

THE KĪRTANA ARROW

Five Powerful Tools to Bring the Chanting of the Holy Names to Perfection

INTRODUCTION

As is true in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the final statement of any scripture is its most essential statement. The *Bhagavad-gītā* ends with *sarva-dharmān parityajya*, “Give up everything and surrender to Me.” Similarly, in the last chapter of *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* we find a discussion between Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Rāmānanda Rāya, and Svarūpa Dāmodara Gosvāmī in which Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu makes it clear why He has appeared – to give what no other incarnation has given before: pure ecstatic love of God. He has given His gift through an *upāya*, a specific means. It is with jubilation that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu talks about this means to His two associates:

“Know from Me that chanting the holy names is the most feasible means in this age of Kali (*parama upāya*). Simply by chanting the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa, one can be freed from all undesirable habits. This is the means of awakening all good fortune and initiating the flow of the waves of love for Kṛṣṇa.”

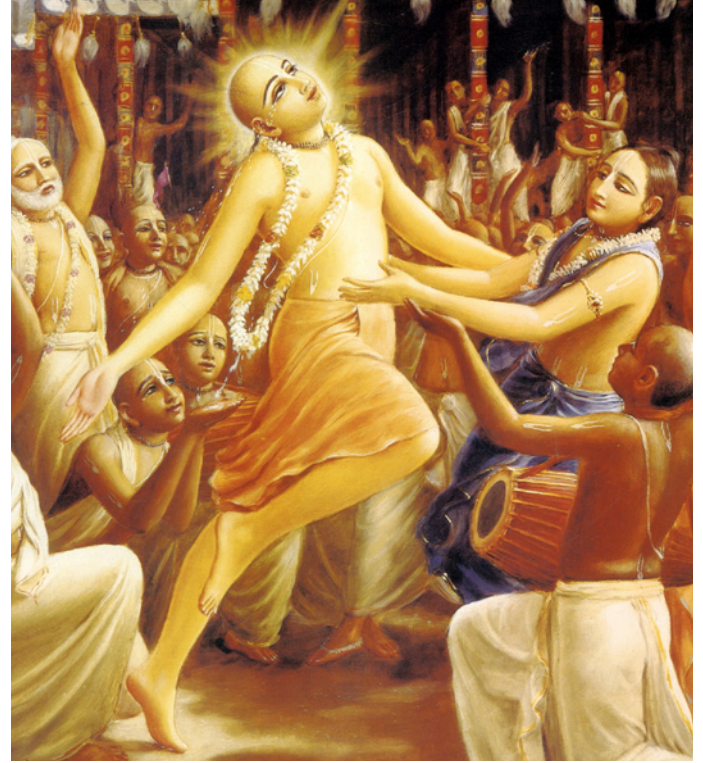
(*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Antya*, 20.8–11)

An *upāya* is that thing through which we attain an otherwise unattainable goal. For example, a bow is the *upāya*, or means, by which an arrow is sent to a distant place. It’s interesting that the *Bhāgavatam* uses the bow and arrow as an analogy for chanting:

“The Vedic mantra is the bow, the pure living entity the arrow, and the target the Supreme Being.”

(*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 7.15.42)

For us, the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is our bow, the pure soul the arrow, and Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa the goal. When the conditioned soul (the archer) shoots the arrow from the bow properly, the goal of his or her life can be attained. If the arrow is to hit the target – if the archer is to reach Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa through his chanting – the archer cannot be thoughtless when he aims. We need to know how to aim the arrow of our chanting properly.



DO YOU CHANT HARE KṚṢṆA?

If yes, have you attained ecstatic love of God?

If not, it may mean that you do not really know how to use your bow and arrow. To help chanters develop the skills for successful chanting, we have taken the bow and arrow analogy from the *Bhāgavatam* and, after years of research, crystallised the most important instructions from both *Gauḍīya* scriptures and our practical experience to offer to you. It is our deep conviction that anyone who applies the five powerful tools described here will get miraculous results in his or her spiritual life. Applying these five tools will allow you to reach the lotus feet of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Just the slightest connection with the Divine Couple (*sambandha*) can allow even a beginner to feel devotional ecstasy while chanting, what to speak of what advanced practitioners can experience. Gradually, that first love of God will reveal Kṛṣṇa in the heart.

In *The Nectar of Devotion* Śrīla Prabhupāda promises that these five devotional processes „...are so potent that a small attachment for any one of these five items can arouse devotional ecstasy even in a neophyte.”¹

Chanting is so powerful that the personified *Upaniṣads* take incense, a ghee lamp, and flowers and perform *ārati* to the holy name; they acknowledge that chanting is the king of all devotional processes (Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, verse 1 of *Kṛṣṇa-nāmāṣṭakam*).

Please note that the five tools of the Kīrtana Arrow are the result of my own study and experience. It would be presumptuous of me to say this is the only way to chant. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, for instance, gave us only three recommendations:

- * *Avoid offenses while chanting.*
- * *Chant with genuine humility – a quality that emanates from the awakened soul.*
- * *Chant with intense longing.*



Photo by Nrsimha Prasad Das

Chanting according to these three recommendations will awaken *prema*.

Still, all the recommendations in the Kīrtana Arrow are based on *śāstra* and organized systematically, so I’m confident they’ll help you tremendously. And, of course, you will also find that Lord Caitanya’s three recommendations are contained within the Kīrtana Arrow. Judging from the enthusiastic feedback we have obtained at our numerous *japa* retreats and from publications on the holy names, we are happy to serve you with this Kīrtana Arrow.

Feel free to write us, and we’ll send you a nicely designed card with a handy description of each of the elements so you can refer to them during your practice.

¹ Śrīla Prabhupāda here refers to one of the limbs of *pañcāṅga-bhakti* (five devotional processes), the chanting of the holy name. If chanting is done properly, one will first achieve love, then the object of that love, Kṛṣṇa, who will manifest in the heart. (See NOD, chapter 13)

THE KĪRTANA ARROW [TRAINING LETTER PART ONE "A"]

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| A | Alignment | Tune body, mind, and heart to achieve full presence and attention. Avoid <i>aparādha</i> . |
| R | Relationship | Enter the awareness of your eternal relationship with Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Infuse your practice with this connection. |
| R | Rendering Service | Offer your chanting in the spirit of loving service. Share the glories of the holy names with others. |
| O | Opening the Heart | Cultivate the <i>kīrtana bhāva</i> of separation and longing experienced by Gauracandra. Fill your chanting with genuine devotional feelings. |
| W | Welcome the Divine Gift | Live in <i>śaraṅāgati</i> (surrender). Enter the receiver mood and patiently await your gift from Nāma Prabhu. |

A – ALIGNMENT (ATTENTIVE CHANTING)

To enter the practice of chanting the holy name we first need to align ourselves. Alignment simply means “to bring into a line” or “to connect properly.” For a car to run well all the systems need to be aligned. Only then will the energy generated from the fuel cause the car to move.

Aligning ourselves for chanting the holy name is highly important if we want focus and energy in our practice. There are three items that need to be aligned: the body, mind, and heart.

ALIGN YOUR BODY

Bring your body to your practice. Sit properly somewhere where you are unlikely to be disturbed. Then pronounce the mantra clearly with your mouth. While chanting *japa*, chant at a good pace, count the beads properly (one mantra per bead), and sit in a posture that guarantees you maximum concentration and presence. According to Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, one round should take between six and seven minutes. If you chant faster or slower than that, don't worry, but if you notice you have completed a round in three minutes or are still chanting the same round fifteen minutes later, check to see if you are paying careful attention to your chanting and counting properly (unless, of course, ecstasy has taken over!).

ALIGN YOUR MIND

The essence of mental focus is to return the mind to the chanting whenever it drifts. There are tools that can help you focus. Perhaps you can use a card with the individual names from the *mahā-mantra* written on it, or look at the divine forms of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa (deities, pictures, or mental images) while chanting (this is called *traktaka* meditation). In your chanting, you can simply focus your inner eye on the names as if reading the *mahā-mantra* on paper. Śrīla Prabhupāda says, however, that the most important point is to simply concentrate on hearing the sound of the mantra:

“You have to chant and hear. You have to chant with your tongue and hear the sound. That's all. What is the question of the mind?”

(Morning walk, February, 3, 1975, Hawaii)

ALIGN YOUR HEART

To align the heart in chanting is the most important of all. In his *Śrī Bhāgavatārka Maricī-mālā* (13.16) Śrīla



Photo by Ananda Caitanya Das

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura recommends that one chant the holy name in the following mood:

*ajāta-pakṣā iva mātaram khagāḥ
stanyaṁ yathā vatsatarāḥ kṣudh-ārtāḥ
priyaṁ priyeva vyūṣitaṁ viṣaṅṅā
mano 'ravindākṣa didṛkṣate tvām*

“May my mind always be eager to see You, just as baby birds desire their mother, as hungry calves anxiously wait to drink their mother's milk, and as the mind of a wife remains absorbed in thoughts of her husband when he is away from home.”
(*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 6.11.26)

To chant with such eager longing requires spiritual attachment. But alas, our heart is bound with the rope of attachment to this world. To increase our attachment to the holy name we can only turn to the compassionate master of the surrendered souls, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and pray to Him to increase our affection for Him. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī recommends the following prayer for increased spiritual attachment:

*agha-damana-yaśodā-nandanau nanda-sūno
kamala-nayana-gopī-candra-vṛndāvanendrāḥ
praṇata-karuṇa-kṛṣṇāv ity aneka-svarūpe
tvayi mama ratir uccair varddhatām nāma-dheya*

“O Śrī Harināma! You manifest in many forms, like Aghadama (the subduer of the Agha demon), Yaśodānandana (the son of Yaśodā), Nandasunā (the son of Nanda Mahārāja), Kamalanayana (the lotus-eyed), Gopīcandra (the moon of the gopīs), Vṛndāvanendra (the Lord of Vṛndāvana), Praṇatakaruṇa (the compassionate master of the surrendered souls), and Kṛṣṇa. O holy name, let my attachment to You increase more and more.”
(*Śrī Kṛṣṇa-nāmaṣṭaka*, 5)

Heart-aligned, or attentive chanting really means chanting with attachment for the owner of the name.