

ANANTA SATSANG • SACRED TEXTS

मूर्तपूजा और नाम-जपकी महिमा

Mūrti-pūjā

and the Glory of Nāma-japa



Swami Ramsukhdas

*Worship through the Sacred Image
and Repetition of the Divine Name*

Contents

Title Page and Epigraph	4
Mūrti-pūjā	5
A Point to Understand	7
The Glory of Nāma-japa	25
The Glory of Nāma-japa	25

Worship through the Sacred Image and Repetition of the Divine Name

Swami Ramsukhadas

This is a fresh, complete English reading edition translated paragraph by paragraph from Gita Press book 447. The controlling witness is a 66-scan source PDF. This edition includes the title and epigraph on scan 2 and the complete booklet on scans 4-57 and 59-64. Scan 1 is a website wrapper, scan 3 is publication metadata, scan 58 is a stray inserted page from another work, and scans 65-66 are a promotional extract; all five are documented but excluded from the translated text.

The booklet's two principal sections are taken from *Gītā-Darpaṇa*. The translation preserves their authored question-and-answer form and distinguishes remembrance, *japa*, and *kīrtana*. *Mūrti-pūjā* is understood contextually as worship of God through a sacred image, not worship of stone as stone.

Title Page and Epigraph

Hari alone is all.

Mūrti-pūjā and the Glory of Nāma-japa

Swami Ramsukhdas

You alone are my mother, and You alone my father; You alone are my kinsman, and You alone my friend. You alone are my knowledge, and You alone my wealth; You alone are my everything, O God of gods.

Mūrti-pūjā

Hari alone is all.

Mūrti-pūjā

From *Gītā-Darpaṇa*

According to our eternal Vedic teaching, devotees do not worship the material image itself; rather, they worship God alone. That is, they fashion a sacred image in order to attend especially to God, who pervades all places in His fullness, and in that image they worship Him. In this way they may readily continue to meditate upon and contemplate God.

If the image itself were being worshipped, the worshipper would have to regard it merely as a stone image and say, “You came from such-and-such a mountain, such-and-such a person made you, and such-and-such a person brought you and placed you here; therefore, O stone-god, secure my highest good!” But no one says this. Where, then, is there worship of the image as material object? Devotees do not worship the material image; they worship God in the sacred image. They efface the sense that it is merely an image and cultivate awareness of God. By worshipping God in the sacred image in this way, they come to be aware of God everywhere. Devotion to God begins through the worship of God, and even after a devotee has attained perfection, that worship continues.

Regarding worship of Him through a sacred image, the Lord has said in the *Gītā*, “Devotees worship Me, bowing to Me with devotion” (9.14); “When a devotee offers Me a leaf, a flower, fruit, water, and so forth with faith and love, I partake of the gift he has offered” (9.26); and worship of the deities (Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śakti,

Gaṇeśa, and Sūrya - the five deities belonging to the divine order), of brāhmaṇas, teachers, elders such as one's mother and father, and wise, liberated saints is austerity of the body (17.14). If there were no form before one, to whom would one bow? To whom would one offer a leaf, flower, fruit, water, and so on, and whom would one worship? This establishes that worship through a sacred image is also spoken of in the Gītā.

In the same way, worship of the cow, tulasī, the sacred fig tree, a brāhmaṇa, a knower of Truth who is liberated while living, Mount Govardhan, the Gaṅgā, the Yamunā, and so forth is also worship of God. By worshipping them, the truth that "God is everywhere" readily enters one's experience. Worship of the cow and these other sacred presences is therefore a great aid to experiencing God everywhere, because the worshipper has at least begun to accept that God is everywhere. But one who worships no one at all and merely talks will not experience the truth that God is everywhere. The point is that worshipping God in a sacred image is a means to spiritual welfare and the highest good.

Apart from the worship of God, to worship flesh and bone - that is, to adorn one's own body with fine ornaments and clothes, build an excellent house and decorate it with beautiful things, embellish oneself, and so on - is indeed worship of a material form, and it leads to one's downfall.

A Point to Understand

Almost all believers accept that God pervades every place in His fullness. Yet those who truly accept this are the ones who have begun to worship the sacred image, the Veda, the sun, the sacred fig tree, tulasī, the cow, and so forth while regarding God as present in them. For those who recognize God in the sacred image, the Veda, the sun, and these other sacred forms will naturally begin to recognize God everywhere and in every being. Those who recognize God only in the sacred image and similar forms are called “materially oriented (beginning) devotees.” Since they have begun to worship God in at least one place, they have turned to face Him. But those who merely say, “God is everywhere,” while showing reverence, veneration, or esteem for Him nowhere, have not been called devotees. They only say that God is everywhere; they do not truly accept it. Thus they have not turned to face God.

* “One who faithfully worships Hari only in His consecrated image, but not in His devotees or in other beings, is remembered as a materially oriented devotee.”

(Śrīmad Bhāgavata 11.2.47)

Worship of God in a sacred image is a matter of faith, not of argument. Before those who have faith, God’s greatness becomes manifest. God accepts the worship they offer and receives sanctified food from their hands. Thus God ate khichri from Karmābāi, coarse flatbreads from the devotee Dhannā, milk from Mīrābāi, and so on. The point is that through faith and devotion, God manifests in the sacred image.

Question: Devotees offer food to God, but how do we know that God accepts it?

Answer: In God's court, the object is not of chief importance; the devotional feeling is. It is because of that feeling that God accepts the objects and acts offered by a devotee. When the devotee's feeling is that he is feeding God, God becomes hungry, manifests Himself, and takes the food. The object God accepts because of the devotee's feeling does not remain perishable; it becomes divine and conscious in nature. Even if that degree of feeling is absent or one's feeling is deficient, God is nevertheless pleased simply because the devotee offers Him food. Neither the object nor the act is paramount in pleasing God; the feeling alone is paramount. The saints have said:

"The coarse rabri of a loving devotee tastes sweet, O Vīr; without loving feeling," says Kālu, "even rice pudding tastes bitter."

I once met a gentleman who had profound faith in a saint and used to serve him. He said, "Whenever Maharaj became thirsty, the thought would arise in my mind that Maharaj was thirsty. So I would take him water, and he would drink it." Similarly, a wholly faithful wife comes to know when her husband is hungry or thirsty, and even what food he wishes to eat. When the meal is set before him, the husband too says, "Today I was longing for this very food." In the same way, one whose heart longs to offer food to God comes to know God's preference, hunger, and thirst.

There was a temple priest whose chosen form of God was Bāla-Gopāla, the child Krishna. Every day he made small laddus, and when he put Bāla-Gopāla to bed at night, he placed them beside His head, because a child may become hungry during the night. One day he forgot to put out the laddus. That night Bāla-Gopāla said to the priest in a dream, "I am hungry!"

There is another such incident. A sadhu used to offer cashews, almonds, pistachios, walnuts, and other nuts to God each year after Diwali, during the cold season. One year dried fruit became very expensive, so he began offering peanuts instead. One night God said to him in a dream, “Will you feed Me nothing but peanuts?” From that day onward, he again began offering cashews and the other nuts. Earlier he had harboured some doubt about whether God accepted the offering. When God spoke in the dream, his doubt vanished. The point is that when someone offers food to God with devotional feeling, God becomes hungry and accepts it.

There was a sadhu who ordinarily ate a great deal. Once he became ill. Someone told him, “Maharaj, drink cow’s milk, but drink only the milk left after the calf has fed.” He began doing just that. After the calf had drunk its fill from its mother, he milked the cow. Only a quarter to three-eighths of a seer of milk came out, yet even that small amount satisfied him. Within a few days his illness disappeared and he became healthy. If even something obtained justly possesses such power that a little can satisfy a person and cure disease, what need be said of something given with loving feeling!

Everyone has experienced that when someone serves food with feeling and love, the food has a remarkable taste and it leaves the tendencies of the mind in a very good state. Feeling affects not only human beings but animals too. When a calf’s mother dies, people feed it the milk of another cow. The calf survives, but it does not thrive. If that same calf had drunk its own mother’s milk, she would have licked it lovingly while nursing it, and the calf would have thrived on even a little milk. If feeling affects human beings and animals, what need be said of its effect upon God, the indwelling Knower of all hearts!

It was solely because of Vidurānī's devotional feeling that the Lord ate banana peels from her hand. It was solely because of the gopīs' devotional feeling that the Lord snatched curd and butter from their hands and ate it. The Lord says to Brahmā:

“The food offering placed before Me I receive with My eyes; but its savour I taste upon My servant's tongue, O lotus-born Brahmā.”

“O lotus-born one! I receive with My eyes the food offerings placed before Me; but I taste the flavour of that offering only through the tongue of My devotee.”

I have also heard from saints that when food is offered with devotional feeling, God sometimes looks at it, sometimes touches it, and sometimes actually takes a portion of it.

When a little child who still crawls on his knees picks something up and gives it to his father, the father becomes delighted. Raising his hand high, he says, “Son, grow this tall - grow even taller than I am!” Was that object difficult to obtain? Did the father receive anything exceptional because the child gave it to him? No. He was pleased solely by the child's feeling in giving. In the same way, God lacks nothing and desires no object, yet He is pleased by the devotee's feeling in giving.

But when people decorate temples merely for display and to deceive others, adorn Thakurji - the consecrated form of God - and offer Him the finest foods, God does not accept it. Such an act is not worship of God; it is worship of money and personal self-interest.

Some people call anyone who offers food to Thakurji or worships Him a hypocrite, and proudly think themselves better because they perform no such “hypocrisy.” Such people do not attain their

highest good. Those engaged in a noble act, in whatever manner, possess goodness at least to that extent; there is goodness in their conduct and way of life. But when people proudly abandon good conduct, the result can only be bad.

Question: When wicked people break sacred images, why does God not show them His power and miraculous glory?

Answer: Why should God's power and greatness become manifest before those who bear no sacred regard for the image, who hate those who worship God through it, and who break it solely out of hatred? God's greatness is revealed only through the feeling of faith.

When wicked people break a sacred image and God does not display His power, the reason is a deficiency, among the worshippers themselves, in the conviction that God is present in the image. But where devotees possess firm faith and trust that God is present in the image, God does manifest His power. Near Surat in Gujarat, for example, there is a temple of Śiva. The Śivaliṅga there is covered with holes. The reason is that when Muslims came to break that Śivaliṅga, innumerable large bumblebees emerged from it and drove them away.

Only those who wish to pass an examination respect the examiner and submit to his authority, because whomever the examiner passes, passes, and whomever he fails, fails. But God has no need to pass anyone's examination. Passing an examination does not increase God's greatness, nor does failing one diminish it. For example, to test Lord Rāma, Rāvaṇa sends Mārīca in the illusory form of a golden deer. The Lord runs after the deer and thus "fails" Rāvaṇa's test - for what certificate could God possibly need to obtain from wicked Rāvaṇa by passing? In the same way, when

wicked people break temples to test God, He fails their examination and does not reveal His power before them, because they approach Him with a wicked disposition.

There is an object-quality, and there is a feeling-quality. These two qualities are distinct. Consider a wife, a mother, and a sister. The bodily substance of all three is the same: the wife's body is of the same kind as the mother's and the sister's, so the "object-quality" is the same in all three. Yet one feeling arises upon meeting one's wife, another upon meeting one's mother, and still another upon meeting one's sister. Although the material object is the same, the "feeling-quality" differs. The world contains persons and things of diverse natures, so their object-qualities differ; but God pervades all of them in His fullness - that one feeling-quality is the same. In the same way, one who has faith in the sacred image possesses the feeling-quality, "God is present in this image." One who has no faith in it possesses only the object-quality, "This image is made of stone, brass, silver, or some such substance." Thus, if the worshipper's feeling toward the image is directed to God, then for that worshipper it is God Himself, present before him. If the worshipper regards it only as an image of stone, brass, silver, and so on, then for him it is indeed merely such a material image, for God abides in the devotional feeling:

"The deity dwells neither in wood, nor in stone, nor in clay. The deity truly dwells in devotional feeling; therefore one should cultivate that feeling."

(*Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Uttara-khaṇḍa 28.11)

“The deity does not dwell in wood, stone, or clay. The deity resides in devotional feeling; therefore devotional feeling itself should be regarded as primary.”

There was a renunciant baba who owned two gold images, one of Gaṇeśa and one of a mouse. The two weighed the same. The baba wished to go to Rameshwaram, so he approached a goldsmith and asked, “Brother, how many rupees will you give me for these images?” After weighing them, the goldsmith offered five hundred rupees for each - the same price for both. The baba exclaimed, “Can you not see? One is the master and the other is His mount! How can the master, Gaṇeśa, have the same value as His vehicle, the mouse?” The goldsmith replied, “Baba, I am not pricing Gaṇeśa and the mouse; I am pricing the gold.” The point is that the baba’s vision rested upon Gaṇeśa and the mouse, while the goldsmith’s rested upon the gold. The baba saw the feeling-quality, and the goldsmith saw the object-quality. Likewise, those who break sacred images see only their object-quality - only stone, brass, and so forth. In accordance with their own feeling, therefore, God remains for them merely stone or some other material.

Seen as it truly is, everything - the unmoving and the moving alike - is God’s own form. Those in whom the feeling-quality, awareness of God, is present see everything as God’s form. But those in whom the object-quality, awareness only of the world, prevails see the moving and unmoving as separate things. The same principle should be understood concerning the sacred image.

People worship the sacred image with faith, offering praise and prayer, because they perceive something special in it. Those who break the image also perceive something special in it. If they saw no distinction, why would they break that image in particular? Why

would they not break other stones? Thus they too recognize a special character in it. They break it only out of hatred for those who repose faith and trust in it, in order to cause them pain.

Those who destroy a temple constructed according to scriptural ordinance, together with its images installed through the rite of consecration, do so out of hatred: to advance their self-interest, break the sacred customs of Hindus, perpetuate their own pride and name, and cause anguish in Hindu hearts for generations through the sight of shattered images. Such people meet a dreadful fate and enter terrible hells, because their very intention is to hurt and destroy others. A bad intention can have only a bad result. But those who exert all their strength, even risking their lives, to protect temples and sacred images attain a good destination because their intention is good.

When we honour a learned person, what we actually honour is learning, not a body of flesh and bone. In the same way, one who recognizes God in the sacred image honours God Himself, not the material image. Therefore God's power does not become manifest before one who does not recognize Him in the image, but before one who does, His power becomes manifest.

Question: Why should we practise mūrti-pūjā? What need is there to worship God through a sacred image?

Answer: We should practise mūrti-pūjā to deepen and awaken our awareness of God and to please Him. The importance of worldly objects is imprinted upon our inner faculty, and we possess attachment and a sense of "mine" toward them. To erase these, it is very necessary to worship Thakurji, offer flower garlands, dress Him in beautiful clothes, wave the āratī light, offer food, and so

forth. Thus worship through the sacred image benefits us in two ways: awareness of God awakens and grows, and possessiveness and attachment toward worldly objects are relinquished.

In a human life there must be at least one locus for whose sake a person can give up everything. That locus may be God, a saint, one's mother and father, or one's teacher. Through such self-giving, a person's materialistic outlook diminishes and religious and spiritual feeling grows.

Once some pilgrims were making the circuit of Kāśī. A local paṇḍā introduced them to the temples, had them bow to the Śivaliṅgas, and guided their worship. Among the pilgrims were some young men of modern outlook. They disliked bowing at place after place, so they said, "Panditji, what is gained by rubbing one's forehead against stones everywhere?" A saint standing nearby said to them, "Brothers, just as you dwell in this body of flesh and bone, so God dwells in the sacred image. You are only a few years old, whereas these Śivaliṅgas are many years old; in age, therefore, they are your elders. In purity, flesh and bone are impure, while stone is pure. In strength, stone is stronger than bone. If you wish to test it, strike your head against the image and see whether your head breaks or the image does! You have many vices and misconducts, but the image has none. Thus from every point of view the image is superior and worthy of worship. You regard criticism of your name as criticism of you, and praise of your name as praise of you; disrespect to your body as disrespect to you, and respect for your body as respect for you. Will God, then, not regard worship, praise, and prayer offered to Him in the sacred image as worship, praise, and prayer offered to Himself? Brother! The name and form that people honour in you are not your essential Self, yet you are pleased. God's own form pervades everywhere and is therefore

present in these images too. If we worship God in them, will He not be pleased? The greater the devotional feeling with which we worship God, the more pleased He will be.”

Every believer, even if he avoids what he calls image worship, nevertheless engages in it. How? If he accepts scriptures such as the Veda and lives according to them, that too is worship of a form, because the Veda, being a written book, also has a visible form. To honour the Veda and other scriptures is mūrti-pūjā. Similarly, when a person honours and welcomes a teacher, parents, or a guest, serving them with food, water, clothes, and so on, all of that too is mūrti-pūjā. The bodies of the teacher, parents, and others are insentient, yet by honouring their bodies we honour them as well, and they are pleased. Thus whenever and however a person honours anyone, that is all worship through a form. If, with devotional feeling, a person worships God in a sacred image, then the worship is of God Himself.

There was a renunciant baba who lived beneath a large parasol and worshipped Śālagrāma there. People who rejected mūrti-pūjā disliked this practice of his. At that time an English officer named Mr Hook was staying in the area. These people complained to the officer that by worshipping an image, the baba was dishonouring the all-pervading God, and so forth. Angered, Mr Hook summoned the baba and ordered him to leave the place. The next day the baba made an effigy of Mr Hook and carried it around the town. In full view of the people he struck it with a shoe and said, “This Mr Hook is utterly witless; he understands nothing at all,” and so forth. The people again complained to Mr Hook: “This baba insults you. He has made your effigy and beats it with a shoe.” Mr Hook summoned the baba and asked, “Why do you insult me?” The baba replied, “I am not insulting you at all. I am insulting this effigy of yours,

because it is exceedingly foolish.” Saying this, he struck the effigy with his shoe. Mr Hook said, “To insult my effigy is to insult me.” The baba replied, “You are not present in this effigy - this image - at all, yet your mere name upon it affects you so deeply. But our God pervades every place, time, object, and everything else. Therefore, will God not be pleased with one who worships Him in a sacred image with faith? If I worship God in a sacred image, does that honour God or dishonour Him? Mr. Huk said, “Go; you may now practise worship through the sacred image freely.” Babaji returned to his place.

Question- Some people sit in a temple or near a temple and consume prohibited things such as meat and liquor. Why, even then, does God not stop them?

Answer- When children behave insolently before their parents, the parents do not punish them, because they think, “They are our own children; they are ignorant and do not understand.” In the same way, God thinks, “They are My own ignorant children.” Thus His gaze does not even go toward their conduct. Nevertheless, those who consume prohibited things in a temple and engage in prohibited conduct will certainly have to suffer the penalty for that offence.

Question- Why did certain saints of earlier times, such as Kabir Ji, denounce worship through sacred images?

Answer- Saints and great souls appear at a particular time and do the work that its needs require. For example, when intense disputes arose in former times between the Śaivas and the Vaiṣṇavas, Tulsidas Ji Maharaj composed the *Rāmacaritamānasa*, and the quarrel between the two came to an end. Many commentaries have

been written on the Gītā because, as different needs arose at different times, corresponding inspiration arose in the hearts of great souls and they wrote commentaries suited to those needs. When Buddhism had become very widespread, Shankaracharya Ji appeared and propagated Sanātana Dharma. Likewise, during Muslim rule, temples were demolished and sacred images were broken. Saints such as Kabir Ji therefore said at that time, “We do not need temples or worship through sacred images, for our Supreme Lord is not only in a temple or image; He pervades everywhere.” In truth, those saints did not intend to denounce worship through sacred images. Their sole intention was somehow to turn people toward God.

Question- Conditions are no longer like that: Muslims are not demolishing temples or breaking sacred images. Why, then, do followers of those saints’ traditions still denounce worship through the sacred image and God with form?

Answer- Denouncing someone else is insistence upon one’s own doctrine, for those who denounce other doctrines seek to promote their own and establish their own prestige. Those who now denounce temples, worship through sacred images, and the doctrines of others are sectarians. In reality they do not seek the truth of the Supreme Lord or their own deliverance; instead, they want personal veneration, want to create their own faction, and want to promote their own sect. Such sectarians do not attain God. Those who insist upon their own doctrine become intoxicated by opinion, and the words of the intoxicated are not authoritative - not worthy of acceptance:

*“Distracted, possessed, helpless, and intoxicated,
they do not speak words that have been considered.”*

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* 1.125.7)

Such people, intoxicated by doctrine, cannot know the essential truth: > “Hariyā is absorbed in the essential truth, not absorbed in doctrine.

One who wanders intoxicated by doctrine has not found the truth there.

*Hariyā, contemplate the truth - what use have you for doctrine?
Truth has made its home in the immortal realm; doctrine's
dwelling is the realm of death.”*

When those who accept the formless denounce a sacred image with form, they actually diminish the very formless Reality they have chosen to worship. Their position itself implies that their formless Reality is absent where form is present - that it is confined to a particular place! If they accepted their formless Reality as present even within a sacred image with form, why would they denounce form? Moreover, worshippers of the formless maintain, “The Supreme Lord does not possess form, does not incarnate, and has no sacred image.” Their supposedly all-powerful Supreme Lord is therefore unable - too weak - to incarnate or assume form; He is no longer all-powerful. In truth, the Supreme Lord is not like that. He is everything, with form and without form: “I am being and non-being” (Gītā 9.19). We should therefore consider whether our aim is to attain our highest good or to quarrel over form and formlessness. If we worship either God with form or the formless according to our own inclination, we will attain our highest good:

*“Let the world do what it likes, whether good or bad;
'Nārāyaṇ,' sit down and sweep clean your own house.”*

If one must quarrel, there are many things in the world to quarrel over. People already quarrel over money, land, houses, and so forth. But why introduce quarrelling after entering the spiritual path? If we truly worship God with form or the formless, how did we find time to denounce another person's doctrine? Had we spent upon worshipping our chosen form of God the time we spent denouncing others, we would have gained greatly.

By denouncing others we incur this loss: we invite them to denounce our own chosen form of God! If, for example, we denounce the formless, we invite others and give them occasion to denounce our chosen Deity - God with form. Thus denunciation benefits neither us nor anyone else. Furthermore, no one has ever prescribed denouncing others as a means to the highest good. Even those who have denounced others have not said that doing so will bring you good or lead to spiritual welfare. If we denounce someone's doctrine or chosen Deity, our inner instrument will become impure. Tendencies of hatred will form in accordance with that denunciation, obstructing our worship and turning us away from our own chosen Lord.

Therefore a person should not denounce anyone's doctrine or chosen Deity, regard anyone as inferior, or insult and despise anyone. All worship their own chosen form according to their particular inclination, devotional attitude, faith, and trust. The Supreme Lord is attained through the seeker's devotional attitude, love, faith, and trust. One should therefore place faith and trust in one's own path and chosen Lord and devote oneself earnestly to practice in accordance with that path. This is the way to attain God. Denouncing and despising others is not a means to God-realisation; it is a means to one's downfall.

Those saints who denounced worship through sacred images laid special emphasis, in its place, upon repetition of the Divine Name, satsang, the Guru's teaching, contemplation of God, meditation, and similar practices. Therefore people who abandoned sacred-image worship but did not earnestly practise nāma-japa and the other disciplines of their own tradition were left empty on both sides! Those who worship through sacred images are better than they are, for at least they practise according to their own path.

Someone may respond, "We do not intend to denounce others; we are only strengthening our own worship and cultivating exclusive devotion." The answer is that exclusive devotion is not cultivated by denouncing others. Exclusive devotion means that no reality exists apart from our chosen Lord. Our Lord is both with attributes and beyond attributes. All are forms of our Lord. Others may give our Lord another name, but He is still our Lord. Our Lord is worshipped in many forms and in many ways. Therefore those who accept the attributeless are increasing the glory of our Lord with attributes, for it is our Lord with attributes who is present there as the attributeless. Worshippers of the attributeless are thus worthy of our reverence. Only this produces exclusive devotion. Denouncing anyone is not a means of cultivating it.

When people worship their chosen Lord with faith, trust, and a guileless, simple heart, denouncing their Lord or their form of worship will wound their hearts and cause them pain. A grave sin will then attach to the person who made the denunciation, preventing his own worship from reaching fulfilment.

To denounce others in the name of exclusivity is evil clothed in goodness. A good person can protect himself when evil comes in the form of evil, but when evil assumes the form of goodness it becomes

extremely difficult to escape. Rāvaṇa appeared before Sita Ji dressed as an ascetic, and Kālanemi did the same before Hanuman Ji, so even Sita Ji and Hanuman Ji were deceived. Arjuna too seized upon abandoning his duty under the pretext of nonviolence: “Duryodhana and the others do not understand dharma and are overcome by greed, but I understand dharma; I am free of greed; I am nonviolent,” and so forth. Evil thus entered Arjuna as well, clothed in goodness. God had to exert great effort and deliver a long teaching to remove it. Had evil appeared to Arjuna plainly as evil, removing it would not have taken long. In the same way, if the evil of denunciation comes to us in the form of exclusive devotion and we spend our priceless time, strength, and understanding denouncing others, we bring about our own downfall. A seeker should therefore be very careful to devote his time, ability, and strength solely to worshipping his chosen Lord.

Question- How is a self-manifested sacred image of God made?

Answer- Only if a self-manifested sacred image were made could the question arise, “How is it made?” A self-manifested image is not made at all. It manifests by itself; that is precisely why it is called self-manifested. Otherwise, how could it be self-manifested?

Question- How can one recognise whether a particular sacred image is self-manifested or was made by someone?

Answer- Not everyone can recognise this. A person who has seen someone before recognises him when they meet again; likewise, only one who has had God’s direct darśana can recognise a self-manifested sacred image.

Question- What is the glory of beholding and worshipping a self-manifested sacred image as compared with one that has been fashioned?

Answer- Where there are faith and trust, one gains even by worshipping the ṛṣis in darbha grass or Ganesha Ji in a betel nut. Likewise, when there are faith, trust, and awareness of God, one gains from worshipping and beholding a fashioned image as well. Yet faith and trust in a self-manifested image bring a special and more immediate benefit. In the same way, hearing a saint speak directly is more beneficial than reading a book written by that saint. Sanjaya similarly says of the Gītā that he heard it directly as God Himself was speaking it (18.75).

Question- Our relationship with the world forms easily, simply, and without effort, but our relationship with God does not form in the same way. What is the reason?

Answer- The reason is that a person takes himself to be the body. Once he considers himself the body, his relationship with the world forms easily, because the body is of one substance with the world. A relationship forms spontaneously with that with which one has identity - a shared nature. Thus one who considers himself a Brahmin or Kshatriya easily forms relationships with Brahmins or Kshatriyas, while one who regards himself as a scholar or merchant easily forms relationships with scholars or merchants: “Friendship arises among those of similar character and pursuits.” God is not directly visible; and because a person regards himself as a *mūrti* - a bodily form - it is easiest for him to cultivate awareness of God in a sacred image. Therefore, as long as “I” and “mine” remain in relation to the body, one should certainly practise worship through the sacred image. Even after attaining God, one should not abandon

that worship, because one should remain grateful toward the means by which one benefited rather than discard it.

The Glory of Nāma-japa

The Glory of Nāma-japa

From *Gītā-Darpaṇa*

There is no distinction between the Name and the One named - between the Divine Name and God. Remembrance of either therefore has the same greatness. The Divine Name is taken in three ways:

(1) **With the mind-** The Name is mentally remembered. God describes this with the words “who remembers Me constantly” (Gītā 8.14).

(2) **With the voice-** The Name is repeated through the voice as *japa*. God identifies this with His own form in the words, “Among sacrifices, I am the sacrifice of japa” (Gītā 10.25).

(3) **From the throat-** The Name is loudly pronounced from the throat as *kīrtana*, voiced praise or chanting aloud. God describes this with the word “ever chanting” (Gītā 9.14).

In the Gītā, God gives Om, Tat, and Sat as three names of the Supreme: “Om Tat Sat is remembered as the threefold designation of Brahman” (17.23). God identifies praṇava - Om - as His own form: “the praṇava in all the Vedas” (7.8), and “among utterances, I am the single syllable” (10.25). God says that a person who pronounces the single-syllabled praṇava “Om,” remembers Him, and then leaves the body attains the supreme destination (8.13).

Arjuna too proclaimed the glory of the Name while praising God’s cosmic form: “O Lord! Many deities, terrified, are joining their palms and chanting Your Name and praises” (11.21); and, “O

indwelling Lord! Through the chanting of Your Name and praises, the whole world rejoices and is filled with loving devotion. Terrified by the chanting of Your Name and praises, the demons flee in all ten directions, while all the hosts of perfected beings bow to You. All of this is entirely fitting” (11.36).

A point to understand

During deep sleep all the senses dissolve into the mind, the mind into the intellect, the intellect into the ego, and the ego into ignorance. That is, in deep sleep there is no awareness of the sense of “I.” Upon awakening from deep sleep, awareness of “I” arises first, followed by awareness of place, time, condition, and so forth. Yet if someone calls a deeply sleeping person by name, he wakes up. Sound reaches the person even while he sleeps deeply, merged in ignorance. The point is that sound possesses an inconceivable power by which it penetrates ignorance and reaches the ego. In the same way, when a person who has lain in beginningless ignorance, deluded in the world like one unconscious, hears teaching from the Guru’s lips, he comes to know his true nature. In other words, sound can communicate knowledge of truth even to a person submerged in ignorance.¹ Similarly, to one who earnestly repeats the Divine Name, that Name bestows knowledge of his true nature and the direct vision of God.

Authorial footnote 1

Sound possesses such an extraordinary power that it can impart knowledge even of what is remote and not present before the senses.

When someone listens respectfully to the words - the teaching - issuing from the lips of a great, liberated knower of truth, that

person's conduct and devotional attitude are reformed; ignorance is dispelled and knowledge arises. But if someone's speech is marred by falsehood, harshness, idle chatter, slander, gossip, and similar faults, his words do not affect others, because his conduct has blunted their power. The speaker himself may also possess four faults: confusion, carelessness, self-seeking desire, and ineptitude in expression. When a speaker does not know the subject he is explaining properly - knowing some of it and not knowing some - this is "confusion." When, while teaching, he is inattentive and speaks carelessly, and because of indifference does not discern the listener's level or how much the listener can understand, this is "carelessness." When he desires somehow to be worshipped and honoured, to receive money from listeners, to accomplish his selfish purpose, or to draw listeners into his circle and make them conform to him, this is "self-seeking desire." When he lacks skill in speaking, does not know the listener's language, and does not know how to present a point so that the listener can understand, this is "ineptitude in expression." If these four faults are present in the speaker, his words do not give the listener knowledge. Words free of these faults do impart knowledge. The listener, too, must possess faith, trust, an earnest desire to know, diligence, mastery of the senses, and similar qualifications, and must aim at attaining God; then the speaker's words bring him knowledge. The point is that if the speaker is unqualified, his speech does not affect the listener; and if the listener is unqualified, the speaker's speech does not affect him either. The speaker's words affect the listener only when both are qualified. The Name of God, however, possesses such extraordinary power that whenever anyone takes the Name, in whatever state of feeling, only good comes of it: > "With good feeling or bad, in anger or even laziness,

repetition of the Name brings auspiciousness in all ten directions.”

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* 1.28.1)

The Name of God destroys sins when taken in any manner whatever - neglectfully, indirectly, jokingly, or otherwise:

*“Whether uttered indirectly, jokingly, as an interjection, or with neglect,
taking the name of Vaiṣṇava is known to destroy every sin.”*

(*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 6.2.14)

God Himself has said regarding His Name that the name of those beings who repeat My Name either with faith or even with neglect remains always in My heart:

*“Whether with faith or neglect, living beings repeat My Name;
their name, O Pārtha, remains forever in My heart.”*

Doubt- Merely saying the word “jaggery” does not make one’s mouth sweet. What, then, will result from taking God’s Name?

Resolution- The thing called jaggery is absent from its name; that is, the word “jaggery” contains no jaggery. Until jaggery comes into contact with the organ of taste - the tongue - the mouth does not become sweet, because no jaggery is present on the tongue. Similarly, taking the name of a wealthy person does not bring wealth, because his wealth is not present in his name. God, however, is present in His Name. The Name is not separate from the One named - God - and the One named is not separate from the Name. The Name is present in the One named, and the One named is present in the Name. Therefore, by taking the Name of the One named - of God - one attains God; the One named manifests Himself.

Doubt- The Name is merely a word. What can it accomplish?

Resolution- Sound as such possesses inconceivable power, but the Name has a special capacity to establish one's relationship with God. Therefore, in whatever manner the Name is taken, it brings only good. If one repeating the Name possesses a special devotional attitude, benefit comes very quickly:

*“Those who remember with reverence
cross the ocean of becoming as though it were a cow's hoofprint.”*

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* 1.119.2)

Even if little devotional feeling is present in nāma-japa, repeating the Name will certainly bring benefit, though one cannot say when. Increasing the number of repetitions also develops devotional feeling, because a subtle feeling is always present within the one repeating the Name; as the number of repetitions increases, that feeling becomes manifest.

Nāma-japa is not an action - a mere *karma* - but worship, because in nāma-japa the repeater's aim and relationship are directed toward God. Actions by themselves do not bring the highest good; they perish after yielding their fruit. Yet when selflessness predominates in the performance of actions, those actions become means to the highest good. In the same way, when aiming at God predominates in nāma-japa, repetition of the Name becomes a means to direct realisation of God. When God is the principal aim, the Name becomes consciousness itself and no longer remains an action. Not only that: its conscious nature also enters the one repeating it; even the repeater's body becomes conscious, and its inertness disappears. Thus Tukaram Ji Maharaj went bodily to Vaikuṇṭha. Mirabai's body merged into God's sacred form. Kabir

Ji's body disappeared, and people found flowers in its place. The sound of the Name "Viṭṭhala" could be heard from Chokhamela's bones.

Question- How true is the glory of the Divine Name proclaimed by the scriptures and saints?

Answer- The glory of the Name proclaimed by the scriptures and saints is wholly true. More than this, all the Name's glory that has been sung until now has not exhausted it; much remains still to be sung. God is infinite, and therefore the glory of His Name is infinite: "Hari is infinite, and the stories of Hari are infinite" (*Rāmacaritamānasa* 1.140.3). Even God Himself cannot fully proclaim the glory of the Name: "Even Rāma cannot sing all the virtues of the Name" (1.26.4).

Question- The glory attributed to the Name is not visibly evident in people who practise nāma-japa. What is the reason?

Answer- When one does not accept the greatness of the Name, one slights and dishonours it; consequently, it does not exert the same effect. Because of faults such as failing to apply the mind to nāma-japa, failing to repeat the Name while meditating upon one's chosen form of God, and failing inwardly to value the Name, its glory does not become quickly apparent. Still, if the mouth somehow continues repeating the Name, benefit certainly comes even from that, though it takes time. Whether the mind engages or not, let nāma-japa continue unceasingly and never be abandoned. By the grace of the sovereign Name everything will be accomplished: the mind will begin to engage, faith and trust in the Name will arise, and so forth.

If one possesses exclusive devotion to the Divine Name and nāma-japa continues without interruption, genuine benefit certainly results, for God's Name is not like worldly names. God is consciousness itself; therefore His Name too is conscious and living. There was a saint in Rajasthan named Budhārāmājī. Once he became absorbed in repetition of the Divine Name, he could not bear even a little time to pass without *nāma-japa*. When his food was ready, his mother would call him to eat; after eating, he would return to repeating the Name. One day he said to her, "Mother, eating flatbread takes a great deal of time. Please make only porridge, serve it in a plate, and call me when it has cooled a little." His mother did so. Another day he said, "Mother, eating porridge also takes time. Please make only thin *rābrī* and call me once it has cooled." When the Divine Name is repeated with dedication like this, real benefit certainly results.

Objection: If benefit results only from repetition of the Name performed with faith and trust, then where is the glory of the Name? The glory would belong only to faith and trust.

Resolution: If someone does not acknowledge a king as king, he does not receive the benefit that comes from the king. If he does not acknowledge a learned man as learned, he does not receive the benefit that comes from him. If he does not acknowledge saints and great souls as such, he does not receive the benefit that comes from them. When God incarnates, one who does not acknowledge Him as God does not receive the benefit that comes from Him. But if one receives no benefit from a king and the others, has any deficiency thereby arisen in them? The deficiency belongs only to the person who does not acknowledge them. In the same way, one who lacks faith and trust in the Name does not receive the benefit that comes from it, but this causes no deficiency in the Name's glory. The

deficiency belongs only to the one who lacks faith and trust in the Name.

The Name possesses infinite power. It is not at all the case that this power increases when one has faith and trust in the Name and decreases when one does not. Certainly, one who has faith and trust in the Name will receive benefit from it, while one without faith and trust will be unable to receive that benefit. There is another point: one who lacks faith and trust in the Name commits an offence against it. Because of that offence, he cannot receive the benefit that comes from the Name.

Question: Even without faith and trust, one's hand is burned by touching fire. Then why does the glory of the Name not become manifest at once when one repeats it without faith and trust?

Answer: Fire is a material thing and burns only material things, whereas God's Name is transcendent and divine. As the devotional feeling of one who performs *nāma-japa* grows toward the Name, the Name's glory increasingly becomes manifest before him. He begins to experience that glory and to perceive the Name's wondrous, transcendent nature. One wonder of the Name is that even if a person has no devotional feeling or faith but continues to repeat it constantly, its power will become manifest before him, though this may take time.

Question: Are all sins destroyed merely by taking the Name once?

Answer: Yes. All sins are destroyed by the Name taken even once with the anguish of utter need. At the end of life a person sees no one who can save him from death and loses hope on every side. If even one Name then comes from his mouth in desperate supplication, that single Name destroys all his sins. For example, a

crocodile was dragging Gajendra into the water. Gajendra saw, "Now there is no one who can save me; death has come." He took the Name only once in utter distress. The moment he did so, God came, killed the crocodile, and rescued Gajendra.

One who has unbroken faith and trust in God's Name and an exclusive devotional attitude attains the highest good through a single utterance of the Name.

Question: If all sins are destroyed by a single utterance of the Name, why is it necessary to repeat the Name again and again?

Answer: It is by repeating the Name again and again that the one utterance filled with desperate longing emerges. To start a motor engine, one repeatedly turns the handle. No one knows whether the engine will start on the first, fifth, tenth, or fifteenth turn. But if the handle keeps being turned, the engine starts on one turn or another. In the same way, if one continues to repeat the Divine Name, sooner or later that one utterance filled with desperate longing will certainly arise. Therefore, taking the Name again and again is very necessary.

Question: A person performs *nāma-japa* but also commits forbidden actions. Will he be delivered or not?

Answer: In time he will certainly be delivered, because the Divine Name taken in any manner never goes in vain. But the direct effect of *nāma-japa* will not become visible to him. In fact, forbidden actions are committed only by one whose aim is not the attainment of God alone. One whose sole aim is God-realization cannot commit forbidden actions. A person whose aim has become money does no work by which his money would be lost. He cannot bear financial loss; and if for some reason money is lost, he becomes agitated. In

the same way, when a person's aim becomes God-realization, he cannot act contrary to spiritual practice. If actions opposed to spiritual practice are still performed by him, this proves that God-realization has not yet become his aim.

The seeker should firmly establish God-realization as his aim and continue performing *nāma-japa*. Then no forbidden action will be committed by him. Even if such an action should occur, he will feel deep remorse for it, and as a result it will never occur again.

IAST: *vaiṣṇave bhagavad-bhaktau prasāde hari-nāmni ca |
alpa-puṇyavatām śraddhā yathāvan naiva jāyate ||*

"Those whose accumulated merit is slight do not develop proper faith in the Vaiṣṇavas, devotion to God, the Lord's *prasāda*, or Hari's Name."

When bile is greatly aggravated, even sugar candy tastes bitter to the patient. But if he continues to take the sugar candy, the bile subsides and the candy begins to taste sweet. In the same way, when sins are abundant the Name does not taste pleasing. But if one begins *nāma-japa*, the sins will be destroyed, the Name will begin to taste pleasing and sweet, and the direct benefit of repeating it will also become visible.

Question: One whose destiny contains the taking of the Name can repeat it; it can come from his mouth. But how can someone take the Name if doing so is not written in his destiny at all?

Answer: One thing "happens" and another is "done." Destiny is the fruit of past actions, whereas new actions are done; they do not simply happen. One conducts business and profit or loss happens. One farms and gain or loss happens. One performs a mantra with

desire for a result, as an observance, and health or some other result happens. One sets out for Badrinārāyaṇa - this is doing; while walking, one arrives at Badrinārāyaṇa - this is happening. One takes medicine - this is doing; the body becomes healthy or remains unhealthy - this is happening. Loss and gain, life and death, honour and dishonour are things that happen, because they are fruits of actions performed in a former birth.*

But performing *nāma-japa* is a new action. It is something to be done, not something that merely happens. Everyone is free to do it. There is only this distinction: if someone has repeated the Name before, hearing its glory will immediately awaken an interest in *nāma-japa*, and it will begin to occur easily. But if someone has not previously repeated the Name, hearing its glory will not quickly awaken interest in the practice. If the person who tells of the glory of *nāma-japa* speaks from experience, the listener too will develop a taste for the Name; and by remaining in that experienced person's company, repetition of the Name will also become easy for him.

Authorial footnote:

"Listen, Bharata," the sage said in anguish, "destiny is powerful. Loss and gain, life and death, honour and dishonour lie in the hands of Providence."

What is written in destiny is a result, not a new action. Begin to perform *nāma-japa* and it will start happening, because repetition of the Name is a new action and a new form of worship. Therefore, to say, "It is not written in my destiny to perform *nāma-japa*, attend satsanga, or do auspicious actions," is nothing but excuse-making. To harbour the thought, "Nāma-japa, satsanga, and the rest are not in my destiny," is itself corrupting company, for it

destroys the inclination to perform *nāma-japa* and other such practices.

Question: Can destiny, one's *prārabdha*, be changed through *nāma-japa*?

Answer: Yes. Through repetition and voiced chanting of the Divine Name, *prārabdha* changes and a new *prārabdha* is formed. Something that was not destined to be obtained is obtained; the impossible becomes possible. Such is the experience of saints and great souls. If someone calls to the One who ordained the fruits of actions and takes His Name, what is surprising about that person's *prārabdha* being changed? Those who wander begging and cannot even obtain enough to fill their stomachs would have heaps of bread and clothes if they became absorbed in *nāma-japa* with a sincere heart; they would lack nothing. Yet *nāma-japa* should not be employed to change *prārabdha* or cut away sins. Just as it is unwise to buy coal in exchange for a priceless jewel, it is unwise to employ the priceless Divine Name for trivial ends.

Question: If all sins are destroyed by *nāma-japa* alone, why do the scriptures prescribe various kinds of expiation for removing sins?

Answer: Through *nāma-japa*, expiation is accomplished for all sins, known and unknown, and every sin is destroyed. But because people lack faith and trust in the Name, the scriptures prescribe many kinds of expiation. If faith and trust in the Name arise, no other expiation is necessary. Even if a devotee who performs *nāma-japa* commits some sin or makes some mistake, he need not undertake another expiation to remove it. If he simply continues *nāma-japa* with dedication, everything will be set right.

Question: If someone performs *nāma-japa* with desire for a result, will that repetition expend itself after giving the result?

Answer: Although it is not wise to expend the Name for fulfilling petty worldly desires, the Name's glory is not destroyed even if *nāma-japa* is performed with desire for a result. The one who repeats the Name will certainly receive spiritual benefit, because the Name has a direct relationship with God. Certainly, by employing the Name to fulfil worldly desires he has treated it with disrespect, and therefore his spiritual benefit will be reduced. But if he remains diligently absorbed in the Name and wholly devoted to it, by the Name's grace his desire for results will disappear. Dhruva, for example, performed *nāma-japa* with desire, seeking a kingdom. Yet when he had the vision of God, he was not pleased even on receiving the kingdom and position; instead he grieved over having approached God with desire. In other words, his desire for a result had disappeared.

By the grace of Lord Name, even those who perform *nāma-japa* with desire for results may remember the Name at the final moment and attain the highest good!

Question: The scriptures and saints say that repeating the Name a specified number of times brings the vision of God. Does this really happen?

Answer: Yes. The *Kalisantarāṇa Upaniṣad* says that one obtains the vision of God by repeating the mantra thirty-five million times:

"Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare; Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare."

IAST: *hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare | hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare ||*

Samartha Rāmadāsa Bābā writes in the *Dāsabodha* that one obtains the vision of God by repeating the name "Rāma" 130 million times. But if one's faith, trust, and love toward the Name and God are greater, the vision of God may come even before completing these numbers.

Question: What is meant by the statement:

"In the age of Kali there is neither ritual action, nor devotion, nor discriminative wisdom; the Name of Rāma is the one support"?

Answer: In the age of Kali it is very difficult to perform auspicious rites such as sacrifice complete in every detail. Very few people remain who properly know their prescribed procedures, and materials such as pure cow's ghee have also become difficult to obtain. Therefore, when auspicious rites in the age of Kali are not performed with every required component and their procedure remains deficient, fault accrues to the performer.

Regulated devotion, *vaidhī-bhakti*, is practised according to prescribed rules and procedures. Very few know which chosen Deity should be worshipped and served by which method. Therefore, practising that form of devotion is also difficult in this age of Kali.

The path of knowledge is difficult, and it is also very difficult to find experienced people who can teach its discipline. Therefore, following the path of discrimination is extremely difficult in the age of Kali. The point is that action, regulated devotion, and knowledge - all three are very difficult in this age; but taking God's Name is not difficult. Everyone can take God's Name, because it requires no

prescribed procedure. Children, women, men, the elderly, the sick, and all others can take it at every time, in every circumstance, and in every condition.

The Name is a form of address, a call. What matters chiefly is the anguished feeling of need, not a prescribed method. Therefore, by taking God's Name, every person can call out to God in desperate supplication.

Objection: The mind does not become absorbed in *nāma-japa*, and there is no benefit in repeating the Name without mental absorption! It has also been said:

The rosary turns in the hand, and the tongue moves within the mouth; but the little mind roams in all four directions - this is not remembrance.

Resolution: It is true that if the mind is not absorbed there will be no *sumirana*, no remembrance. But the couplet does not say that *nāma-japa* will not occur. If mental remembrance does not occur because the mind is not absorbed, let that be so; repetition of the Name will certainly still occur! *Nāma-japa* can never be fruitless. Therefore, whether the mind becomes absorbed or not, one should continue repeating the Name.

It is not possible to say, "I shall perform *nāma-japa* once my mind becomes absorbed." But if we begin performing *nāma-japa*, the mind too will gradually become absorbed, because mental absorption is a result of repetition of the Name.

Question: Scripture says that one should not make the Name heard by someone who does not wish to take it and has no faith in it, because this is an offence against the Name. Why, then, did

Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu and others proclaim the Name even to those who had no faith in it?

Answer: One should not make the Name heard by someone who does not wish to hear it, does not wish even to utter it, and treats it with contempt. This is the prescribed rule, the command of scripture. Even so, saints and great souls compassionately make such a person hear the Name. Prescriptions and prohibitions do not apply to their compassion. They apply to action, while compassion transcends action. Compassion is causeless; it is shown without an ulterior cause. Suppose a God-realized saint or great soul, by his own power, gives something to another person. That gift is not the fruit of the recipient's former actions; it is the saint's compassion. In the same way, saints such as Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu, overcome by compassion, proclaimed the Divine Name even to wicked and sinful people.

Question: If animals, birds, and other creatures near death are made to hear the Divine Name, can they be delivered?

Answer: Animals, birds, and other creatures do not understand the power of the Divine Name, and if its power acts upon them of itself, they do not resist it either. They neither denounce nor disparage the Name, nor do they hate it. Therefore, if they are made to hear the Name while near death, its power works upon them; that is, they are delivered by the Name's power.

Question: At the final moment, even if someone says "Nārāyaṇa," "Vāsudeva," or another divine name while referring to his son or someone else, God still accepts it as His own Name. Why is this so?

Answer: God is exceedingly merciful. He has granted this special concession: if at the final moment a person takes God's Name or

remembers Him on any pretext whatsoever, that person's highest good will be attained. God gave the individual a human body solely so that the individual might attain the highest good, and the individual accepted that human body. Only if the being attains the highest good will God's giving him a human body and his taking that body become meaningful. But he is departing from the human body without having attained his good. God therefore gives him one last opportunity: "Now, as you go, take My Name or remember Me on any pretext, and your highest good will be attained!" Thus, when the fearsome messengers of Yama appeared at the final moment and Ajāmila called to his son Nārāyaṇa, God accepted it as His own Name and sent His four attendants to Ajāmila.

The point is that a person should continue taking God's Name at all times - night and day, while eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, walking and moving about.