

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, What's So Special About Chanting Hare Krishna?

By Stephen Knapp

**Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna
Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama
Rama Rama, Hare Hare**

We've all heard the Hare Krishna mantra at some time, but what the heck is so special about this mantra? Why are we supposed to spend time chanting it? What can it do for us?

First of all, let me explain a little about *mantra-yoga*. *Mantra-yoga* is actually a mystical tradition found in almost every spiritual path in the world. It may involve the softly spoken repetition of a prayer or mantra for one's own meditation, or it may be the congregational singing of spiritually uplifting songs, prayers, or the sacred names of the Supreme Being. It all involves the same process, but in the Eastern tradition it is called *mantra-yoga* because it is the easy process of focusing our minds on the Supreme, which helps spiritualize our consciousness. *Man* means the mind, *tra* means deliverance. Therefore, a spiritual mantra is the pure sound vibration for delivering the mind from material to spiritual consciousness. This is the goal of any spiritual path. Although all spiritual traditions have their own prayers or mantras, the Vedic *mantras* are especially powerful and effective in uniting us with the spiritual realm. However, a complete yoga process is generally a blend of a few yoga systems, such as *bhakti-yoga* with *mantra-yoga*. Therefore, *bhakti-yoga*, as described in the previous chapters, also includes *mantra-yoga*, or the process of concentrating on the sound vibration within a mantra. This is especially important in this age of Kali.

Many years ago the brahmana priests could accomplish many kinds of wondrous deeds simply by correctly chanting particular mantras. Many of these mantras still exist, but it is very difficult to find those who can chant them accurately. This is actually a safety measure because if the wish-fulfilling mantras were easily chanted, there would no doubt be many people who would misuse them. But other mantras that are available can easily help purify one's consciousness, give spiritual enlightenment, and put one in touch with the Supreme.

In *Bhagavad-gita* (10.25) Sri Krishna explains that He is the transcendental *om* mantra and that the chanting of *japa* (chanting a mantra quietly for one's own meditation) is the purest of His representations and sacrifices. It is understood that by chanting *japa* and hearing the holy sounds of the mantra, one can come to the platform of spiritual realization. This is the process of *mantra-yoga*. Even though the mantra is powerful in itself, when the mantra is chanted by a great devotee, it becomes more powerful. This is the effect when a disciple is fortunate enough to take initiation from a spiritually powerful master who gives him a mantra for spiritual purposes. Then the disciple can make rapid progress by utilizing the mantra.

In this age of Kali-yuga the process of chanting *japa* or mantra meditation is much more effective than practicing other spiritual paths that include meditating on the void or Brahman effulgence, or trying to control the life air within the body as in *raja-yoga*. Only a very few can become perfect at moving the life air up to the top of the head or raising the *kundalini* force up through the various *chakras*. And meditating on the void becomes useless as soon as there is the slightest external distraction, which in this age of Kali is a continuous thing. Therefore, the most effective means of focusing the consciousness is to concentrate on the sound vibration of a mantra.

There are two mantras that are especially recommended in the Vedic literature. One is *omkara* or the *om* mantra, and the other is Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare, which is known as the *maha* or great mantra. It is explained that these two mantras can deliver one to the realm beyond material existence.

Omkara (pranava) is considered to be the sound incarnation of the Supreme Personality of God and is identical with the Supreme Lord. It is beginningless, changeless, supreme and free from any external contamination. The *Narada-pancharatra* states: "When the transcendental sound vibration is practiced by a conditioned soul, the Supreme Lord is present on his tongue." The *Atharva-veda* and the *Mandukya Upanishad* both mention the importance of *omkara*. *Omkara* is said to be the beginning, middle, and end, and is eternal, beyond all material restrictions or contaminations.

Actually, the chanting of *omkara* is generally practiced by those engaged in the mystic yoga process. However, anyone who chants Vedic verses will also be chanting *om*, because *om* is often included as the *bija* or seed mantra at the beginning of many such verses or other mantras. By chanting *om* and controlling the breathing perfectly, which is mostly a mechanical way of steadying the mind, one is eventually able to go into trance or *samadhi*. Through this system, one gradually changes the tendencies of the materially absorbed mind and makes it spiritualized. But this takes many years to perfect and such a slow process is hardly practical in this age. If one is not initiated into the brahminical way of knowledge, he will find it difficult to understand the depths of *omkara* and will not

likely be able to get the desired results from chanting it. Therefore, it is not advised that people in general chant *omkara* in this age of Kali-yuga and with the expectation of reaching full spiritual perfection because they are often not qualified or unable to chant it properly to attain the inner depths of spiritual completion. [Much more information about *om*, its significance and how to chant it is in our ebook on "[Meditation](#)".]

The mantra that is meant to be chanted in this age is easy and is actually more directly connected with the Supreme than the sound vibration of *omkara* because it contains the direct holy names of the Lord. So the mantra for Kali-yuga is the *maha-mantra*, or great mantra for deliverance, which is Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

CHANTING THE MAHA-MANTRA

There are many Vedic references which specifically recommend the chanting of the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* as the most effective and advantageous means of reaching spiritual realization and counteracting all the problems of this age. Some of these verses are the following:

These sixteen words--Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare--are especially meant for counteracting the ill effects of the present age of quarrel and anxiety. (*Kali-santarana Upanishad*)

All mantras and all processes for self-realization are compressed into the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*. (*Narada-pancaratra*)

Chant the holy names, chant the holy names, chant the holy names. In this age of Kali [the age of quarrel and confusion] without a doubt there is no other way, there is no other way, there is no other way. (*Brihan-naradiya Purana* 38.126)

In this age there is no use in meditation, sacrifice and temple worship. Simply by chanting the holy name of Krishna--Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare--one can achieve perfect self-realization. (*Vishnu Purana* 6.2.17)

The self-realization which was achieved in the Satya millennium by meditation, in the Treta millennium by the performance of different sacrifices, and in the Dvapara millennium by worship of Lord Krishna [as the Deity in the temple], can be achieved in the age of Kali simply by chanting the holy names, Hare Krishna. (*Bhag.*12.3.52) (Verses similar to this are also found in the *Padma Purana*, *Uttara-khanda* 72.25, and the *Brihan-naradiya Purana* 38.97)

Living beings who are entangled in the complicated meshes of birth and death can be freed immediately by even unconsciously chanting the holy name of Krishna, which is feared by fear personified. (*Bhag.*1.1.14)

When instructing King Pariksit, the great sage Sri Shukadeva Gosvami said, "O King, constant chanting of the holy name of the Lord after the ways of the great authorities is the doubtless and fearless way of success for all, including those who are free from all material desires, those who are desirous of all material enjoyment, and also those who are self-satisfied by dint of transcendental knowledge. What is the value of a prolonged life which is wasted, inexperienced by years in this world? Better a moment of full consciousness, because that gives one a start in searching after his supreme interest." (*Bhag.*2.1.11-13)

The reason that chanting the Lord's names is such an effective process is because the Lord and His names are identical: they are the same spiritual energy. By chanting Hare Krishna we are in immediate contact with God. If we chant someone else's name, we cannot enjoy their association because the name and the person are different. For example, by chanting "water, water, water," we do not quench our thirst because water and the name are two different things. But in the spiritual world everything is absolute. Krishna is nondifferent from His names and, therefore, we can feel His presence simply by chanting His names. This is further elaborated in the *Caitanya-caritamṛta (Madhya-līla, 17.131-133)*, which explains that there is no difference between the Lord's name, form, or personality, and they are all transcendently sweet. Krishna's name is the same as Krishna Himself, and is not material in any way. It gives spiritual benedictions and is full of pleasure. But in the material world everything is different. Furthermore, in *Caitanya-caritamṛta (Adi-līla, 17.22)*, and the *Padma Purāna*, the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* is said to be the sound incarnation of Krishna, and anyone who chants this mantra is in direct association with Krishna and is delivered from the clutches of the material energy.

It is explained that because chanting the names of God brings us in direct contact with God in proportion to the chanter's purity, this process of self-realization is the way of success for everyone. The *Bhagavatam* (2.1.11) discloses that the chanting of God's names in the manner of the great authorities is the doubtless way to spiritual success for everyone, no matter whether they are full of material desires or free of all desires or self-satisfied because of their spiritual knowledge.

Simply by relying on the chanting of the holy names of God, one need not depend upon other processes, rituals, paraphernalia, or persons. One does not even have to be initiated by a spiritual master to chant the *maha-mantra*. As the *Caitanya-caritamṛta (Madhya-līla, 15.108)* says, one does not have to take initiation, but only has to chant the holy names. Thus, deliverance is available to

even the lowest of people. Furthermore, Rupa Gosvami writes about the potency of the holy name in his *Padyavali*:

The holy name of Lord Krishna is an attractive feature for many saintly, liberal people. It is the annihilator of all sinful reactions and is so powerful that save for the dumb who cannot chant it, it is readily available to everyone, including the lowest type of man, the *chandala*. The holy name of Krishna is the controller of the opulence of liberation, and it is identical with Krishna. Simply by touching the holy name with one's tongue, immediate effects are produced. Chanting the holy name does not depend on initiation, pious activities or the *purascarya* regulative principles generally observed before initiation. The holy name does not wait for all these activities. It is self-sufficient. (*Padyavali* 29)

Herein is evidence that the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* is so powerful that one who sincerely takes shelter of it will attain all the desired results of connection with the Supreme. The *Skanda Purana* gives further evidence of how powerful is the *maha-mantra*:

The name of the Lord need not be chanted with regard to place, time, circumstantial conditions, preliminary self-purification or any other factors. Rather, it is completely independent of all other processes and rewards all the desires of those who eagerly chant it. (*Skanda Purana*)

Therefore, without a doubt, the Hare Krishna mantra is the most potent mantra one can utilize for spiritual upliftment. The *Caitanya-caritamrta* (*Madhya-lila*, 15.107) also points out that one is freed of all sinful reactions simply by chanting Krishna's names. And all the nine types of devotional service are completed by this process. Thus, in Kali-yuga only the chanting of the holy names is necessary for worshiping the Lord. However, if one is not able to chant purely or follow the regulations for chanting, it is recommended that one get further guidance from a bona fide spiritual master.

In Kali-yuga the chanting of the holy names is certainly the most practical and effective process for the conditioned souls. It is also the easiest process whether one finds himself in Kali-yuga, Satya-yuga, Treta-yuga, or Dvapara-yuga. Regardless of what age one may be living in, the process of chanting the holy names is always recommended for everyone. "The names of the Supreme Lord who has the disc as His weapon should be glorified always and everywhere." (*Vaisakha-mahatmya* section of the *Padma Purana*) But since the age of Kali is the most difficult, where men have short durations of life, it is also the most fortunate age. This is explained in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (11.5.36-37 and 12.3.51) which states that those who are wise know the value of this age of Kali because, in spite of the fallen nature of this age, the spiritual perfection of life can be attained by the easy process of *sankirtana*, the congregational chanting of Krishna's holy names. No better position can be found to attain freedom from

material existence and entrance into the spiritual kingdom than joining the Lord's *sankirtana* movement.

Even those living in other ages desire to take birth in Kali-yuga to take advantage of this special concession of a speedy delivery from the cycle of birth and death through the process of *sankirtana*. This is confirmed in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (11.5.38) where we find it said that those who live during Satya-yuga and other ages wish to be born in Kali-yuga just to take advantage of associating with the devotees of Lord Narayana, who are especially found in South India.

The *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (11.5.32) explains that intelligent persons perform congregational singing of Krishna's names to worship the incarnation of Krishna who sings His own names, and who is accompanied by His associates and confidential companions. Therefore, as the *Caitanya-caritamrta* (*Adi-lila*, 7.74) specifically says, the essence of all scriptural teachings is that the only religious principle in the age of Kali is to chant the Lord's holy names, which are the basis of all Vedic hymns. "In this way the most perfect penance to be executed in this world is the chanting of the name of Lord Sri Hari. Especially in the age of Kali, one can satisfy the Supreme Lord Vishnu by performing *sankirtana*." (*Caturmasya-mahatmya* section of the *Skanda Purana*)

The fact of the matter, as explained in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (3.33.6-7), is that regardless of what one's present situation is, if a person once speaks about the activities and chants the holy names of the Supreme, or hears about and remembers Him, he becomes eligible to engage in the Vedic rituals. And how much more glorious are those who regularly chant the holy names. Such people are indeed worshipable, for they must have performed all kinds of austerities, achieved the characteristics of the Aryans, studied the *Vedas*, bathed at all the holy places of pilgrimage, and done whatever else is required.

When the great sage Narada Muni was explaining to Srila Vyasadeva the means by which he became enlightened, he said, "It is personally experienced by me that those who are always full of cares and anxieties due to desiring contact of the senses with their objects can cross the ocean of nescience [illusory darkness] on a most suitable boat--the constant chanting of the transcendental activities of the Personality of Godhead. It is true that by practicing restraint of the senses by the yoga system one can get relief from the disturbances of desire and lust, but this is not sufficient to give satisfaction to the soul, for this [satisfaction] is derived from devotional service to the Supreme Personality. " (*Bhag.*1.6.34-35)

Lord Krishna goes on to explain to Uddhava that in the association of saintly devotees, there is always the discussion about Him, and those who partake in such hearing and chanting about the Lord's glories are certainly purified of all sins. In this way, whoever hears, chants and respectfully opens his heart to these topics about the Lord becomes faithfully dedicated to Him. Thus, he achieves devotional service to Lord Krishna. Then, as Lord Krishna Himself asks, "What

more remains to be accomplished for the perfect devotee after achieving devotional service unto Me, the Supreme Absolute Truth, whose qualities are innumerable and who am the embodiment of all ecstatic experience?" (*Bhag.11.26.28-30*)

As further related by Sukadeva Gosvami, "A person who with faith engages in chanting the glories of these various pastimes and incarnations of Vishnu, the Lord of lords, will gain liberation from all sins. The all-auspicious exploits of the all attractive incarnations of Lord Shri Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and also the pastimes He performed as a child, are described in this *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and in other scriptures. Anyone who clearly chants these descriptions of His pastimes will attain transcendental loving service unto Lord Krishna, who is the goal of all perfected sages." (*Bhag.11.31.27-28*)

Sri Suta Gosvami relates that in a conversation between Narada Muni and Sanatkumara, Sanatkumara explained the way to attain freedom from this world, even for the most wayward sinners. Even all those mean men who are destitute of all good ways of behavior, who are of a wicked mind, who are outcaste, who deceive the world, who are intent upon religious hypocrisy, pride, drinking liquor, and wickedness, who are sinful and cruel, who are interested in another man's wealth, wife and sons, become pure if they resort to the lotus-like feet of Vishnu. The name of Vishnu, sure to succeed here, protects those sinful men who transgress even Him who causes divinity, who give salvation to the immobile beings and the mobile beings. A man who has done all kinds of sins is freed if he resorts to Vishnu. If a contemptible, wicked biped would commit sin against Vishnu, and by chance resorts to His name, he is emancipated due to the (power of the) name (of Vishnu). However, a man falls down due to his sin against (Vishnu's) name, which is the friend of all. (*Padma Purana 4.25.8-13*)

The sage Kavi instructed King Nimi that the holy names of the Supreme Lord are all-auspicious because they describe His transcendental birth and pastimes, which He performs for the upliftment and salvation of all conditioned souls. For this reason the Lord's holy names are sung throughout the world. By chanting these holy names of the Supreme, one reaches the level of love of God, in which one becomes fixed as an eternal servant of the Lord. Then such a devotee becomes very attached to a particular name and form of the Lord in his service. As his heart melts in ecstatic love, he may laugh loudly or cry or shout. Sometimes he may even sing or dance like a madman in such ecstasy because he becomes indifferent to the opinion of others. (*Bhag.11.2.39-40*)

In this way, we can begin to understand how elevated the writer of the Vedic scripture considers those who have adopted the process of chanting Krishna's holy names. However, for those who do not like the chanting of the holy names and blaspheme the process and criticize or try to restrain those who do chant, we can understand that their sentiment is due to their sinful and offensive activities. Such people are said to have no intelligence and work for no useful purpose and

simply contribute to the chaos and confusion within society. The *Bhagavatam* (3.9.7) confirms that those who do not engage in the blessed chanting and hearing about the activities of the Supreme are bereft of intelligence and good fortune. They perform sinful activities to enjoy sensual pleasure which lasts only for a short time.

LORD VISHNU'S NAMES ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN THE GREATEST HOLY PLACES

The power of the Lord's holy names is also related in the following story. It is described in the *Padma Purana* that many years ago when asked by the sages at the forest of Naimisharanya which one single act will bring the fruit of visiting the many holy places, Suta Gosvami answered in this way: Out of so many rituals and rites that are prescribed, only one is superior. There is no doubt that one who has devotion to Lord Vishnu has undoubtedly conquered everything. Hari, [Vishnu, Krishna], the Lord of all gods, should alone be propitiated. The goblin of sin will perish by means of the great sacred hymns in the form of the names of Vishnu. There is no doubt that those with pure hearts, going around Vishnu even once, get (the fruit of) having bathed at all the holy places. A man would obtain the fruit of (having visited) all holy places by seeing Vishnu's image. Chanting the excellent name of Vishnu, a man would obtain (the result) of having chanted all the sacred hymns. A man having once smelt the tulasi plant, the grace of Vishnu, does not see the huge and terrible face of Yama [Yamaraja, the lord of death]. A man having (but) once saluted Krishna does not drink the mother's milk [does not need to be reborn again]. I always repeatedly salute them whose mind is (fixed) on the feet of Vishnu. Even [those of lower tribes, such as] pulkasas, chandalas, or other mlechha tribes, who serve the feet of Vishnu alone are fit to be saluted. Then what about the meritorious and devoted brahmanas and royal sages? Having placed one's devotion in Vishnu, a person does not experience confinement in the womb (is not reborn). A man who with high sounds chants the name of Vishnu purifies the world as does the Ganga [Ganges River]. There is no doubt that a man is freed from sins like murder of a brahmana by seeing (the image of), touching (the feet of), reciting (the name of), and devoting oneself (to Vishnu). Circumambulating (the image of) Hari [Vishnu, Krishna], and loudly chanting His names in a sweet and melodious voice, accompanied with clapping of the hands, a man has struck the sin of murdering a brahmana from his hands. A man becomes pure by just seeing Him, who having narrated His story, would listen to a narrative about Him. Then, O best of sages, how can there be the slightest doubt about such a person's sins. (*Padma Purana*, 3.50.1-17)

"O great sages, Vishnu's name is the best holy place of all holy places. Those who have uttered the name of Krishna make the world a holy place. Therefore, O

best of sages, they consider nothing more meritorious than this. A man using and holding on his head the remains of offered flowers to Vishnu, would beckon Vishnu, who is the destroyer of grief due to fear of Yamaraja. Undoubtedly, Vishnu (alone) is to be worshiped and saluted. Therefore, see and worship Vishnu only who has no beginning or end, who is the soul (of everything), and who is unmanifest. Those who look upon Vishnu and another deity as equal, go to terrible hells. Vishnu would not care for them. Vishnu, the Lord Himself, liberates a fool or a chandala to whom Vishnu is dear. There is none greater than Vishnu, who is like a wild fire for (burning) heaps of sins. A man, even after having committed a terrible sin, is freed by the name of Vishnu. Lord Vishnu, the Father of the worlds, has put greater strength than Himself into His name. Therefore a man looking highly upon Vishnu's name should be devoted to Hari. The name of Vishnu is a great destructive weapon like the thunderbolt in rending the mountain of sins. His feet are fruitful and move for that (only). The hands that worship Him are alone said to be blessed. That head which bends before Hari (Vishnu) is the best part of the body. That is (really) the tongue that extols Vishnu. That is the mind which follows His feet. That is the hair that bristles [stands up in ecstasy] at the utterance of His name. Those are the tears that are shed due to devotion to Lord Vishnu. Oh, people are very much duped by their faults if they do not resort to (Him) by merely chanting His names. Those who though having got a tongue do not utter the name of Vishnu, easily fall [back into the cycles of birth and death] even after having secured the stairway to liberation. Therefore, a man should carefully (please) Lord Vishnu by means of worldly and religious rites [devotional service]. Lord Vishnu is pleased with worldly and religious rites, not otherwise. The worship of Vishnu is said to be a holier place than a holy place. A man obtains that fruit by serving Vishnu which he obtains by bathing at and drinking (the water from) all the holy places. Only blessed men worship Vishnu by means of worldly and religious rites [devotional service]. Therefore, O sages, worship Krishna (Vishnu), who is the most auspicious. (*Padma Purana* 3.50.17-39)

THE POWER OF THE MAHA-MANTRA: HOW IT WORKS

It may be somewhat surprising for the average Westerner to hear about the power within the vibrations of words or *mantras*, but the potency is real. For example, any numerologist will tell you that each letter has a particular value and a group of letters pronounced as a word invokes the power of those letters. Therefore, someone's name contains the subtle formula for signifying to varying degrees one's characteristics, qualities and future. By associating with particular sound vibrations one becomes influenced by them.

A good example of this is when one country tries to take over another in war, or one political party tries to defeat another. The first thing they try to do is take over the lines of communication and the media, such as radio, television, and newspapers. By sending out its propaganda through sound, a government can influence people's minds and stay in power, or a political party can remove the leaders of the opposition. In the latter case, a new government may become established.

According to the predominant types of sound vibration people associate with through T.V. and radio, or in reading articles in magazines and newspapers, they become attracted to certain things or drawn towards certain viewpoints. When television shows, songs on the radio, stories in magazines, and advertising everywhere propagates the concern for temporary sense gratification, then people lose their interest in the real goal of life. They simply become absorbed in the thoughts of whatever type of sound vibration enters their consciousness. When nonsensical sound vibrations enter and contaminate the ether, the air, water, and the very molecular structure of each and every person, place and thing, then we cannot expect anything else but continued and worsening turmoil and perplexities in the world.

Let us try to understand how this happens. First of all, energy pervades the atmosphere of this creation in the form of vibrations, as in sound waves, light waves, radio waves, and so on. The mind can especially be affected by the kind of energy or vibration it picks up or tunes into. The function of the mind is twofold: it joins thoughts and concepts into theories and goals or desires, and it simplifies or interprets experiences that are gathered through the senses. This is controlled by sound vibration or thought waves. For example, when you hear the following words, an image will form in your mind: dog, cat, insect, man, woman, politician, automobile, and sunset. We can take the experiment a little further when we say, snarling dog, sleeping cat, biting insect, ugly old man, beautiful voluptuous woman, conniving politician, sleek automobile, and tranquil red sunset.

The second set of words may have brought images to your mind that were completely different than the first set. This is all due to sound which triggers the mind to react and form thoughts or images related to the words by interpreting past experiences. Such thoughts and images may also form into goals or desires of what we want to attain or wish to avoid. When throughout our life we are bombarded by different kinds of sound waves, whether from schoolbooks in our early years, or to present day radio, television, and movies, our consciousness is led through particular changes and different levels of development. This might be controlled by others so that we act in a certain way according to someone else's design, whether we know it or not. If you start listening to the radio all the time and all they play are songs about making love under the apple tree, you will not have to tell anyone what you will be thinking about. It is not difficult to figure out. This is how we are controlled by sound.

Another example is that sometime we may be feeling peaceful and decide to spend a nice, quiet evening watching television. After several hours of being exposed to all kinds of sound vibration in the form of game shows, cop shows, comedy, soap opera, news, and a multitude of advertising, we may wake up the next morning unrested, agitated, and disturbed without knowing why. In this way, the kind of sound vibration we associate with can make a big difference on our consciousness.

There are, however, many kinds of beneficial sound vibrations that we can utilize. A friend of mine once cut his finger down to the bone while he was in India. It was a serious cut and he was not able to do much to stop the bleeding. He told one of the Indian men nearby who took him into his house. The man put some mustard seed oil on the cut and stroked it with his finger while chanting a certain mantra. At that point the bleeding stopped. He did it again and the cut closed. The man did it a third time and, to my friend's amazement, the cut on his finger was healed. Some farmers also use mantras to produce better crops. Plants are very sensitive to vibrations and different sounds can assist plants in their growth.

In the Vedic literature there are, of course, many stories which describe the use of mantras. The brahmana priests produced many kinds of magical results by using them. They could even curse others or, if necessary, kill someone with the use of mantras. The warriors or kings could also attach a *brahmastra* weapon to the arrows they shot. A *brahmastra* is a weapon equivalent to the atomic bombs of today, but were produced by perfectly chanting particular mantras. However, the *brahmastra* could also be called back by using a different mantra and the extent of damage could also be controlled. They were not like the bombs of today that, when released, are completely uncontrollable and kill and hurt everyone and anyone in its range.

There are many other kinds of sound vibrations, mantras, or prayers that can be used for gaining money, maintaining health, defeating enemies, getting good luck, subduing evil spirits, counteracting snake bite, and so on. There are countless mantras or prayers for temporary results, not only in the Vedic culture but in other cultures as well. The most powerful mantras are those that can completely free one from this material world and the cycle of birth and death and allow one to enter the spiritual realm. As already established, there is no mantra more powerful for this purpose than the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*.

The way the *maha-mantra* works is a science. One thing we must first understand is that there are channels by which the Infinite descends into this world. One channel is through transcendental sound. The *maha-mantra* is a purely spiritual vibration. It cannot be chanted with a material tongue nor heard with a material ear. In this way, the holy name reserves the right of not being exposed to organic senses or understood by someone in materialistic consciousness. However, the Infinite has the power of making Himself known to the finite mind. When He reveals Himself to His devotee, the devotee

experiences the perception of God. This is called self-realization and transcendental revelation. This can be attained through the process of purely chanting the *maha-mantra*.

The holy names are not revealed simply through Vedic writings, but they are revealed to the world through the spiritual tongues of the pure devotees. Such pure devotees are the real spiritual masters of everyone in the universe. But if the guru is not genuine, then the sound or mantra, though seeming to sound the same, will not produce the real effect.

The audience of the pure devotee hears the name of Krishna but may not fully recognize or comprehend it. Yet the name enters the ear and vibrates the eardrum which touches our mind. There is still not genuine spiritual realization at this point because the soul remains untouched. Yet the name begins to affect our mind by cleansing the dust within. This dust is the materialistic consciousness which causes forgetfulness of our real spiritual identity. This forgetfulness manifests in forms of bodily attachment, lust, greed, envy, anger, etc. Therefore, by chanting the *maha-mantra* we wash our mind and enable it to get free of the contaminating dust. Then the mind and intelligence become very clear and sharp. Plus when the Supersoul hears our sincere attempt to chant the holy names, He will also assist us in clearing away any obstacles in our path. Thus, our ability increases to delve more deeply into spiritual understanding and to acquire a taste for the holy names.

The mind is the connecting link between the body and the spirit soul within. The soul, which does not actively engage in any material activities, remains in a state of suspended animation while covered by illusion, as in the case of a materially conditioned person who engages in material activities. Through the vehicle of the mind, the senses act and we perceive things around us and form theories. If the mind is unclear or dusty due to the influence of the material energy, we then become confused about the goal of life and may engage in so many material pursuits. When the mind is cleansed or purified by associating with the Infinite in the form of the *maha-mantra*, all our material concoctions are forced out. By inundating our mind with the transcendental sound of the holy names, all of our misconceptions, which is the cause of our material suffering, are completely conquered, leaving no more enemies within the mind. Then the mind reflects the quality and nature of the soul.

The holy sound of Hare Krishna, as uttered by the pure devotee, moves our intellect and we begin to consider the Vedic philosophy. When the intelligence is thus energized by spiritual knowledge, the transcendental sound vibration, after cutting through the senses, mind, and intelligence, makes contact with the soul. Thus, we are able to hear the holy name with our real spiritual ear, and actual spiritual revelation and self-realization is open to us. Then the soul, having made contact with the Supreme in the form of transcendental sound, recapitulates, sending the vibration back through our intelligence, mind and senses. At that

time, when we chant Hare Krishna, the Supreme Infinite Lord is there in the vibration and our whole being experiences a deluge of unlimited spiritual ecstasy.

From this level of spiritual realization, we can enter into the understanding of the very cause of everything that exists. The mind, body, and soul, and even material nature itself can be changed into transcendental energy by one pure exclamation of Hare Krishna. This is very important to understand because when everything becomes saturated with this transcendental sound, the result is total transformation of energy. Thus, what is material can be changed into something spiritual. If this can be done on a grand scale, then the material world can be transformed into the spiritual world.

Another example of how the holy names of Krishna work, and how powerful they are, can be cited from the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, Sixth Canto, in the story of Ajamila. Ajamila was born of good parents who trained him in knowledge of the *Vedas* to become a perfect brahmana. Yet one time, while walking along the road, he happened to see a man and a prostitute in a state of intoxication, frolicking in the grass. The woman was not covered properly and was uninhibitedly engaging in amorous pastimes with the man. Upon seeing this, Ajamila became very agitated and later sought the company of the prostitute. He left his young beautiful wife and lived with the prostitute, giving up all regulative principles. He begot ten sons in the womb of the prostitute and named the youngest son Narayana, a name of one of the expansions of Krishna.

To maintain himself and his family, Ajamila cheated others in gambling or by robbing them. While he spent his time in abominable, sinful activities, eighty-eight years of his life passed by. Since his youngest son was born while Ajamila was very old, Narayana was very dear to him. Because of the child's awkward manners and speech, Ajamila delighted in the child's activities. When Ajamila ate or drank, he always did so with his son, Narayana. Ajamila, however, could not understand that the length of his life was decreasing and death was approaching. When the time of death arrived for Ajamila, he began to think only of his son.

At the moment of death, Ajamila became extremely frightened when he saw three persons with deformed bodies, fierce, twisted faces, and their hair standing erect. With a noose in their hands, they had come to take him to Yamaraja, the lord of death. Because of attachment to his son, Ajamila fearfully began to call him loudly by his name, Narayana.

Just then the Vishnudutas, soldiers of Lord Vishnu, arrived when they heard the holy name of their master from the mouth of the dying Ajamila. Ajamila had certainly chanted the name of Narayana without offense because he had chanted in complete anxiety. The Yamadutas, soldiers of Yamaraja, were snatching the soul from the heart of Ajamila, but the messengers of Lord Vishnu forcefully stopped them from doing so. The Yamadutas inquired why they were being stopped from taking Ajamila. The Vishnudutas then asked the Yamadutas that if

they were really servants of Lord Yamaraja, then explain the meaning of religious and irreligious principles.

The Yamadutas replied that from their master, Yamaraja, they had heard that which is prescribed in the *Vedas* constitutes religious principles, and the opposite is irreligion. They continued to explain that Lord Narayana is situated in His own abode in the spiritual world, but controls the entire cosmic creation.

The sun, fire, sky, air, demigods, moon, evening, day, night, directions, water, land, and Supersoul Himself all witness the activities of the living entities. Those that deserve punishment are those who are confirmed by these witnesses as having engaged in unrighteous activities. Everyone engaged in fruitive activities deserves punishment in proportion to their sinful acts. In this way, they must enjoy or suffer the corresponding reactions of their *karma* in the next life.

The Yamadutas continued to explain the laws of *karma* and the position of the living entity, pointing out that in considering the sinful life of Ajamila, they had the right to take him to hell in order to rectify his sinful behavior.

The Vishnudutas, however, stated that Ajamila had already atoned for all of his sinful actions, not only for this one life but for those performed in millions of lives, simply by chanting the holy name of Narayana in a helpless condition. Even though he had not chanted purely, he chanted without offense, and, therefore, was now pure and eligible for liberation. Throughout Ajamila's life, he called the name Narayana. Although calling his son, by chanting the name Narayana, he sufficiently atoned for the sinful actions of millions of lives. At the time of death, Ajamila had helplessly and very loudly chanted the holy name of the Lord. That chanting alone had already freed him from the reactions of all sinful life. Therefore, the soldiers of Lord Vishnu forbade the servants of Yamaraja to take Ajamila for punishment in hell. Anyone who takes shelter of the Supreme through His holy names can similarly be saved from the dark future of sinful reactions after death.

Although *Srimad-Bhagavatam* relates the full story of Ajamila and how he witnessed the discussion between the Yamadutas and Vishnudutas and then went on to achieve ultimate spiritual perfection by taking to the process of *bhakti-yoga*, our short summary here is to show the potency of the holy names. Ajamila is not much different than most people in this age of Kali who are attracted to sinful activities. Therefore, we should seriously try to understand and take advantage of the chanting of the holy names, for by doing so even the greatest sins we may have committed can be atoned, as the following verses explain:

Simply by chanting one holy name of Hari, a sinful man can counteract the reactions to more sins than he is able to commit. (*Brihad-vishnu Purana*)

As when all small animals flee in fear when a lion roars, similarly all one's sinful

reactions leave when a person chants the Lord's holy names while in a helpless condition or even if he has no desire to do so. (*Garuda Purana*)

The path to liberation is guaranteed when a person once chants the holy name of Lord Hari. (*Skanda Purana*)

The *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (6.3.31) explains that chanting the holy names can negate the reactions of the most serious of sins, and, therefore, everyone should take this seriously and join the *sankirtana* movement, which is the most auspicious activity in the universe. And the *Caitanya-caritamrta* (*Madhya-lila*, 15.109) discloses that beyond dissolving one's entanglement in material existence, by chanting Krishna's names one develops attraction and awakens his love for Krishna.

From these verses we can understand that there is no impediment for everyone to readily utilize the holy names to purify themselves of even the worst sins, providing they are sincere and chant purely. Even those who cannot speak properly can repeat the *maha-mantra* within their minds. From those who are the most saintly to those who are in the most abominable position, all have the opportunity of chanting the holy names to begin the escape from *karmic* reactions and to free themselves from material entanglement.

As described in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (6.2.9-10), the chanting of the names of the Supreme is the best atonement for one who is a thief, a drunkard, a killer of *brahmanas*, or one who kills women or kings or cows or his own parents, or for any other kind of sins. Simply by chanting the holy names one attracts the attention of the Supreme who gives that person special protection.

Herein we can discern that attracting the attention of the Supreme by chanting His holy names is the best means of protecting ourselves from our past impurities. When the Supreme is pleased with someone, what can they not accomplish? Anything can be done by one who becomes spiritually powerful. Therefore, out of all the various processes of atonement that are prescribed by different scripture, engaging in the chanting of the holy names is best because it actually uproots the material desires in the heart. As the *Bhagavatam* (6.2.12) confirms, the various processes of atonement are not complete if one's mind still runs back to unwanted material habits. Therefore, those who want freedom from their *karmic* reactions, chanting of the names and pastimes of the Supreme is the best because it completely purifies the mind. Furthermore, the *Bhagavatam* (6.2.15) relates that chanting the holy names of the Lord before dying by some misfortune is enough to deliver a person from having to enter hell to suffer for his bad *karmic* reactions.

Not only is the name of the Lord so powerfully effective on one who seriously chants it, despite the fact that he may have been sinful in his past, the name also acts on one who chants it in a very casual manner. The *Bhagavatam* (6.2.14, 19)

points out that even if one chants the holy names neglectfully, jokingly, or simply for entertainment, the holy names are nonetheless effective enough to free the person from unlimited sins, just as a powerful medicine is effective whether a patient who takes it understands it or not.

Even making an offense to God Himself or to the holy names, such offenses can be mitigated by taking shelter of chanting the Lord's holy names. This is related in the *Padma Purana* (4.25.22-27) as follows: When somehow a sin or blemish is committed against the name of Vishnu, the man should always recite the name and sincerely seek its refuge only. Lord Vishnu's names alone remove the sin of those who have committed a sin or offence against the names since they alone, continuously recited, bring wealth. It is the name alone, when recited without interruption, when remembered or heard, either in a pure form or with incorrect syllables, would protect a man. This alone is the truth. Of course, if it is resorted to hypocritically or for greed born of love for body or wealth, it would not quickly produce the desired result. O Narada, this great secret, which removes all inauspiciousness, and keeps off all sins, was formerly heard (by me) from Shiva. O Narada, even those who are intent on committing sins [but refrain from such], but who know the names of Vishnu, would be liberated merely by reciting them.

Pondering all these points, Lord Yamaraja, in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (6.3.26), concludes that all intelligent men take to devotional service by chanting the holy names of the Supreme because even if they accidentally perform some sinful act, they are protected since the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra obliterates all sinful reactions.

ATTAINING LIBERATION THROUGH CHANTING

In the previous segment it is mentioned that there are certain channels through which the Infinite descends. Similarly, there are certain channels that the living beings can use to escape material existence and return to the spiritual realm. Of course, the final goal of any religious process or yoga system is to get free from material entanglement and enter directly into spiritual existence. This happens easily for one who learns how to purely chant the holy names, as verified in the *Caitanya-caritamṛta* (*Adi-lila*, 8.26, 28) which states that the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra vanquishes all sins and makes way for the performance of devotional service to begin. The chanting of this *maha-mantra* gives so much spiritual advancement that one easily ends his material existence and attains love of God.

From everything that has been described so far about the glories of the holy name, such as its potency to purify the mind, to relieve us of material activities

and the reactions to sinful acts, as well as to put us in direct contact with the Supreme and reawaken our attraction for Him, it is obvious, especially for this age of Kali-yuga, that the most worshipable object is the Lord's holy names, especially as found in the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*. The *Bhagavatam* (6.3.22) also confirms this by stating that the topmost religious principle for the entire human race is to engage in devotional service beginning with the chanting of the Lord's holy names. Therefore, those who chant the holy names have reached the ultimate position in civilized life and, if they continue on the path, will attain further realizations in spiritual life up to reaching the platform of pure, unadulterated devotional service. All such transcendental opulences, as stated in the above verses, are attained simply by chanting the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* without offenses. In this way, one attains the supreme spiritual bliss. The *Caitanya-caritamṛta* (*Antya-līla*, 20.14) explains that by chanting the spiritual names of Krishna one tastes spiritual ecstasy when his love for Krishna awakens. Then one attains Krishna's direct association and feels like he is in an ocean of love.

The name "Krishna" literally means "the greatest pleasure," or "He who is all-attractive." All living entities are looking for pleasure and happiness. God is the storehouse of all pleasure and whatever happiness we feel in this material world is simply due to contact with His energy. However, by chanting His holy names, we can transcend whatever temporary pleasure is found on the material platform and experience actual spiritual happiness by coming in direct contact with the Supreme, the source of all pleasure. The *Caitanya-caritamṛta* (*Adi-līla*, 7.73) verifies that simply by chanting the Hare Krishna mantra a person is freed from material life and will be able to see the Lord.

The mystery behind these names of God is further explained in the *Sri Caitanya Upanishad*, texts 12-14. It explains that the names of the Supreme that are used in the Hare Krishna mantra have specific meanings. *Hari* refers to "He who unties the knot of a person's material desires." Krishna is divided into *Krish*, which means "He who is attractive to everyone," and *Na*, which means "the greatest spiritual pleasure." And *Rama* means "He who is full of spiritual bliss and attracts all others." The Hare Krishna mantra consists of the repetition of these names of the Supreme (Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare) and is the best of all mantras and most confidential of secrets. Those who are serious about making spiritual progress continually chant these holy names and cross over material existence.

For one who takes shelter of the *maha-mantra*, he is sure to reach the Supreme because such mystic meditation engages the mind and intelligence in Krishna. By such continued remembrance of Krishna, even though one may seem to be engaged in so many duties, one regains his spiritual consciousness which is the prerequisite for entering back into the spiritual world. As Sri Krishna explains in *Bhagavad-gīta* (8.7-8), a person should think of Him as Krishna and carry out one's duty with the mind and intelligence fixed on Him. Thinking and meditating

on Krishna in this undeviated way, one can be sure to reach the divine Supreme Spirit.

From this information we can understand that if we can continue setting some time aside everyday for chanting the *maha-mantra* and spiritualizing our consciousness, we will be prepared for entering the spiritual realm after death. This is the most important aspect of any yoga or religious system--being free from material consciousness and remembering the Supreme at the time we give up our body. This requirement is easily fulfilled simply by remembering the Lord through chanting His holy names. This is confirmed in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (3.9.15) which declares that one who takes shelter of Krishna by invoking His spiritual names at the time of leaving the body is cleansed of many lifetimes of sin and attains Krishna without fail.

The most practical example of this is Ajamila, as previously discussed. The *Bhagavatam* (6.2.49) describes that at the time of death Ajamila chanted the Lord's name and returned to the spiritual world, although he was calling for his son, Narayana, and spent a lifetime in sinful activity. So where is the doubt that if one seriously chants the Lord's holy name he will return to the spiritual world? Therefore, as the *Bhagavatam* (6.2.46) elaborates, for one who is serious about attaining freedom from material existence, there is nothing more effective than chanting the holy names of the Supreme and discussing His pastimes and qualities. Other processes are not as complete and leave one's mind tainted with passion and ignorance. Furthermore (*Bhag*.6.3.24), all of one's sinful *karmic* reactions are wiped out simply by chanting the Lord's names and glorifying His qualities and activities. Even if one cannot properly pronounce the holy name, a person will achieve liberation if he chants without offense.

GOD INAUGURATES CHANTING THE HOLY NAMES

We should not think that *sankirtana*, the chanting of the Lord's holy names, is simply part of the system of *mantra-yoga*, or is merely a formula that has been passed down through the ages like other yoga systems. Nor is it a ritual, ceremony, or activity meant for producing good *karma* or positive fruitive results. Neither is it merely a way to focus the mind and achieve peace and tranquility. It is more than any of these.

As previously explained, there is a system of self-realization especially recommended for each age. In the age of Kali, people are not attracted to spiritual pursuits and are often rebellious against anything that seems to restrict or stifle their freedom to do anything they want. Since in this age we are so easily distracted by so many things and our mind is always in a whirl, we need an easy

path. Therefore, the Vedic *shastra* explains that God has given us an easy way to return to Him in this age. It is almost as if He has said, "Since you are My worst son, I give you the easiest process." The *Caitanya-caritamrta* (*Adi-lila*, 3.40) confirms this and says that the Supreme Being descends as Sri Caitanya, with a golden complexion, to simply spread the glories of chanting the holy names, which is the only religious principle in this age of Kali. In this way, God Himself has given the method of chanting His holy names as the most effective means to reach His spiritual abode.

The Lord always descends to establish the codes of religion. This is confirmed in *Bhagavad-gita* (4.6-8) where Lord Krishna explains that although He is unborn and the Lord of all living beings, He still descends in His spiritual form in order to re-establish the proper religious principles and annihilate the miscreants whenever there is a decline of religion and a rise in irreligious activity.

Though there are many incarnations of God, all incarnations are known and predicted in the Vedic literature. Each incarnation performs many wonderful pastimes. But in Kali-yuga the Lord descends as His own devotee in the form of Sri Caitanya in order to show the perfect example of how devotional service should be performed, and to stress the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra for this age by inaugurating the process of the *sankirtana* movement.

Predictions of the appearance of Lord Caitanya can be found in many Vedic texts. One of them is from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (3.12): "The Supreme Personality of God [Purusha] is Mahaprabhu [great master], the propagator of transcendental enlightenment." Another is from the *Vayu Purana*: "In the age of Kali I shall descend as the son of Sacidevi to inaugurate the *sankirtana* movement." The *Bhagavatam* (11.5.32) also describes how intelligent men sing the holy names to worship the incarnation of God who is accompanied by His associates and always sings the names of Krishna. And in the *Caitanya-caritamrta* (*Adi-lila*, 3.19-20) the Supreme Lord Himself describes how He will appear as His own devotee to perform and teach devotional service by inaugurating the *sankirtana* movement, which is the religion for this age.

The *Sri Caitanya Upanishad* (texts 5-11) of the *Atharva-veda* contains the most detailed prediction of Lord Caitanya's appearance and activities. When Pippalada asked his father, Lord Brahma, how the sinful living entities will be delivered in Kali-yuga and who should be the object of their worship and what mantra should they chant to be delivered, Brahma told him to listen carefully and he would describe what will take place in the age of Kali. Brahma said that the Supreme Lord Govinda, Krishna, will appear again in Kali-yuga as His own devotee in a two-armed form with a golden complexion in the area of Navadvipa along the Ganges. He will spread the system of devotional service and the chanting of the names of Krishna, especially in the form of the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*; Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

These and other predictions confirm the fact that Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu would appear to specifically propagate the chanting of the holy names. Of course, now, five hundred years after Lord Caitanya's appearance, we have complete descriptions and elaborations on His life, activities, and philosophy, as had been written by His close associates. This verifies the fact that the chanting of the *maha-mantra* is the rare and special opportunity given by God for all to be relieved from the problems of the age of Kali and of material life in general. As confirmed in the *Caitanya-caritamrta (Adi-lila, 3.77-78)*, it is Sri Krishna Caitanya who inaugurates the congregational chanting of the holy names, which is the most sublime of all spiritual sacrifices. Intelligent people will worship Him through this means, while other foolish people will continue in the cycle of repeated birth and death in this material world.

In another place in the *Caitanya-caritamrta (Antya-lila, 20.8-9)*, Sri Caitanya specifically tells Svarupa Damodara and Ramananda Raya that chanting the holy names is the most practical way to attain salvation from material existence in this age, and anyone who is intelligent and takes up this process of worshipping Krishna will attain the direct shelter of Krishna.

HOW TO CHANT THE MAHA-MANTRA

There are no hard and fast rules for chanting the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*. One can chant anywhere, anytime, in any situation. In fact, the *Caitanya-caritamrta (Antya-lila, 20.18)* describes that chanting the holy name at any time or place, even during sleep or while eating, brings one all perfection. However, there are different stages of chanting. The first stage of chanting is the offensive stage, the second stage is offenseless chanting, and then is the third or pure stage of chanting, which is when the chanting becomes extremely powerful.

The proper way to chant is to give up all of our internal thoughts. As mentioned before, it is almost impossible to meditate on the void and empty our mind of all thinking. Our mind is always being pulled here and there by something. But the chanting process is easy because we simply concentrate on the mantra. However, our meditation on the mantra will be most effective if we can avoid the internal dialogue we always have within our mind. We should not be chanting while we make plans for the day, or while focusing our attention on other things. The *maha-mantra* is the Supreme in the incarnation of sound. Therefore, we must chant with complete respect and veneration. We must give the mantra our full attention, otherwise it is offensive. The process is to simply chant and hear. That is all. If we can do that, then we will make rapid progress and quickly attain the second stage of chanting, which is the offenseless stage.

As one progresses through the second stage, a person begins to get a taste for the chanting, and begins to feel the nectar of joy and bliss within the names. As a person enters the third or pure stage of chanting, the layers of ignorance that keeps one from realizing their spiritual identity are peeled away. At the fullest point, one gains direct perception of their spiritual identity and relationship with God, and is immediately liberated while still in the material body. The Lord reveals Himself to such a sincere devotee and the devotee relishes the taste of transcendental life. As Srila Rupa Gosvami states in his *Sri Upadesamrita* (text 7), everything about Krishna is spiritually sweet, such as His names, qualities, and activities. But one who suffers from the disease of ignorance cannot taste this sweetness. Yet by chanting the names everyday, a person can destroy this disease and relish the natural sweetness of Krishna's names.

The Hare Krishna mantra is said to contain everything for both material and spiritual well-being. So if one chants Hare Krishna with material desires, he will attain these. And if one wants *mukti*, or liberation from the material world, he can also get that. Then again if one chants the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* understanding that Radha and Krishna are personally present there enjoying intimate pastimes in Vrindavana, then one can attain Their eternal loving service. Ultimately, the content of the mantra cannot be separated from the *sadhaka's* or practitioner's mentality. Both have a part to play at what will be attained through the use of it.

The essential state of mind that one should have while chanting the *maha-mantra* is described by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu Himself in the third verse of His *Siksastaka* prayers:

"One should chant the holy name of the Lord in a humble state of mind, thinking oneself lower than the straw in the street; one should be more tolerant than a tree, devoid of all sense of false prestige and should be ready to offer all respect to others. In such a state of mind one can chant the holy name of the Lord constantly."

The names of God come directly from the spiritual world, Vaikuntha, which means the place of no anxiety. Therefore, the more we are absorbed in *kuntha*, or anxiety caused by material pursuits, the longer it will take for us to reach the Vaikuntha platform. But the more we associate with the Vaikuntha vibration of the *maha-mantra*, the sooner we will progress to the stage of experiencing the ecstasy that comes from awakening our transcendental love for the Supreme. The *Caitanya-caritamrta* (*Adi-lila*, 8.27) confirms that bodily transformations of spiritual ecstasy, such as trembling, perspiration, a faltering voice, and tears, may manifest when one's spiritual love for the Lord is actually awakened.

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To begin progressing on the path of chanting the *maha-mantra*, it is prescribed that the practitioner chant on beads called *japa-mala*, similar to a rosary, that consists of 108 beads with one extra head bead, which is larger than the others. This represents the 108 *Upanishads*, or, as described elsewhere, Krishna in the form of the head bead surrounded by 108 of His most advanced devotees.

You may be able to purchase a set of *japa* beads at certain import shops or temples. If you cannot find them anywhere, you can also make them. Simply go to a crafts shop and purchase 108 beads of the same size and one larger bead of your choice for the Krishna bead. Also get a length of durable nylon cord. String the 108 beads with a knot in between each one and bring the two ends of the cord through one hole of the Krishna bead and out the other side where you tie the two ends of the cord together in a firm knot. Then cut the remaining lengths of the cord so you have a small tassel. Now you have got your own set of beads for *japa* meditation.

One chants the Hare Krishna mantra once on each bead from the head bead all the way around the 108 beads. This is one round, or one *mala*. Then without chanting on the Krishna bead, turn the beads around in your hand and go in the opposite direction and chant another round. One should try to set a certain amount of time aside each day, preferably in the morning, to peacefully sit down or walk and chant the particular number of rounds you have set for yourself. One may chant two rounds, four rounds, or whatever one can do.

For those who are serious, it is prescribed that they chant a total of at least sixteen rounds everyday. With a little practice, this normally takes about two hours. Two rounds will take about fifteen minutes. But one should set a fixed number of rounds to chant everyday. Then one can also spend some time reading *Bhagavad-gita* or *Srimad-Bhagavatam* to enhance his or her spiritual development. A daily program of chanting and reading will produce definite results very quickly.

When you are ready to use the mantra, it does not hurt to calm the mind through the basic steps of preparation that have already been described, such as a little *pranayama* breathing techniques and so on. This is, after all, steps for preparing to attain deeper levels of awareness and consciousness, although this is not necessary. Then take your *japa* beads and begin intently chanting the Hare Krishna mantra. When the mind is calm and focused, it will especially be able to concentrate on the vibrations of the mantra. As you chant it with your voice, it is received through the ear and considered by the intelligence. From there it goes deeper into the consciousness. Let no other thoughts enter the mind so that the mantra is all there is. Dive deep into the sound of your chanting and feel the vibration of the holy names and the energy they emit.

As you become regulated at this, doing it everyday, changes will begin to manifest in your consciousness that may be imperceptible at first, while other changes begin that will be noticeable from the start. You will often notice an internal energy within you that was not there before. Amongst other things, you may also feel more sure of your own position and purpose in life, and a closer affinity with God and all beings. Of course, this is just the beginning, so if you do this regularly, deeper insights and realizations will occur as your consciousness acquires more clarity and purification.

This short description does not include that you could also get a real taste for the nectar within the Lord's holy names themselves as you can begin to perceive a reciprocation between yourself and the Lord in His names every time you begin to chant. This takes on a whole different side of spiritual growth which more closely links one to God, which, after all, is the whole purpose of any sort of yoga or religion.

As with any form of meditation, it is best to do your chanting in the early morning when it is quiet and peaceful, and before your mind starts with the activities of the day. However, you can do it anytime or even at a few different times, such as in the morning and again in the evening to put things back into perspective, especially if you have had a busy or difficult day.

CONCLUSION

This chapter contains descriptions of the glories and effectiveness of chanting the *maha-mantra*. Those who are intelligent will certainly add this spiritual practice to their lives. By taking it seriously, they will soon notice a change in their disposition. They may feel more peaceful, content, happy, etc. One trait that is always noticeable in a person who seriously takes to *bhakti-yoga* and the chanting of the *maha-mantra* is a decrease in such feelings as anxiety and distress, up to the point of complete fearlessness. Once someone is no longer afraid of death, then what is there to be afraid of in this material world? One loses such fear when he or she is spiritually self-realized and knows he or she is not this body and, therefore, not actually subject to death, but merely undergoes a transformation of giving up the body. And by taking shelter of the protection of the holy names of Krishna, one will remain spiritually safe in any condition of life.

It is unfortunate that many people in the world are either not aware of this transcendental knowledge or have no taste for it. For such people, extensive material engagements and plan-making are their primary occupation. But this kind of activity is like working hard for nothing because in the end one is awarded only with death, in which all material assets are lost. As stated in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (3.9.10), nondevotees engage in very troublesome work and cannot

sleep well at night because they are absorbed in worldly plans. By providence their ambitions are frustrated and they continue in the cycle of repeated birth and death in material existence.

The only way, therefore, to get release from such material problems and be free from the contamination of the age of Kali is to take up the practice of *bhakti-yoga* and regularly chant the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* while observing the regulations as best as one can. By chanting the *maha-mantra* with faith, a person will eventually purify his or her consciousness and reach success. As more people begin to chant the holy names, the troubles and upheavals found everywhere will diminish, and this age of Kali-yuga can become like the peaceful and bountiful Satya-yuga--the golden age. This is actually the prediction made by Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who said (in *Caitanya-caritamṛta*, *Adi-lila*, 7.26) that love of God will one day inundate the world and drown everyone, regardless of who or what they are. Then many beneficial changes in this world will be seen. Therefore, the best thing any of us can do is to take it seriously.

"Let there be all victory for the chanting of the holy name of Lord Krishna, which can cleanse the mirror of the heart and stop the miseries of the blazing fire of material existence. That chanting is the waxing moon that spreads the white lotus of good fortune for all living entities. It is the life and soul of all education. The chanting of the holy name of Krishna expands the blissful ocean of transcendental life. It gives a cooling effect to everyone and enables one to taste full nectar at every step." (*Siksastaka* 1, written by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu)

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