

THE DIVINE NAME

Bhagavannāma



Swami Ramsukhdas

Complete English reading edition

Paragraph-by-paragraph translation

Translator's note

This edition presents the complete readable teaching of the Hindi volume *Bhagavannāma*, paragraph by paragraph, while preserving its five-part structure, questions and answers, cited stories, and devotional exhortations. Repeated running heads, page numbers, and ornamental rules are omitted.

The supplied Hindi scan is the controlling source. The publisher's official English edition, *The Divine Name*, was consulted as a secondary witness. Its wording has been checked, lightly recast for clarity and consistency, and normalized to a readable transliteration style. Sanskrit and Hindi quotations are rendered for their sense in the surrounding English rather than reproduced as damaged scan text.

Technical terms are retained where useful: *nāma-japa* is the repeated remembrance or chanting of the Divine Name; *satsaṅga* is holy company; and *bhajana* is loving worship and remembrance of God.

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Contents

1. The Glory of the Divine Name
2. Methods of *nāma-japa*
3. Ten Offences Against the Divine Name
4. Nāma-japa with Complete Self-Surrender to God
5. The Importance of Singing God's Praises

The Glory of the Divine Name

Do not waste even a single breath without uttering the Divine Name. Know thyself by the Divine Light of knowledge and wash away all your sins with which your mortal body is fraught and dispel the darkness which is there in you. This human life is a rare opportunity which you are not likely to get again, devote yourself to the service of God. Human body is transitory: your life span is as short as the flash of lightning, so be as prompt and quick in devoting yourself to the practice of *nāma-japa* as a person who threads pearls by the flash of lightning.

Brothers and sisters give undue importance to money but money is not so precious as time. The time of human life is invaluable. We can devote time to the acquisition of knowledge or wealth. In due course, our progeny may multiply to hundreds. We can also earn name, fame, honour and prestige in the world. We may also devote time to amassing huge amounts of wealth and property. Time may also help us to pave the way to heaven. Nay, we may devote our lifetime to the attainment of God-realization after which nothing remains to be achieved. Thus we can spend time in acquiring all types of mundane possessions but we cannot prolong our life even by an hour in exchange for all these worldly possessions.

For example, out of your life span of seventy-five years you have spent sixty years in accumulating money, land, buildings and a lot of wealth. Now, can we prolong our life by just sixty hours in exchange for all the accumulated wealth and property? Just ponder over this matter. We cannot even get one extra hour to live in exchange for the wealth which we have amassed in the course of one year. If we cannot get even one extra minute to live in exchange for the wealth which we have hoarded in the course of one year, is it not a sheer waste of time?

A businessman will undertake no such project in which investment does not yield any return. Business must yield some profit. On the other hand, if we can prolong our life by sixty months or even sixty days as a return on the investment of sixty years of time, we can console ourselves by saying that at

least some return has been reaped. But not to speak of sixty days we cannot get even sixty minutes extra in exchange for the efforts of sixty years. Thus we end up with a great loss. Indeed, it is nothing but a loss.

Can we get back bygone time in exchange for whatever we have accumulated so far? The answer is a clear "No. In order that our precious time may not be wasted thus, let us be especially vigilant right from today. We can be extra-vigilant, only if we make up our mind about what we desire. If we have a desire for honour, money, health and longevity then it is impossible to satiate such a desire.

Human beings do not even know what their aim is. We do not know what we really desire because we do not try to find it out. You will have to think it out for yourself. Nobody is going to help you in this regard. Once the hour of death comes, the dear and near ones will weep. What more can they do? They cannot render you any help. Had you devoted yourself to God and to constant unfailing remembrance of His name, you would not have met with such a predicament.

(Only he is rich who possesses the wealth of the holy name of God.)

Had you accumulated the wealth of God's name by constantly chanting it, this wealth would have stood you in good stead at the last moment of your life and would have accompanied you on your journey to the next world. If you have sung the praise of God, it means that you have accumulated a kind of unique wealth that will accompany you. This wealth is so unique that thieves and robbers who steal and loot worldly possessions cannot even touch it. Your worldly wealth can be looted but the wealth of the holy name of God cannot be looted. As long as you are here in this world the latter will remain with you and when you leave for the next world it will accompany you. You would not have to make efforts to carry this wealth with you.

The wealth of the holy name of God cannot be shared with you by anyone. It is entirely yours. It is imperishable. It leads to God-realization. It ends all sorrows forever and gives us eternal bliss. Our tongue is ever free to chant His holy name. Speak only when it is very essential otherwise keep on repeating His holy name. Saint Dariyājī says:- i.e., he who while performing his routine

duties, constantly keeps on repeating His holy name with perfect attachment with Him, is a householder saint.

All of us can freely and easily adopt this method. In our heart we must have devout love for God with the feeling that He is ours and we are His. The world is not ours nor are we of the world. Our duty is only to serve the world without expecting anything in return. If you go on considering the worldly things your own, the consequent deep-rooted feeling of mineness will cause rebirth and grief.

If your heart and mind are preoccupied with wealth and worldly possessions you will be reborn as a snake. The chanting of the holy name of God is the only real wealth one can acquire.

Great saints have sung the glory of 'Guru Mahārāja' by saying that Guru Mahārāja has been very generous to us. He has made us rich by giving us the wealth of the holy name of God. i.e., glory be to the generous 'Guru' who has made us rich.

Gentlemen! We can appreciate the glory of the holy name of God only when we realise its real worth. Those who have learnt the secret of the glory of name from saints and exalted souls, sing their praise out of sheer gratitude. Great men sing the glory of their 'Gurus' for revealing to them the glory of the Divine Name.

The bliss we derive by reciting His holy name is boundless. The glory of the all-powerful Divine Name is ineffable. Goswami Tulasīdāsaḥ used to worship 'Sītā-Rāmaji and he was exclusively devoted to them, but while singing the glory of the Divine Name, he says: i.e., To what extent shall I describe the glory of the Divine Name, even God Himself cannot do so. Thus the saint regards God Himself as incapable of describing the glory of His own name. The glory of the name is infinite. Words cannot describe it and the tongue cannot utter it. His holy name can be repeated at all times whether one is sitting, sleeping, eating or working. The great sage Caitanya Mahāprabhu says-"God has vested all His power (glory) in the Divine Name and its uniqueness is that it can be chanted at any time. There is no specific time prescribed for repeating His holy name. His name can be chanted at any time,

whether it is day, evening or night. It is my misfortune that I am not able to devote myself to the practice of *nāma-japa* and derive any pleasure out of it. Inspire me, O Lord, with the desire to do so."

Many people complain that they are helpless, they are not destined to chant His holy name. Gentlemen, start chanting His holy name right now and have it written in your destiny even now without further delay. The doors are always open. You can do it at any time. Repeat His name all the time, whether you are in adversity or prosperity, in pleasure or pain, and thus you can have it written in your destiny even now and accumulate the wealth of His holy name. You have to be careful not to forget His name again. Let me suggest a method for it. Listen to it attentively. In your heart you bow before God and pray unto Him, "O Lord, let me not forget you; O Lord, let me not forget You." Keep on saying this every moment. Right from early morning to bed time, go on repeating the name of God and at the same time saying, "O Lord, let me not forget You."

If while repeating His holy name the thought of something else comes to your mind and you forget Him, then pray unto Him, "O Lord, let me not forget You. May I go on repeating Your holy name, without forgetting You even for a moment." If you pray to God in this way He through His grace will help you to rectify this error. You will begin to sing His holy songs and this will continue forever. i.e., once we develop the interest in the Divine Name it means we have a share in the supreme bliss.

You will be preoccupied with the constant remembrance of His name. You will not have to make an effort any more to repeat His holy name. Through God's grace the repetition of His name will go on automatically. But first you try to repeat His name and pray unto Him.

It must be around 1960-65, I do not remember the exact date. I read a letter written by a saint to his dear disciple in which it was written: "If you fail to repeat His holy name even for a moment, the sorrow caused due to this lapse should outweigh the sorrow caused by the death of a young married son." Great Heavens! Is the loss of one single moment more grievous than the death of a young married son? It is so because little ones may grow up to be young

man and new sons may be born to householders, but the time once lost is lost forever. There is no getting it back. It is an irreparable loss. Therefore, we should be careful not to waste our time.

Only that time of your life will be counted as fruitfully utilized which is devoted to the chanting of His holy name.

Gentlemen, the time of life which you have wasted so far is wasted forever, but be careful now. Make sure every now and then that you remember the Divine Name. Write down the name of God here and there in the house so that you may be reminded of it every now and then. Place God's picture in front of you with a view to remembering the Divine Name.

I have seen the house of a householder where you can see God's Name written before you while going upstairs as well as down stairs. You can also see God's Name written here and there as you move about in the house. He did so lest he should forget His holy name. We should all follow into this householder's footstep. This is something really worthwhile. i.e., devotion may be very difficult but it brings us immense gain without involving any loss. It is all gain and nothing else. In this way we should utilize our time most profitably. i.e., do not waste a single breath without uttering the Divine Name.

Although saint Dādūjī recited the Divine Name all his life yet he repented that he could not practise *nāma-japa* as often as he ought to have done nor in keeping with the infinite glory of the Name. Even when the great saint was breathing his last he wished he had got a little more time to practise *nāma-japa*. The rich people are busy accumulating more and more wealth. Their greed knows no bounds. The more they earn, the more is their desire to earn more. But all this wealth will be left behind in the world and the time devoted to its accumulation will be a sheer waste. If you devote yourself to the practice of *nāma-japa*, you will be tempted to pray unto Him like the great saints, "O God, one tongue will not suffice. Give us thousands of tongues to utter Your holy Name." Their desire for *nāma-japa* goes on increasing.

I came across a gentleman who told me that while engaged in *nāma-japa* he visualised the Divine Name everywhere around him-in everything, every direction, every person and every particle of dust. He had developed such a

tendency that he saw the Divine Name pervading everywhere. How wonderful! How extraordinary!

When Lord Rāma ascended the throne after conquering Lanka, the kings offered Him many presents. Vibhīṣaṇa had prepared a necklace of the precious gems collected by Rāvaṇa with a view to presenting it to Lord Rāma at the time of His coronation. When Vibhīṣaṇa put the necklace round the neck of Lord Rāma the latter passed it on to Sītāji. Mother Sītā who treated Hanumān as her dear son beckoned him and put the necklace round his neck. Hanumān felt very happy. He began to look at the precious gems out of delight and curiosity. He broke one of the gems with his teeth, and not finding the Divine Name written therein threw it away. Hanumān was going to break another gem when the jewellers present there remarked that a guava would have been the best gift for a monkey and not a necklace of precious gems. They asked Hanumān why he was breaking the gems one by one like that. Hanumān replied that he was breaking them in order to find out whether Lord Rāma's Divine Name was written inside them. Since the Divine Name was not there he was throwing them away as useless pieces of stone.

Hanumān was again asked whether he did not keep anything that did not bear the name of Lord Rāma. Hanumān replied that he did not.

He was asked again how he possessed his body which did not bear His holy name. Then Hanumān tore open his skin with his nails. They saw inside his skin the Divine Name written all over. Thus those who constantly practise *nāma-japa* become saturated with the Divine Name.

There is a village in the south named 'Pandharpur' which has been the native place of great saints like, Nāmadevajī, Sopānadevajī and Jñānadevajī etc. They have written and said wonderful things. There was a shoemaker named Cokhāmela. He used to repeat the Divine Name-Viṭṭhala, Viṭṭhala, Viṭṭhala. He lived in a village near Pandharpur named Mangalvedha. A house was under construction in that village. Cokhāmela worked as a labourer there. All of a sudden the house collapsed and Cokhāmela was buried alive along with many others. As the house was a big one, it took months to dig out the dead bodies. When they were all dug out only the skeletons were left. Now it was

difficult to recognize Cokhāmela's skeleton. Perhaps it was Nāmadevajī who suggested that the bones should be brought close to the ear to listen which of them uttered the Divine Name-Viṭṭhala, Viṭṭhala, Viṭṭhala. That was the way to recognize Cokhāmela's bones. How wonderful! Even the bones uttered the Divine Name after death. By constant practice of *nāma-japa* the devotee becomes replete with the Divine Name. All of us should be immersed in *nāma-japa*.

The name of Lord Kṛṣṇa used to flow out of the body of Arjuna. Once, while Arjuna was sleeping his body was practising the *nāma-japa*. Every pore of his body was uttering the name- Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa. Hearing this, Lord Kṛṣṇa, His queens, Nāradaḥ, Śaṅkarajī, Brahmājī and other gods gathered there. Śaṅkarajī began to dance with joy. This happens to a devotee who constantly practises *nāma-japa* of his favourite God. The Divine Name pervades every part of his body. Saint Harirāma Dāsajī has said: i.e., it is surprising that every pore of a devotee repeats the Divine Name.

You read the writings and sayings of saints. You will find that their devotion is so great that their mind, intellect and senses are all devoted to the *nāma-japa* with the result that even the body begins to utter the Divine Name. How great pious and divine their bodies were that the mere remembrance of such holy saints brings about our salvation. They completely identified themselves with the Divine Name and image. Saint Nāradaḥ writes in his 'Bhakti Sūtra':

God and His devotees are identified because they have fully devoted themselves to Him

If you put a piece of wood in the fire it will become an ember and begin to glow. Even a black coal, or a pebble also starts glowing when it is put into the fire. What is this? This is the effect of fire. If a physical thing like fire can make a piece of wood or a pebble glow like this, what cannot the Divine Name perform. It is not physical, it is something Divine. This all-powerful name awakens our consciousness and urges us to devote ourselves to *nāma-japa*,

This must be the case with many of you who are constantly devoted to the practice of *nāma-japa*. When you are sound asleep, you hear the sound 'Rāma' which awakens you and warns you saying, "Why are you sleeping?"

Utter the holy Name." Thus God Himself awakens us to a sense of our real duty. There was a saint who had renounced the world. He used to practice *nāma-japa*. He did not even touch money, let alone accept it. He used to say that many a time it so happened that when he was fast asleep someone gently and affectionately put his hand under his neck and helped him to sit up to practise *nāma-japa*. Thus the all-powerful name reminds us of God. I feel that this must be the case with those of you who are devoted to the practice of *nāma-japa*. This happens to all without any discrimination of caste, creed, sex or social position. If ever you happen to feel sleepy while engaged in the practice of *nāma-japa*, something will occur in the form of noise or voice to awaken you. This is nothing but God Himself awakening you to the realisation of your real duty. The Divine Voice seems to say, "Why are you sleeping? Are you practising *nāma-japa* or sleeping?" God takes pains to keep watch over you. Just devote yourself to Him.

The great saint Tulasīdāsa says:-

The sins of your infinite births shall be rooted out today, nay, now if you surrender yourself completely to God and repeat His holy name. You develop the attitude, "Only God is mine and I am only His" and practise *nāma-japa*. But the necessary condition is that you should have 'exclusive devotion' to God.

Do not seek refuge in anything worldly-wealth, family or property. Have unceasing and exclusive devotion to God, think of none but God.

If you seek refuge in worldly things like family, wealth etc., and at the same time practise *nāma-japa*, it does bring us some spiritual gain but the best way of practising *nāma-japa* is to do so with exclusive devotion to God.

The great saint Tulasīdāsa asks us to give up bad company (Kusanga). But what is bad company? Bad company is nothing but the attitude or feeling that the worldly wealth or property is yours. The company of those who are greedy of wealth and sensual pleasures is also bad. The company of those who are averse to God is the worst. A void such company otherwise such bad company will change your inclination and turn you away from God.

People ask how the effect of bad company can be so powerful that *nāma-japa* is not strong enough to counteract its evil effect. Brothers, bad company in itself is not so powerful. What it actually does is to arouse and activate those deep-rooted instincts in you which are opposed to the practice of *nāma-japa*. Therefore, bad company produces a powerful effect. The practice of constant *nāma-japa*, roots out the instincts opposed to it. After that, if ever by chance you happen to be in bad company you will not be affected by it like the precious gem on the head of a snake which is not affected by the snake's poison. Rather you will start exerting your wholesome influence on the bad company to change it for the better.

But before you attain such a high stage of devotion, be careful to avoid bad company and practise *nāma-japa* with abandon and exclusive devotion. Practise it at all times. Once you get into the rut you will not easily come out of it.

I have come across a gentleman who was dressed in white like a householder but he used to chant, Rāma, Rāma, Rāma. He used to repeat Rāma, Rāma, slowly at first and then he would repeat it quickly like a person who has lagged behind and walks faster in order to catch up with others who are going ahead of him. I had the occasion to spend a night with him. I observed that even at night he would practise *nāma-japa*. He would sleep for a while and on awakening he would again start the practice of *nāma-japa*

He would repeat Rāma, Rāma, Rāma, at all times-even while taking a morsel he would chant it. If once you get into this habit of constant *nāma-japa*, you will never get out of it. Then it is beyond your control to give up the habit of constant *nāma-japa*. If once you taste this extraordinary nectar you will never feel like giving it up. Then you will think of nothing else but God, His attributes and everything concerning Him.

Why is it so? It is because your relation with God is everlasting whereas your relation with the world is transitory. Childhood, youth and old age do not live with you forever. You pass from one stage to another. Everything worldly is ephemeral. Nothing remains with us forever. But God alone remains with us forever. God has never parted nor will ever part from us. It is we who in our

ignorance turn away from God. God loves all His creatures, therefore He never forgets them. i.e., all are My creatures and they are equally dear to Me.

Nothing in the world is permanent. All these worldly possessions like favourable circumstances, wealth, property and your kith and kin will desert you sooner or later. It is a mere illusion to rely on them because they are all transitory. What is all this? It is an invitation from God. He is asking us why we are engrossed in these worldly possessions; which are not ours. You will see it for yourself that all these relations like mother, father, brothers, sisters, wife, sons, daughters etc., will not stand by you in the hour of adversity. They will all stand in the way of your salvation.

Do not listen to anything else, practise constant *nāma-japa*.

The Upaniṣads say that many of us spend their whole lives without ever getting an opportunity to listen to anything pertaining to God. Gentlemen, you are very lucky in this respect. How gracious God is to you that you get an opportunity to listen to saints and have the benefit of their holy company. It is not something ordinary. Today you may not realise its true worth, but it is indeed something extraordinary.

Dear devotees of God, the fact is that the persons who have only a limited number of virtuous deeds to their credit have no faith in devotion to God. It is only when the inner sense is fully purified that we develop faith in saints, the Divine Name and devotion to God. It is a matter of great piety and virtuousness for them to have such faith in God. People devoid of piety will resort to sophism, they can never stand the company of holy men. Saint Tulasidāsa says:

On account of the sins of previous births a person does not relish good company (satsaṅga), he will either doze off during the course of sermon or leave the 'satsaṅga', or start talking of something else. But if he remains in the good company for a few days, he will surely come under the holy influence and start singing the prayers of God. After that he will never leave the holy company.

I have heard the story of a scoffer who indulged in scoffing at religion and holy men. Talking lightly of the saints he would tell the people, "Look at these saints, they go on repeating Rāma, Rāma, Rāma..."

The people would ask him again how the saints repeated His holy name. Then he would again say, Rāma, Rāma, Rāma..." Wherever he went people would ask him to mimic the saints and he did so. In the process of mimicking the saints he himself developed the habit of *nāma-japa*.

Therefore, whether you like it or not you just start the practice of *nāma-japa* and see what happens. But gentlemen, without practising it you cannot realise its wonderful effect in the same way as you cannot relish the taste of sweetmeat a piece of candy; a fruit preserved in sugar) till you actually eat it.

When you read about the glory of the holy name in the scriptures or hear it from saints, you may develop some interest in it. But you will derive real pleasure out of it only when you yourself start practising it wholeheartedly and not merely with a view to showing off to the people. He who practises *nāma-japa* merely to show off to others is a devotee of the people and not of God. How can a sincere devotee give up *nāma-japa* whether he is by himself or in company? How can he give up something which he loves from the core of his heart? Just as you cannot resist the temptation of taking money when it is offered to you, in the same way a true devotee cannot miss the opportunity of *nāma-japa* even for a single moment. The great saint Narada writes in his 'Bhakti Sūtra':

A votary surrenders everything to God but if he forgets *nāma-japa* even for a moment he becomes restless like a fish out of water. Thus a true devotee cannot give up the practice of constant *nāma-japa*:

In the eleventh canto of the 'Bhāgavata' it is said in connection with the 'Nava Yogeswaras' that a true devotee cannot give up *nāma-japa* even for the fraction of a second even for the kingdom of the three worlds. Because the wealth of the three worlds is transitory, whereas God lives forever. If in any case, the votary gives up the Divine Name, it means that he has not realised its true greatness and glory. The fact is that a true devotee can never forget the Divine Name.

Once you start relishing the Divine Name, there is no giving it up. A fly flits about from place to place and does not sit on an ember but if ever it does so, it will never fly again, only its smoke will rise from the ember. In the same way our mind flits about from one thing to another only until it is engrossed in the practice of *nāma-japa*. But once it is engrossed in devotion to God it will not move away from it. If the mind wanders away it means there is no true devotion to God. People say they have sung praise of God and practised *nāma-japa* for quite some time. But it is not enough. In fact, it is not even the beginning. Once a beginning is made, it is not within your power to give it up. Just ponder over the matter, even the bones of the devotee continue to repeat the Divine Name after his death.

In the desert land of Marwar, there was a woman named Phūlibāī who belonged to the Jata community. She used to practise *nāma-japa*. She used to make cowdung cakes. One day someone took away her cowdung cakes. She went to that person's house and asked him why he had stolen her cowdung cakes. He denied having done so and asked Phūlibāī what was the distinguishing make up of her cowdung cakes. Phūlibāī told him to put the cowdung cakes to his ear and listen. And lo! to his surprise he heard the sound, Rāma, Rāma----coming from the cowdung cakes. That was Phūlibāī. Even her cowdung cakes constantly practised *nāma-japa*

Hearing the name of this old woman who was a votary of God, the Mahārāja of Jodhpur went to see Phūlibāī. What the Mahārāja saw was the old woman standing in front of every member of his rétinue feeding them with thick chapatis of bajra (a kind of coarse grain) and guar pods (a kind of vegetable). The Maharaja was highly impressed when he saw this and took Phūlibāī to his harem with a view to giving some holy company (satsaṅga) to the queens who rarely got such an opportunity. Poor Phūlibāī went to the harem dressed in her simple country clothes. No sooner did she enter the harem than the sophisticated queens laughed at the simple country-woman. But Phūlibāī reprimanded them saying in her plain and naive manner:-

"This body is as fragile as an unbaked pitcher. Why are you so proud of your mortal body and the meretricious jewellery that you are wearing? Hussies! Why do not you properly utilize your precious time by practising

nāma-japa?" With a plain country manners, Phūlībāi was not aware of what she was saying. This was her usual way of speaking. She was completely engrossed in the practice of *nāma-japa*. When we think of her name, it gives us peace of mind and our sins are washed away. Why? It is because she had fully devoted herself to God.

Saint Tulasīdāsa rightly observes that one becomes great by (Palasa-a kind of tree) carried by Lord Vāmana which became as tall as the highest point in the universe.

Lord Vāmana (God incarnation as a pigmy) went to Bali and asked him for some territory on the earth. He told Bali that he would measure the territory with his small feet and take as much as was covered in three steps only. Bali laughed at the idea and asked Him to take more but Lord Vāmana insisted on taking only as much as was covered in three steps. When Lord Vāmana started measuring the territory He grew so tall that the wand He was carrying appeared to be no bigger than a mere toothpick. Now, what was He to do with such a small stick? But it is said: that the wand grew to be very long without any bud or leaf. Why? Because it was in the service of Almighty God Himself. Gentlemen, in the same way we ordinary mortals can also become great by dedicating ourselves to Him and by chanting His holy Name. There is a verse in Gujarati:

The smallest can become the greatest by the practice of *nāma-japa*.

I have heard the story of a saint who was going somewhere by train. He was travelling in second class. A Muslim fellow passenger was sitting in front of him. When it was time for his Namaja (prayer) he stood up, spread his neckerchief on the floor and began to say his prayers. The saint stood up. He kept standing as long as the Muslim fellow passenger was busy in his Namaja. After completing his Namaja he took his seat. The saint followed suit. Now, the Muslim passenger asked the saint why he was standing. The saint in return asked the Muslim passenger why he was standing. The latter replied that he was in the service of God. The saint replied that he was in the service of God's servant for when a person is praying to God he is not an ordinary person as he is in direct touch with God

The names of God may differ from religion to religion and language to language but there is only one God. When a person is devoted to the worship of God the Almighty, he no more remains an ordinary person because he is in direct touch with the Supreme Being.

Just as a highly placed official or a minister wields great influence and authority, in the same way a devotee of God wields ever greater influence and authority as he is the representative of God who is the Supreme Being. It is said in the Gītā:-

"O Possessor of incomparable glory in all the three worlds, there is no one else equal to You; how can anyone be superior?"

He is so dear to God that God Himself calls the devotee a jewel set in His crown. A devotee whom God regards so highly deserves our deepest reverence. We should count ourselves blessed if we receive the sight of such a devotee.

Gentlemen, there are saints who have attained God-realization but who live like ordinary people. None can recognize them by their face because they look like ordinary people.

Saint Rāmadāsa has aptly observed that the ways of saints are not known to the world. They appear to be ordinary people but really they are extraordinary.

Only a great saint can know a great saint. It is beyond the competence of ordinary people to know them. Thus gentlemen, all of you can easily avail yourselves of the practice of *nāma-japa*, which helps us not only in this world but also in the next world.

The great saint Tulasīdāsa says, "Let others rely on others, I for one rely upon none but the Divine Name, which is like a Kalpataru (the wish fulfilling tree). The Divine Name' will bring me salvation in the Kali age (Kaliyuga)."

The great saint further says that the Divine Name' is like his parents and he is like a wilful child. Just as a wilful child succeeds in getting the toy of his

choice from his parents by insisting on having it, in the same way the great saint Tulasidāsa gets everything he likes from the 'Divine Name'

Saint Tulasidāsa speaks with the utmost confidence in the Divine Name and calls Lord Śaṅkara as witness to the truth of his words.

Why does saint Tulasidāsa call upon Lord Śaṅkara as a witness? For one thing, Lord Śaṅkara Himself is devoted to the practice of *nāma-japa*. Secondly, Lord Śaṅkara can never tell a lie because the sacred river 'Gaṅgā' springs from His holy head. Poet Sagarāmadāsa says,

Using the metaphor of a horse race, the saint poet Sagarāmadāsa impresses upon us the urgency of practising maximum of *nāma-japa* in our short span of lifetime. He says God has very graciously bestowed upon us this human body and our Guru (spiritual guide) has given us the light of knowledge. There lies the field before you and the horses are at your command. Hold the reins firmly in your hands and move ahead. Go on chanting the Divine Name with your tongue. Let us see who wins the race. Saint Sagarāma urges us to ride at full gallop to reach the goal in time. Sing the praise of God as much as you can because the days of your life are numbered. If you do not ride at full gallop how will you reach your goal? If you lag behind, i.e., if you cannot attain salvation, you will go to the wombs of lower animals like dogs and pigs and meet with untold sufferings so spur on to your destination.

Brothers, be careful while speaking. Always speak the truth, never tell lies. Always be careful of your speech and constantly practise *nāma-japa*. Your tongue loses its strength and *nāma-japa* becomes less efficacious if you tell lies.

Be careful of your conduct. Do not encroach upon the rights of others, do not covet the things that do not belong to you; do not think of other women. If you indulge in any of these sins, how can you attain salvation?

People suffer a lot and complain that there is no end to their cares and worries. The simple remedy is *nāma-japa*. The Divine Name is like a 'Cannon Ball' which clears the ground wherever it goes. Whenever you are in the grip of worries resort to *nāma-japa* for some time and you will be relieved.

Methods of *nāma-japa*

What is the best method of *nāma-japa*? The best method is to practise *nāma-japa* with a feeling that you belong to God.

Practise *nāma-japa* with your tongue and at the same time meditate upon His Divine form. When we think of the sacred river Gaṅgā' the picture of its flowing stream comes to our mind. When we think of a cow its picture comes to our mind and when we think of a holy Brāhmaṇa his picture also comes to our mind. Similarly while practising *Rāma-nāma-japa* the Divine form of Lord Rāma, His favourite bow, must come before our mind's eye. This is the best method of 'Nāma- Japa'. The same thing has been said in "Patañjala Yogadarsana'-

If you are a devotee of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, take refuge at His holy feet, repeat the mantra:-

(*Śrī Kṛṣṇaḥ śaraṇam mama* - Śrī Kṛṣṇa is my refuge) and at the same time meditate upon His Divine form. This is the best method of *nāma-japa*. One method is to repeat His name with a feeling that you belong to Him. The other is to concentrate on His Divine form while practising *nāma-japa*. If your mind wanders away, pray thus: "O Lord, help me. I forgot--my mind wandered elsewhere." If you pray like this God will certainly help you. You cannot do by yourself what is achieved with God's help. Therefore, both *nāma-japa* and meditation upon His Divine forms must go on simultaneously. It says in the Gita:-

(8/13)

"Pronounce the word 'OM' and meditate on my Divine form." The scriptures emphasize this point.

We should not practise *nāma-japa* with a view to showing off to the world. We should not have the ambition to be regarded as devotees of God. This is tantamount to selling *nāma-japa* in order to gain regard and prestige. Such

nāma-japa does not bring the desired result. Therefore, we should not practise *nāma-japa* for the sake of show only: instead we should practise it with our inner self with exclusive devotion. When people do not disclose even their wealth to others how can we disclose our invaluable treasure of *nāma-japa*. We should practise it secretly in a secluded place and with our inner self. We should regard it as a mistake on our part and a matter of shame if ever it is disclosed.

Why did Prahādaḥ meet with so much suffering? It was so because he revealed his Bhagavat-Bhajana (*nāma-japa*). Had he not revealed the psalms that he sang in praise of God, he would not have met with so much suffering. Therefore, let no one know that you sing psalms in praise of God. Mothers and sisters should be careful to sing their psalms secretly. Psalms sung in praise of God in seclusion are as powerful and efficacious as sins committed surreptitiously or charity practised secretly. What is secret charity? Giving things away without letting the members of their own family know is not secret charity; it is theft. Charity should be practised in such a manner that the receiver does not come to know who the donor is. The donation should not be held back from the members of the donor's family, otherwise it will amount to a theft, and theft is a sin.

One day in my morning sermon I called upon the congregation to serve the poor. On hearing this a gentleman remarked that if we start helping the poor, they will crowd round us and pester us again and again. I pointed out to him that we should not proclaim to the world that we are helping the poor. Do it in such a manner that nobody knows about it. If you proclaim it to the world, it means you are doing it with a view to winning applause and you are not inspired by a sense of service. If you are really inspired by a feeling of charity and service such charity is very noble. Similarly, practise *nāma-japa* silently within yourself. Do not try to show off to the world. If you cannot practise *nāma-japa* silently, it does not matter but your aim should not be to show off. If anybody observes you practising *nāma-japa*, it is not a serious fault on your part but the tendency to show off is a sin. Practise *nāma-japa* constantly. If anybody happens to observe you, be careful but do not stop the practice. While practising *nāma-japa* observe the following rules:-

I. Have the feeling that you belong to God,

2. Meditate upon His Divine forms, 3. Do it in seclusion,

4. Practise *nāma-japa* constantly.

5. Do not have a desire for any worldly gain in return for

nāma-japa, and

6. Whenever the idea of God comes to your mind all of a sudden have the feeling that God has very graciously remembered you, and at once start practising *nāma-japa* constantly. If you practise it by fits and starts it will not prove to be so powerful and efficacious and as when you do it constantly. Take cooking, for example: If mothers and sisters cook for fifteen minutes or half an hour and then discontinue it and again resume it after some time, do you think it will be the proper method of cooking? No, certainly not. In the same way, practise *nāma-japa* constantly day and night, morning and evening without any break. Great sage 'Nāradaḥ' says in 'Bhakti Sūtra':

"Surrender everything to God. If you forget God even for a moment, you should become restless like a fish out of water." That is true devotion. Constantly practise nāma-japa and at the same time earnestly pray, "O Lord, may I not forget You!"

Do not practise *nāma-japa* for the sake of worldly possessions. The glory of the Divine Name is invaluable, so do not try to get any worldly possessions in return for it. It will be tantamount to selling the holy name for paltry things. It weakens the power of the Divine Name. If you sell the Divine Name in this way, it means that you are treating diamonds like ordinary stones. Some pray to God for pelf and power, others pray to Him for the blessing of a son or a grandson. These are all paltry and mortal things. It is immaterial whether you get them or not it would be a serious blunder on our part to sell the Divine Name for such worthless things. What we should really pray for is devotion to God and complete surrender at His holy feet. This is not a desire for any gain, it is a desire for complete submission to Him. Thus it is a desire not for taking anything, but for giving. You must have desires in abundance for God's love

and devotion to Him. Saints have prayed to God for nothing but His love and complete devotion to Him.

*"O Lord, Your royal-residence is the heart of that devotee who has no desire for any worldly possessions and has instinctive love for you."
Lord Śaṅkara prays:-*

"O Lord, I ask You for a blessing time and again which You will vouchsafe to grant. I desire nothing but complete surrender and constant devotion at Your lotus-feet."

If they did not pray for worldly gains, they had not dearth of anything. Praying for God's love and devotion to Him is not a desire for any worldly gains.

When you go on a pilgrimage or practise charity, do not desire to have any worldly gain in return. While practising *nāma-japa* have a feeling of joy that you have the Divine Name in your mouth. You have achieved everything through His kind grace when you have His Divine Name in your mouth, otherwise ordinary insignificant sinners that we are, we are not ordinarily destined to chant His Divine Name. Lord Śaṅkara Himself constantly chants the Divine Name which helps us to get rid of passions and desires of all kinds.

The Divine Name has a special significance for us who are living in this Kali age (Kaliyuga). It is through the kind grace of God that we practise *nāma-japa* which is an invaluable treasure and a blessing from God. We should feel exultant that we have developed devotion to God and that we constantly chant His Divine Name.

As already pointed out, whenever the idea of God comes to your mind all of a sudden, have the feeling that God has very graciously remembered you, and at once start practising *nāma-japa*. Pay careful attention to this. This is something very important. On such an occasion you should thank your stars that God has Himself vouchsafed to remember you without any effort being made on your part. Leave aside every work and start the practice of *nāma-japa* because such occasions are rare in our life. When Aṅgada set out, Hanumānji accompanied him for part of the way in order to see him off.

Aṅgada told Hanumān to request Lord Rāma to remember him (Aṅgada) from time to time.

Therefore, the time when God remembers you, is very precious. It must be devoted to *nāma-japa*. Thus there are six rules of *nāma-japa*: If you practise *nāma-japa* in seclusion, with concentration, reverentially and constantly, it will bring you eternal bliss.

Many people remark that they simply practise *nāma-japa* thinking as if they were not doing anything worthwhile. In fact it is not so. The practice of *nāma-japa* is something very noble and invaluable in which Lord Śaṅkara, Sanakādika, sage Nārada, great ṛṣis, munis and saints were engrossed. Hold the Divine Name in high esteem. If you come across a devotee of God, respect him. If you come across anything pertaining to God, pay due reverence to it and exult at the thought that God has bestowed this favour upon you. It is as though God were holding you by the hand and pulling you towards Himself saying, "Come to me, seek refuge in me." If you come across anything pertaining to Him—a book or hymn or a story—it is a sure sign that God is beckoning you.

If you can practise *nāma-japa* without a rosary it is alright, but • if you happen to forget it again and again, a rosary is a very useful reminder. Therefore, keep a rosary with you. It will help you.

A rosary with a devotee is like a weapon with a warrior. It helps us in *nāma-japa*. A rosary is a good means of reminding you of God. Even if you can practise *nāma-japa* without it, it is useful to say our prayers while counting beads on a rosary.

A rosary is also necessary in order to maintain regularity in the practice of *nāma-japa* because with its help we can count the beads for a certain number of times daily. It has a drawback also. The drawback is that when we have counted the beads on a rosary for a certain number of times, we feel that we have done enough and so we put away the rosary but we should not do so. Never have the feeling that you have done enough of *nāma-japa*. In the matter of earning money we never have a feeling of satiation. Even if we have earned a reasonable amount of money we still have a desire to earn more. In

the matter of *nāma-japa* we must follow the example of a shopkeeper who keeps his shop open all day in spite of the fact that he has earned ten times as much as the day's profit in the morning itself. Similarly when we have counted the beads on a rosary for a certain number of times we must not stop doing so but have a desire for doing it more and more. The more we do it the greater should be our desire to do it more.

There was an article in the 'Kalyāṇa' about an illiterate couple from the countryside who used to practise *nāma-japa*. While practising *nāma-japa* they used to keep 250 grams of urad (a kind of pulse seed) by their side. When they had finished one 'mālā' they put aside one gram of urad. When all the urad seeds were exhausted, they would say that they had done *nāma-japa* to the tune of 250 grams or 500 grams as the case might be. That was their way of keeping count of the number of times they had counted the beads on the rosary. Whatever method you may adopt, practise *nāma-japa* as often as and as long as you can and still have a desire for more. Once you get into the rut, you will understand the method.

The Government creates a network of laws and by-laws to ensnare tax evaders, yet they manage to find out some loopholes in the law and succeed in tax evasion. Similarly, although we are entangled in worldly affairs, we can manage to escape them if we have a desire to do so. Try to get rid of this entanglement and start practising *nāma-japa*.

Meditation upon God does not cause any restlessness; on the contrary, it gives us great joy. But when we try to concentrate our mind by force, we may feel some restlessness. But don't worry about it. Go on praying to God, "O Lord, help me to concentrate." A gentleman once suggested that just as a shopkeeper always weeps before customers complaining that his sales are down, in the same way a devotee must again and again weep before God complaining that he is unable to concentrate and that he is not able to practise *nāma-japa* to his entire satisfaction. A shopkeeper may not benefit by weeping before the customers but a devotee will certainly benefit by weeping before God in this way.

True devotion and longing for God makes us realise that we belong to God and God belongs to us. Establish this sort of true relation with God. Our sole aim in this life is to attain God-realization. Once this is done, other achievements will automatically follow by the grace of God.

Ten Offences Against the Divine Name

There are ten offences regarding the practice of *nāma-japa*. The practice of *nāma-japa* must be free from these ten offences.

Some people say:-

Here the name Daśaratha is used as a devotional wordplay: the practice of *nāma-japa* bears its full fruit when it is free of the ten offences. If we chant while continuing these offences, the power of the Name is spent in destroying their effects and we do not receive the intended fruit. We must therefore be careful to avoid them. The ten offences are as follows.

The first offence is the censure of great saints and exalted souls. Great saints and exalted souls are very dear to God. So, if we censure them or insult them in any way, we shall incur the wrath of 'Nāma Mahārāja' (God). In fact we must never try to censure anybody because appearances are often deceptive and it is very difficult to tell a saintly person from an ordinary one. There have been great saints and devotees who lived like householders and looked like ordinary persons but they were fully devoted to God and practised *nāma-japa*. We must be careful never to speak ill of such persons and thus avoid incurring Divine wrath.

Meditate upon the Divine Name and be one with God.

The Divine Name is not like ordinary names. It is spiritual, not material. The Divine form is also spiritual. Our human bodies are material but the Divine form is spiritual. If you want to win the favour and grace of God, never find fault with saints and devotees.

The second offence is to point out the glory of the Divine Name to an atheist who has no faith in the glory of the Divine Name and who often speaks ill of God. Do not sing the praise of God to such a person against his will. Such a

person will look down upon the Divine Name and thereby dishonour 'Nāma Mahārāja' (God), It is like casting pearls before a swine.

It is like offering pearls to a customer who wants to buy groundnuts. Why offer the diamond of "Rāma-Nama" to a person who does not know its worth.

We have lived on food for so many years and have grown up, yet when we are suffering from bilious fever, even sugar-candy tastes bitter and the smell of food is loathsome to us. This does not mean that the food is tasteless or the sugar-candy is bitter. In fact, the fault lies with us. It is because of the excess of bile in our system.

Just as food is distasteful to a person suffering from bilious fever, the Divine Name is distasteful to a sinner. Don't sing the glory of the Divine Name to him. If sugar-candy tastes bitter, what else is sweet? If a sinner does not seek refuge in the Divine Name, where else will he go for his salvation?

If a person has no inclination towards God in the beginning, he should not worry. Instead, he should start the practice of *nāma-japa* with the feeling that he will come to like it by and by. He should think that if he does not like the Divine Name, the fault lies with him. He should pray to God thus, "O God, May I develop devotion to You and love for Your holy name."

If you are a devotee of Lord Viṣṇu, don't speak lightly of Lord Śiva. Don't try to discriminate between the two. In fact both are one.

The nature of Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Śaṅkara is the same but they appear to be different on account of different feelings and attitudes of the devotees. Therefore, if an ignoramus discriminates between the two it means that he is devoid of the knowledge of the scriptures. The root of the two words 'Hari and Hara' is the same, only the suffix is different, therefore, they appear to be different. One who carries on a controversy about the difference between Hari (Lord Viṣṇu; and Hara (Lord Śiva), does so out of ignorance and is heading for his own disaster.

Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Śiva have deep love for each other. If we go by their attributes, Lord Viṣṇu must be fair in complexion whereas Lord Śiva should

be dark. But in reality Lord Viṣṇu is dark in complexion and Lord Śiva, fair. Why is it so? Lord Viṣṇu meditates upon Lord Śaṅkara and the latter meditates upon Lord Viṣṇu, with the result that their complexions have got interchanged. Lord Viṣṇu has become dark, Lord Śaṅkara, fair. Lord Śaṅkara is as fair as camphor Śaṅkara paints the figure of Lord Rāma's bow on his forehead, while Lord Rāma paints the figure of Lord Śaṅkara's trident on his forehead. Both are favourite Gods of each other. Therefore, it is an egregious error on our part to try to discriminate between the two or insult either of them. Any such discrimination or insult will only incur the wrath of Nāma-Mahārāja. So if you want to benefit from *nāma-japa*, do not discriminate between Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Śiva.

Many people indulge in this type of discrimination to such an extent that if they are the devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Viṣṇu, they will refuse to have 'darśana' (sight) of the Divine face of Lord Śiva. It is wrong to do so. We must have equal reverence for both. Though they appear in two different forms, yet they are one and the same.

Both Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Śiva are servants, masters and friends of Lord Rāma, the Divine consort of mother Sītā.

Lack of faith in the Vedas, the scriptures and in the sermons of the great saints and exalted souls amounts to a offence. It is wrong to think that since we regularly practise *nāma-japa* there is no need for us to study the Vedas and perform Vedic rites.

The scriptures contain different views on many important points. What is said in one scripture does not agree with what is said in another.

What is the use of studying such scriptures? Reading them is getting entangled in controversies. Therefore, a devotee should not study such scriptures. Arguing in this manner amounts to a offence. When we practise *nāma-japa*, what need is there to serve our "Guru" (spiritual guide)? What need is there to obey the "Guru"? Is *nāma-japa* so weak that it needs the aid of guru-sevā (service of the Guru)? Showing disrespect to a Guru in this manner amounts to a offence.

He who is wanting in faith in the Vedas also incurs the displeasure of 'Nāma Mahārāja'. The Vedas are 'śrutis' (heard from the Divine Voice); they are the source of all knowledge. They show us the true path. Therefore, have implicit faith in the Vedas. Have due faith in the scriptures, the 'Purāṇas' and history. They are replete with the glory of God. If the glory of God contained in them is gleaned and compiled in the form of one book, it would be larger than the 'Mahābhārata'. Even then there is no end to the glory of God. How can one expect benefit from the Divine Name by speaking ill of the scriptures which profusely sing the glory of the Divine Name?

We also incur the displeasure of 'Nāma Mahārāja' by speaking ill of the 'Guru' (the spiritual guide) who has revealed to us the glory of the Divine Name. If you are not satisfied with your 'Guru' give him up but do not speak ill of him.

This is the rule. Give up the 'Guru' and go on with the practice of *nāma-japa*. But do not censure the 'Guru', who has shown you the way to salvation, given you the light of spiritual knowledge and awakened Divine love in you and has revealed to you the glory of the Divine Name.

Do not doubt the truth of the statement that the glory of the Divine Name is infinite and ineffable. When you read in the scriptures or hear from saints that the glory of the Divine Name is infinite, do not regard it as an exaggeration. Do not have any doubt like, "How can *nāma-japa* alone lead to our salvation." God Himself resides in the Divine Name, so have faith in *nāma-japa*. When a person is sound asleep and his senses are all steeped in stupor, he promptly responds when we call him by his name. This is the power of the ordinary name or an ordinary person. We can easily imagine how much more powerful the Divine Name can be. The Divine Name awakens a person who has been steeped in ignorance from time immemorial. Such is the power of the Divine Name and of the holy words of exalted souls to dispel the darkness of ignorance, and make an entirely new man of a person.

It has been observed that satsaṅga' (holy company) brings about a change in a person. It brings a great change in his feelings, attitudes, desires and inclinations. It brings about a complete change in his inner self. Thus the power of holy words is immense. It is wrong to think that the power of the

'Divine Name' has been overstated with a view to deceiving people into believing in its infinite glory. Think with a cool mind. If saints and exalted souls will deceive you, who else will talk about your salvation? Great saints have enjoined us to practise 'Nāma- Japa' stating that the Divine Name can make impossible things possible. It has been verified by actual practice. The Divine Name has worked wonders. Impossible things have come to pass. God is capable of performing everything. With exclusive submission and constant practice of *nāma-japa* a devotee can make God do everything for him.

What cannot 'Nāma-Mahārāja' achieve? There is nothing that it cannot achieve. The practice of *nāma-japa* has brought untold gains. It has cured incurable diseases. It has exorcised many ghosts and evil spirits. The mere 'darśana' (holy sight) of great saints and exalted souls has brought salvation to many evil spirits. The holy company and the kind grace of great saints who practised *nāma-japa* has brought salvation to innumerable creatures.

Gentlemen, if you consider this matter carefully, you will come to know that those countries, cities, towns and villages which have been visited by holy people have completely changed. They are entirely different from those places where the holy feet of exalted souls have never trodden. The inhabitants of such neglected places are leading the lives of ghosts and evil spirits. The visits of holy people have brought purity, divinity and a sort of unique quality to these places. The inhabitants of such places have averred that they were quite ordinary folk in the past but saints have enriched their lives.

In the Vikrama Samwat 1993, we went on a pilgrimage. We passed through Kathiawad where we came across a young man who claimed to be only five or seven years old, although he looked much older. We asked him how it could be so. He replied that he had been subscribing to the "Kalyāṇa only for the past seven years, and he regarded only these seven years of his life as fruitfully utilised. The earlier years of his life were a sheer waste of time because he had done nothing worthwhile during that period.

Thus see what a remarkable thing it is! The train carrying the pilgrims was from the Gita Press, Gorakhpur. People would go round the train. Wherever

the train stopped, the people started chanting hymns. They also chanted hymns at stations where the pilgrimage train was about to come.

This is all due to the glory of the Divine Name. Even to this day we sing songs in praise of saint Tulasīdāsa and his 'Rāmacarita Mānasa' because the sacred book sings the glory of Lord Rāma. As saint Tulasīdāsa himself says, it contains the Divine Name of Lord Rāma which is the essence of the 'Vedas' and the 'Purāṇas. Whoever or whatever is related to God becomes Divine. The river Gaṅgā is sacred because it performs the ablutions of the Divine feet of God. Hence it is wrong to think that there is any exaggeration when saints say that the glory of the Divine Name is infinite.

To indulge in prohibited acts, and non-performance of the duties enjoined in the scriptures are also offences. It is nothing but sophistry to think that since we practise *nāma-japa*, we have got the licence to indulge in prohibited acts like stealing, telling lies, fraud, encroaching upon the rights of others etc. It would be sheer folly to use *nāma-japa* as a stalking horse for committing sins.

It is an act of offence to neglect duties enjoined in the scriptures. The practice of *nāma-japa* should not lead us to think that 'sandhyā (prayer), 'Gāyatrī, śrāddha' (offerings made to the dead) and 'tarpaṇa' (appeasement of the souls of the dead) are superfluous. It is the sacred duty of the householder to perform these rites on appropriate occasions.

The Divine Name is so powerful that it can destroy sins more numerous than any sinner can possibly commit. So people say, "Let us commit sins now and wash them away later on with the help of *nāma-japa*. Such sins cannot be washed away by *nāma-japa* because it is a misuse of the Divine Name. We must not misuse *nāma-japa* as an excuse for committing sins. I have heard a story which is pertinent to the subject under discussion. There was a gentleman whom the then British Government had vested with the prerogative of pardon, i.e., no criminal could be hanged in his presence. This made his son-in-law a reckless criminal. He indulged in theft, robbery and similar crimes. When his wife entreated him not to indulge in such crimes, he would say, "Why should I worry? Your father is there to save me. Will he allow you to become a widow?" That girl informed her father of the criminal acts of

her husband. The father-in-law told his son-in-law not to indulge in such activities but the latter turned a deaf ear. Once the son-in-law was convicted of a serious crime and was sentenced to death. When the daughter came to know of it, she approached her father to save his son-in-law. The father said, "Daughter, you are bound to be a widow sooner or later. How long shall I protect him? My prerogative is not meant to be misused." Determined not to be blinded by his infatuation for his daughter, the father did not turn up to help his son-in-law. In the same way if a person commits sins in the hope that 'Nāma Mahārāja' would come to his rescue, commits an egregious blunder.

The last offence consists in treating *nāma-japa* on a par with other religious duties and rites like bathing in the Gaṅgā, making the gift of a cow to a Brāhmaṇa. 'Nāma-Mahārāja' is a class by Himself. Nothing can compare with it. The glory of the Divine Name is infinite and ineffable.

Thus if our practice of *nāma-japa* is free from these ten offences it leads to rapid spiritual progress. If per chance, the devotee happens to commit any of these offences, there is no need to do any other penance for it, the only penance is to practise more and more *nāma-japa*. There is no other penance for it.

The glory of the Divine Name is infinite and ineffable. It is beyond God Himself to describe it. Therefore, those who are fully devoted to *nāma-japa* who practise *nāma-japa* day and night are immune from these offences. There have been saints who had no knowledge of the scriptures, the 'Purāṇas', and the 'Smṛtis', but under the influence of the 'Nāma Mahārāja', they were able to write the main tenets contained in the scriptures in their simple language. Therefore, in this Kali age devote yourselves sincerely to the practice of *nāma-japa*. Do not miss the golden opportunity.

Nāma-japa with Complete Self-Surrender to God

As already pointed out in the earlier chapters, while practising *nāma-japa*, methods are not so essential as sincere devotion and love for God. A greedy person loves to talk of money. A person deeply attached to his family loves to talk of his family affairs. In the same way a devotee must develop love for everything concerning God - His name, His form, attributes, His kind grace and the Divine element. The benefit a devotee derives from such an attitude or feeling cannot be derived from the methods prescribed for *nāma-japa* although by following these methods such an attitude can be developed in course of time.

The main thing in developing this feeling of love and sweetness for God is the awareness that God is ours and the world is not ours. Even this body is not ours. It is a gift which will forsake us. God has always been ours and He is not going to forsake us. In our ignorance we ourselves have turned away from Him. God has always been ours, so let us develop the feeling that only God is ours and not the world. Worldlings are doing just the opposite. They regard the body, money and wealth as their own. But the fact is that all these worldly possessions can never be ours forever. We can be foolishly attached to them but they have not the least attachment for us. They may desert us at any time. You indulge in fraud, deceit, dishonesty, lies and all sorts of other evil practices for the sake of money. The money for which you quarrel with your own kith and kin, for which you neglect your religious duties, deserts you without even informing you. Then why do you maintain one-sided attachment for money?

God is yours even if you do not remember Him. It is He who feeds us, protects us and works for our well-being. It is an egregious blunder not to regard such God as ours. God is ours and for that reason He is dear to us.

There is no devotion as deep and great as love. Love arises from the feeling that God is ours. Whatever is ours is dear to us. We love our own belongings.

A mother is dear to a son even if she is less beautiful, wearing fewer ornaments and less beautifully dressed than other women. Similarly, a son is dear to his mother although he is an ugly looking child. Why is it so? It is so because of the feeling of 'mineness'. This feeling of 'mineness' is important and essential. It may appear something quite trivial to you but it is not so. It took me a long time to come by this gem of thought. I did not have an opportunity of reading about it anywhere or hearing it from anyone. Even if I might have come across it I could not get hold of it. How to develop love for God? I have read and heard about many methods but the best method is the feeling of 'mineness'. The feeling of 'mineness' generates love. Therefore, regard God as your own. Do not regard the world as your own because it is not yours.

People take pride in acquiring things which are perishable and do not really belong to them. They consider it a great achievement to acquire worldly possession. People acquire riches, learning, name and fame and multiply their progeny and win applause. But they should not be puffed up with pride because the acquisition of these perishable possessions is no achievement at all because these things were not ours, are not ours and will not remain ours. Real achievement lies in achieving something that will last forever, i.e., God. We must seek God-realization because God is ours and He will never desert us. God was always with us, is always with us and will always remain with us. If we turn to Him we shall enjoy eternal bliss. If we turn away from Him we shall be miserable although even then God will continue to be ours. Therefore, devote yourself to God, attach yourself to God. This is something invaluable and very remarkable. The company of saints and holy people should result in diverting us from mundane possession to God and accepting Him as ours. Our infatuation for the world and its perishable possession has lasted through many births yet we have achieved nothing. We are still empty handed. Had we devoted ourselves to God we would have enjoyed eternal bliss. This is the absolute truth.

God is always with us whether we are dead or alive, in prosperity or in adversity. He is with us in all circumstances. The only difficulty is that man does not divert his gaze towards Him with the feelings that God is his.

Therefore, he is miserable and deprived. Develop devotion to God, have a feeling of attachment to Him and chant His holy name.

Saint Tulasīdāsa says, "The moment a soul turns toward Me, the sins of countless births are destroyed." Therefore, give up evil company and practise *nāma-japa* with the feeling that you belong to God.

Just as you consider God to be yours, in the same way consider yourself to be God's.

As a virtuous and loyal wife is fully and exclusively devoted to her husband, in the same way a devotee should be fully and exclusively devoted to God.

Just as a faithful wife transfers her attachment from parents, brothers, sisters etc., to one man i.e., her husband, in the same way a devotee should transfer his attachment from worldly things to God who was always with us, is always with us and will always remain with us. Practise *nāma-japa* with the conviction that God alone is ours. Saint Tulasīdāsa exhorts us to give up evil company. Everything is evil company except God. If you are entangled in evil company, you will repent. Develop the feeling that only God is yours.

Saint Mīrābāī became great and immortal through her exclusive devotion to God: "Gīrīdhar Gopāla alone is mine; there is no other." God is deeply moved by a devotee who seeks refuge in Him with such exclusiveness. God has never forsaken anyone; the fault lies with us when, through ignorance, we turn away from Him. He is always kind to us. We need only accept Him as ours. God does not need to accept us anew, for He has never abandoned us. We mistakenly believe that we belong to the world and the world belongs to us. Correct this error and develop the firm faith that you are God's and God is yours.

A son may be spoilt and prodigal or he may be sensible and promising. Let us suppose that the prodigal son runs away from home to a city like Bombay and there indulges in grievous crimes with the result that he is put behind the bars. After serving his term in the prison when he comes back home people point their accusing finger at him. He becomes the talk of the town and his father hangs his head down in shame. But can the father deny the fact that the

prodigal son is his son? Can he disown him? Certainly not. In a like manner however degraded a sinner may be, God will never disown him. God will punish him for his evil ways and mend and purify him because he is God's own son. In the same way, brothers and sisters, however degraded and depraved we are, we are God's. It is the absolute truth. So long as you do not accept it as true you are miserable. If you accept this truth your degradation and depravity will desert you, your vices will forsake you. By the grace of God, you will be purged of all your vices. The mere recognition of our relation with God purifies us. It is said in the Gītā that whatever is performed in the Divine Name of God e.g., japa, meditation, singing of hymns, listening to discourses by holy men, the study of holy books, is sanctified and becomes noble.

(Gītā 17/27)

Whatever actions man performs with his body, speech or mind have a beginning and an end, they are not everlasting. The actions performed in the name of God live forever because God Himself is everlasting. The best and most meritorious deeds performed by us become everlasting when they are dedicated to God, otherwise they are exhausted after bearing fruit. Thus we must dedicate all our good deeds to God. Let us chant His Divine Name with the feeling we are His own. Let us meditate upon Him. Let us listen only to the divine attributes and deeds. Let us sing and listen to hymns and verses sung in the praise of God. When we sing the praise of God with the feeling that we are His own we become one with God.

Bad company is nothing but dependance on perishable things which divert us from God. Therefore, it is an egregious folly to seek refuge in perishable things in the hope that they will do us good. Gentlemen, know it for certain that these things are not going to help you. The essential attribute of a rich man is his riches. Similarly, the essential quality of perishables is their perishable nature. Therefore set no store by them. The world is perishing every moment.

Every brother and sister should ponder over this matter. Being a fragment or spark of immortal God, how long are you going to seek refuge in the mortal world? Saint Tulasīdāsa has rightly observed: "Being a spark of the Divine soul, the human soul is immortal." You are immortal and still you are seeking

refuge in the mortal world. What has become of you? Have you taken leave of your senses? You are proud of your self and power, land, riches, property and progeny.

Whence comes it that these things are yours? Have you been in possession of these things from time immemorial? Are you going to possess them forever? Certainly not. You know all this, yet you take pride in possessing them and consider them to be your own. This is nothing but sheer self deception. You are labouring under a delusion. By regarding these things as your own you will not be able to devote yourself to God. You will not be able to regard God as your own, while these things will not remain with you forever. Thus you end up by losing both material possessions and God. Your condition is like that of the person in the proverb, "He went to shear but was shorn." In the end you can do nothing but weep. You have got a golden opportunity. Human life has been bestowed upon us. The glory of human life is great because only a human being can establish relation with God and achieve God-realization. The other lower creatures have neither the sense nor the ability to establish relation with God and achieve God-realization. Avail yourself of this golden opportunity. The worldly activities in which you indulge in like eating, drinking, procreation can be done in other forms of life also. If we remain engrossed in such activities alone, in what respect are we different from and superior to creatures like pigs, dogs, camels and donkeys-

Saint Tulasīdāsa has aptly pointed out in these lines that without devotion to God men and women are no better than pigs, dogs, camels and donkeys. If we indulge in worldly activities and forget the main aim of human life, i.e., God-realization, it is an affront to human life. Please do not offer an affront to your precious human life in this way. God has very graciously bestowed this human life upon man but man in his folly has frittered it away-

Make the best use of this precious human life. It is only on rare occasion that God bestows this special favour upon human beings. We are extremely fortunate that we are born as human beings: -

It would be a grievous error to fritter away this precious treasure. He who wastes away this precious human life in trifles without attaining

God-realization will suffer even in the next world and will bitterly repent his folly and weep.

But weeping will be of no avail. The result of his weeping will be still more weeping. Be cautious right from now and devote yourself to *nāma-japa*. If you do not do it now, you will weep later on. Later on you will wrongly blame time, God and your Karmas (deeds).

Therefore, turn to God with a sincere heart. It is quite simple to say with a sincere heart that God is your own. If you do so, it will certainly move God

It is the creature who has remained sequestered from God through many births, who has been suffering in eighty-four-lac species or form of life, just says, "O Lord! Tam only Yours, O Lord, You are mine." God will be highly pleased as if he had retrieved something lost. You will be doing a great favour to God if you only help Him in making good His loss in this way. When a person turns away from God it amounts to a loss to Him.

If you turn to God, all the sins of your previous births will be washed away.

You commit sins only when you turn away from Him. Therefore, seek refuge in this lotus-feet saying, "O Lord, I am only Yours and You are mine." This feeling that you belong to God and God belongs to you is the essence of true devotion. You cannot attain God-realization by performing rites and rituals as easily as by developing love for Him. Performing good deeds like-Yajña, practising charity, going on a pilgrimage, studying the Vedas are all useful. But none of these is as potent as the feeling that God is yours and you are His.

Let us take the example of a multimillionaire to illustrate the point. The millionaire has a manager who gets Rs. 20,000/-per month. The millionaire's son is worthless. He cannot even earn Rs. 100/-per month. But when the rich man dies his riches would be inherited not by the able manager but by the worthless son for the simple reason that the latter is the millionaire's own son. Thus in this matter the inheritor's ability does not count. What really matters is the fact that the inheritor is the rich man's own son. Like the millionaire's son we are all the children of God, irrespective of our ability or inability. It is

an established fact that we belong to Him. God always regards us as His children.

The only requirement that needs to be fulfilled is that we accept this relation with God and develop the feeling that we are God's own.

This world will deceive you in the end. It will desert you and you will not live forever. Even your body will desert you. It is sheer ignorance to regard them as your own. Turning away from them, say to God, "O Lord, I am Your own and You are mine". If you develop this feeling, you will attain eternal bliss.

Practise *nāma-japa* with the feeling that you belong to God. Chant the Divine Name even when you are moving about since it is the name of God who is ours.

Whether you are Jat, Gurjar, or Ahir (different castes) whether you are literate or illiterate, sick or healthy you have the equal right to practise *nāma-japa*. We have a right to inherit our father's property. In a like manner, we have a share in the property of our Divine Father, that is, we are entitled to chant His holy name. Who can gain say this fact? Let me know just as we feel that our parents are our own, in the same way we must feel that God is our own and we are His.

A description of the glory of the Divine Name occurs in the 'Kalisantarāṇa Upaniṣad.' Saint Narada once approached Lord Brahmā and enquired how one could achieve salvation in the Kali age. Brahmā replied that one could do so by chanting the Divine Name. Saint Narada further enquired which name one should chant. Lord Brahmā suggested the following 'mantra'- "Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma-Rāma Hare-Hare, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa-Kṛṣṇa Hare- Hare." Saint Nārada further asked Him about the method of chanting to which the latter replied that there was no method of chanting as such. He simply told him that one could chant it at any time and in any condition. Now this is a 'mantra' from the 'Upaniṣad' but Rāma, Rāma is very simple and easy. It is known as 'Sabara mantra'. It is one of the numerous mantras propounded by Lord Śiva. What is there in it?

This 'Sabara mantra' does not follow any rules of scansion. Whatever came from the mouth of Lord Śiva became a 'mantra'. It is potent because Lord Śiva propounded it. The Divine Name is so efficacious. There are seven crores of such long bewildering 'mantras'. But this simple mantra consisting of just two syllables, Rā-ma is the best of all. By chanting this 'mahāmantra' Lord Viṣṇu identified Himself with Lord Śiva. Not only that Kāśī has been declared as the land dedicated to 'Nāma-Mahārāja' Lord Śiva has opened the door to salvation. Whosoever breathes his last in the holy city of Kaśi (Varanasi) attains salvation. Lord Śiva was able to do it on the strength of the Divine Name. Lord Śiva Himself chants this holy 'mantra'. In the Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa Lord Śaṅkara Himself tells Lord Rāma, "O Lord, I reside in Kāśī with Goddess Bhavānī. I confer a gift of Your Divine Name upon those who are breathing their last in Kāśī so that they may attain salvation." I have heard a gentleman say that he has seen many men whose ear is slightly lifted up as if to receive the gift of the holy mantra from Lord Śiva at the time of their death. We too can chant the same holy name. How fortunate we are! How great its glory is! We, the creatures of Kali age can chant the name of the favourite God of Lord Śiva. It is all due to Divine grace. It is something very simple. Start chanting "Rāma, Rāma, Rāma." Great saints have aptly observed: i.e., salvation lies in your mouth. Start chanting the Divine Name and attain eternal bliss. You may have it for the asking. It is open to all. You manage to take treasures which lie locked up in safes but this treasure of the Divine Name lying in the open does not attract your attention.

The ball of Divine Name is lying in an open field. The invitation is extended to all to come and play. Whosoever wins is free to carry the ball away. The sum and substance is that we all are free to chant the Divine Name with exclusive love and devotion to attain salvation.

Great saints say that in the world to come both those who have chanted the Divine Name in this life, and who have not done so, would repent and weep. Those to have chanted the Divine Name would repent because it is there that they realise the true glory of the Divine Name. They would regret that had they known the true glory of the Divine Name in this life itself, they would have done nothing except chanting the Divine Name day and night. On the

other hand, those who have not chanted the Divine Name would repent for having

wasted their precious life. It is no use crying over spilt milk. So long as your body and soul are together in this human life, you have an opportunity. Avail yourselves of it. Do not care for the people even if they make fun of you.

Walk unconcernedly like an elephant, let the dogs (worldly people) bark at you. Chant the Divine Name and let the world laugh. If the people laugh let them laugh and enjoy themselves. When they are happy they cannot help laughing. If our chanting of the Divine Name makes them laugh, it should be a matter of pleasure for us. Do not care a fig for the world. Go on chanting the Divine Name. Honour and appreciation will harm us in the long run whereas insult and censure will do good to us by destroying our sins. Thus you are doubly benefited.

Let others do whatever they like. It is none of your business. Your duty is to work for your own salvation. Why should you bother your head about whether others are doing it or not. When you are hungry, you eat food without caring to know whether others have had their food or not. When you are thirsty, you take a drink of water little bothering your head about whether others have quenched their thirst or not. Similarly, you need not bother your head about whether others are practising *nāma-japa* or not. Your only concern should be to practise *nāma-japa* and work for your own salvation.

The Importance of Singing God's Praises

(Śrīmad Bhāgavata 12/13/23)

"I bow to Śrī Hari the embodiment of the Supreme Soul, the chanting of Whose Name destroys all sins and prostration to whom removes all suffering."

In this Kali age the glory of the Divine Name is ineffable and infinite. Though the glory of the Divine Name has been great in all the ages-Satya, Tretā, Dwāpara and Kali-yet in this Kali age (Kaliyuga) the Divine Name is the mainstay for human beings. It is the best and the easiest means of achieving salvation.

There are four methods of practising *nāma-japa*, viz., doing it in the mind, doing it silently with the tongue, ordinary chanting and loud chanting. mental japa' is that Japa in which we practise *nāma-japa* in the mind without using the tongue, larynx or lips. In 'upāṁśu-japa' we use our tongue and larynx while keeping the mouth shut so that even our own ears do not hear the sound. In 'ordinary chanting' the sound is audible to us as well as to others. In "loud chanting" there is melodious singing of the Divine Name in a loud voice. Under this method we also sing of the Divine attributes, activities and the benign effect of God besides the glory of the Divine Name. In 'mental japa' the more deeply absorbed our mind is, the better it is. In the same way loud chanting is better if we sing in tune with the correctness of pitch, and with complete absorption. Loud chanting must be performed with abandon and full concentration upon God. Pay no heed to the people around you whether they are chanting or not and what effect your loud chanting is producing on them. If you are aware of such things your loud chanting will degenerate into a mere show intended to get name and fame. Such loud chanting will be less effective in leading you to the desired goal.

There are three worldly desires, i.e., the desire for name and fame, the desire for longevity and health and the ambition to be considered well-versed in the scriptures. All these three desires lead to spiritual degradation. These filthy desires should not creep in while you are engaged in loud chanting, noble deeds, holy company, sermons or religious sagas. They lessen the glory and importance of these pious activities. Although *nāma-japa*, sagas and 'satsaṅga' (holy company) are never entirely fruitless yet the intrusion of such filthy desires deprives us of the desired goal.

When loud chanting is performed with absorption, it creates a peculiar type of atmosphere of sound waves which pervades the whole world and does good to all. It has already been established by science that sound is all-pervasive but whether feeling is also pervasive is yet to be established. In fact, feeling is more pervasive than sound because it is finer or more subtle than sound. The finer a thing the more pervasive it is. Therefore, in rendering service to humanity, the means of rendering it is not so effective as the feeling with which the service is rendered. Even among feelings the feeling of Devotion to God is supreme, because it is spiritual and divine. Nothing in the world is all-pervasive like God. Therefore, if we chant the Divine Name with a feeling of devotion, it exercises a wholesome and balmy effect on humanity.

Sound has divine power. When a person is sound asleep he is steeped in unconsciousness. But if we call him by his name he awakes. Although he is affected by the sound of other words yet the sound of his own name produces the greatest effect on him. Thus, sound is so potent that it can even awaken a person steeped in ignorance or unconsciousness. In a like manner, the chanting of the Divine Name awakens a person who has been steeped in ignorance through many, many births. Not only that, as a result of loud chanting the all-pervasive God appears in His Divine form. God Himself has said:-

(Adipurāṇa 19/35)

"Nārada, I reside neither in paradise nor in the hearts of Yogis. I reside in the place where My devotees loudly chant My Divine Name."

Since the glory of the Divine Name is infinite, mental japa' of the name exercises a benign effect upon all creatures. But loud chanting exercises its benign effect on motionless things like trees and creepers, and moving creatures like human beings, beasts and birds and even on non-living things like stone, wood, clay and buildings.

If you go to a place where there is "satsaṅga" (holy company) where Japa and meditation are being practised, where religious sagas are being narrated, you get peace of mind, your sins will be destroyed and you will be purified. But loud chanting is more effective than all these things. In loud chanting both the listener and the onlooker are benefited. Loud chanting has the same effect on the lover of psalmody as the blessed sight of His Divine face.

Loud chanting is of special significance in this Kali age.

(Śrīmad Bhāgavata 12/13/52)

Everything can be attained through it. In Bengal and Maharashtra loud chanting is more popular. Caitanya Mahāprabhu popularised it in Bengal and saint Tukārāma in Maharashtra. Loud chanting in unison to the accompaniment of a musical instrument produces unique power. While performing loud chanting keep your eyes closed and have the feeling that you are all by yourself with God before you and imagine that the sound of others is only the sound of the Divine voice. Loud chanting thus performed is very efficacious. It destroys our sins and vices. But we can have direct experience of God only when loud chanting is performed with a pure heart free from worldly desires.

In Maharashtra there was a unique saint named Samarthā Guru Rāmadāsa. There is a popular story about him. He was a devotee of Lord Hanumān who used to appear before him in visible form. Once, Guru Rāmadāsa entreated Hanumānji to appear in visible form before all the people. Hanumānji agreed and asked Guru Rāmadāsa to gather the people and arrange the Hari-kathā (the Divine saga). Samarthā Guru Rāmadāsa promised to do so. Being a great saint and royal Guru, Guru Rāmadāsa commanded such a tremendous influence that wherever he went, people gathered in thousands. One day he went to a city and announced that at night Hari-kathā would be arranged in a

certain field outside the city. As soon as this news spread preparations were afoot for the Hari-kathā. Arrangement for lights was made, carpets were spread. A large number of people gathered in time. Singers and musicians came and took their seats and the singing of psalms began. In between the singing, Guru Rāmadasa would narrate the Hari-kathā for some time and then again resumed the psalmody. Thus he was fully absorbed in the singing of hymns. The people hoped that Guru Rāmadasa would resume the Hari-kathā again but instead of doing that he went on singing the psalms. Since the people were devoid of the real feeling of devotion they thought it better to go home and sing the psalms there. Thus thinking that it was rather tiring to sit there any longer, they began to leave one by one. In a short time all were gone. The singers and musicians followed suit. With eyes closed, Guru Rāmadasa went on with his singing with abandon. The people in charge of the lighting arrangement also went away. Those in charge of the carpet had a difficulty as Guru Rāmadasa was dancing and they could not fold the carpet until he had stopped. They also found a way out. In the course of his dancing when the Guru moved to one side, they folded the carpet on the other side and when he moved to the other side they folded the rest of the carpet and went away. When all had gone, Lord Hanumān appeared. Guru Rāmadasa entreated Him to give the benefit of His "darśana (blessed sight) to all. Lord Hanumān asked, "Where are the others? There is no one else here except you."

Thus Hari-kathā consists in chanting the Divine Name with a feeling of complete devotion. God Himself appears where such pure Hari-kathā is going on. In the present age loud chanting of the Divine Name has great significance.

Therefore, gather people together and perform loud chanting in unison. If that is not possible, do it by yourself, this will bring peace to the troubled world.