses itself in the thrills generated by the Name, it attains a state of ineffable ecstasy in which all forms and lives are seen as the manifestation of the one supreme essence of Truth. The Name expands the narrow vision of the individual into a vision of infinite value and grandeur.

The soul, who is drinking deep in the nectarine charm of the Name, rises from the lower worlds of fettered thoughts and action and enters into the universal kingdom of freedom and perfection. Now this transformed life reveals in all its glory the magnificence of the basic Reality of which it and the worlds are but expressions. By the power of the Name its votary distinctly perceives the inner laws and purposes that work out the external phenomenal changes in the universe.

“When the Name becomes the sole mainstay and refuge of the aspirant who thirsts for the highest goal of life – God-realization – he or she marches towards the ideal not only in rapid strides but also with a heart filled with courage and cheerfulness. Indeed, blessed is the soul who possesses an unflinching faith in the greatness of the Divine Name!”

– **Swami Ramdas**
(God Experience)

“I will sing Thy Name, I will drink Thy Name, and get all drunk, O with Thy Name”

– **Paramahansa Yogananda (Cosmic Chants)**

“Listen! Do not let your time pass idly. Either keep a rosary with you and do japa, or if this does not suit you, at least go on repeating the Name of the Lord regularly and without interruption like the ticking of a clock. There are no rules or restrictions in this. Invoke Him by the Name that appeals to you most, for as much time as you can – the longer the better. Even if you get tired or lose interest, administer the Name to yourself like a medicine that has to be taken. In this way you will, at some auspicious moment, discover the rosary of the mind, and then you will continually hear within yourself the praises of the great Master, the Lord of Creation, like the never ceasing music of the boundless ocean. You will hear the land and the sea, the air and the heavens reverberate with the song of His glory. This is called the all-pervading Presence of His Name.”

– **Sri Anandamayi Ma**

BHAKTI YOGA

Bhagavan Sri Krishna Speaks to His Friend Uddhava

As told by **Sri Swami Sivananda**

O Uddhava, neither Yoga, nor knowledge, nor Dharma, nor study of the Vedas, nor austerity, nor renunciation propitiates Me or wins Me so much as unswerving devotion to Me. I, the beloved Atman, am attained only by undivided devotion and faith.

How can the mind be purified without devotion to Me, which is characterized by melting of the heart, the hair standing on end and tears of joy trickling down the cheeks?

A devotee of Mine whose speech is broken by sobs, whose heart melts, who without shyness weeps profusely, or laughs and sings loudly and dances, not only purifies himself but purifies the whole world!

Just as gold blown in the fire loses its impurities and regains its real form, so also the mind shakes off its impurities and its tendencies of karma and desire by means of devotion to Me, and attaining Me regains its own true form. The more the mind is purified by listening to My sacred stories and the repetition of My Names, the more it sees the subtle essence of things and the subtle Reality. Therefore, think of Me and your mind and heart will be merged in Me alone!

Friends, the glory of the Name of God cannot be established through reasoning. It can certainly be experienced through faith, devotion and constant repetition. Have reverence and faith for the Name. Do not argue.

Every Name is filled with countless powers. Just as fire has the natural property of burning things, so also the Name of God has the power of burning the sins and desires.

O Souls! Take refuge in the Name and cross this formidable ocean of birth and death. Glory to the Lord. Glory to His Name. Hari Om. Sri Ram.

– **H.H. Sri Swami Sivananda Maharaj**

ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ

Rishi Narada once asked the Lord where it was that He could always be found. The Lord replied:

***Naham vasami vaikunte / Yoginam hridaye nacha
Madh bhakta yatra gayanthi / Tatra tishtami Narada***

“I may not always be found in heaven (Vaikunta), or even in the hearts of great yogis. Wherever My devotees are singing My Name, Narada, there you will find Me without fail.”

ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ

Mirabai knows that to find the Divine One, the only indispensable is love.

– **Sant Mirabai**

Love of God is the essential thing.

– **Sri Sarada Devi**

Divine Love is the highest attainment. All spiritual practices should end in this sweet consummation. Love is the end of the quest. See that you are absorbed in God who is Love and become an image of Him. Let all your emotions be of love. Life is dry and insipid if it is not filled with love. Be intoxicated with love – the love that blesses you with a vision of your Beloved. All beings are the forms of your Beloved. Grace, Love, and Bliss are synonymous. The three are one in your Beloved and you are He. Dance with joy!

– **Swami Ramdas**

I wish you were present in our Student's Home in Calcutta where the ex-students of Ranchi Vidyalaya have clustered together. There on Saturday nights in the gatherings I have sung and danced (as did Sri Chaitanya and his disciples); and at the end of the dance I have let my body go into rigid ecstasy. I feel I am swimming in the ecstasy while I dance, then all becomes light and my

body falls lifeless to the ground. Sometimes I watch my lifeless form swimming in God; and sometimes I see the Ocean of Happiness in which the body is no more. Sing to yourself the song you like and you will get bhakti samadhi, which God loves also from His devotees. – Paramahansa Yogananda (in a letter written from India to his beloved disciple, Rajarsi Janakananda).

The mysteries that veil the Infinite Spirit are sundered one by one to reveal a beloved God whose awesome omnipotence is tempered with a tender love and compassion that readily responds to a sincere call from His devotees.

– Paramahansa Yogananda

The Importance of Meditation

The purpose of chanting is best understood as a means of entering into the meditative state of deep peace, tranquility and one-pointed attention on God. Once God-communion has been achieved, chanting can also become a means of expressing that divine joy and ecstasy. Seeing great ecstatic masters like Lord Chaitanya, Paramahansa Yogananda and others dancing in ecstasy, many feel that by emulating their example they too can achieve that same blessed state. We must remember, however, that these great ones have already established themselves in the state of divine communion. Dancing and chanting have become a means of outwardly expressing the joy that they feel. What we have not yet discovered within the temple of our hearts, our minds and our souls will not be found in outward activity.

Once we clearly understand the way in which the soul descended into the body, and consequently, the path it must take to re-unite with Spirit, the necessity for meditation leading to samadhi (divine communion) becomes obvious.

Let us all join together to seek God with patience, perseverance and enthusiasm. Whatever spiritual tradition we may be drawn to, whatever saint or master we feel connected with in our heart of hearts, let us respect each other as children of the one Father-Mother-God. May we encourage one another, as Paramahansaji would say, “Onward and upward on the path of Self-realization.”

“What joy awaits discovery in the silence behind the portals of your mind no human tongue can tell. But you must convince yourself; you must meditate and create that environment.”

– Paramahansa Yogananda
(Spiritual Diary)

“Giving love to all, feeling the love of God, seeing His presence in everyone... that is the way to live in this world.”

– Paramahansa Yogananda

Recommended Reading

Autobiography of a Yogi
Paramahansa Yogananda
Self-Realization Fellowship, 1946

In Quest of God
Swami Ramdas
Blue Dove Press, 1994

OM MA: Anandamayi Ma, A Short Life Sketch
Swami Mangalananda
2006

Himalayan Heritage Magazine

If you enjoyed this booklet, we are certain you will love our magazine, Himalayan Heritage, which is published 6 times a year. Subtitled “For lovers of Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Religion, kept for all the world by the Himalayan sages and great masters of India,” our magazine is of interest to everyone on the path of Hindu Devotional Mysticism.

Regular features include:

India Dreaming – Stories from or about India, focusing on Her endlessly unfolding expressions of spirituality.

Saints & Sages – Profiles the life on one of the great masters of India, creating an endless mandala of sanctity, which is a prominent feature of Indian culture.

Teaching Stories of the Saints of India, and many other articles of an informative and inspirational nature.

Please see our website for more information:

www.HimalayanHeritage.org

or write to us:

HimalayanHeritage@JyotiMandir.com





Himalayan Heritage Press
Encinitas, CA