



NĀMA RUCI - CHANTING WITH TASTE



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DISCOVERIES

*na dhanam na janam na sundarīm
kavitām vā jagad-īśa kāmaye
mama janmani janmaniśvare
bhavatād bhaktir ahaitukī tvayi*

O Lord of the universe, I do not desire material wealth, materialistic followers, a beautiful wife or fruitive activities described in flowery language. All I want, life after life, is unmotivated devotional service to you.



Pray in a personal way - in other words, become aware that you are addressing Kṛṣṇa personally. Only this personal approach will bring happiness to you, the soul. And only this will ultimately give you the taste you are hankering for. Put time into this relationship with Kṛṣṇa, and you will experience something sublime.

When you have no taste for chanting the holy names, it can be difficult to spend time with the holy name. But if you chant with taste it is easy. What would give you more taste than to be aware that you have a relationship with that most wonderful personality whose names you chant?

HOW TO LIVE IN THIS WORLD WITHOUT DISTURBANCES?

Based on the fourth verse of the *Śikṣāṣṭakam*, Bhaktivinoda Thākura prays:

Household affairs, possession, disciples, farm-animals, crops, or whatever one may call wealth, wife, sons, servants, relatives and whomever else one may call one's friends, well written poetry or whatever else one calls beautiful literature - all these are nothing but material things. O Kṛṣṇa, all I really desire is that you mercifully give me pure devotional service!

If you want to experience deeper love, your love has to become exclusive; this means it is directed to the object of love, but excludes everything else. Only then you can relish the truly deep dimensions of love.

“The nature of love is such”, says Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu, “that if I place my love somewhere else, that means that I have not a grain of devotion for Kṛṣṇa!” Such is the love Caitanya Mahāprabhu wants to experience for Kṛṣṇa.

Therefore, exclusive love and full attention means that you have developed taste. Here is a nice short prayer for developing taste:

“He Kṛṣṇa, ruci bhava tu me!” –
“O Kṛṣṇa, please, may I develop taste for you!”
(Guru Gopal’s *ṭīkā* on the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra)

Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu further prays: “As much as I have attachments for these worldly things, I pray that a similar degree of attachment may be developed by me for your holy lotus feet.”

Please try chanting in this mood: *How long can I go on without deep taste?*

PRACTICING ON THE LEVEL OF TASTE

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura explains that we have to give up three material reasons for striving for devotional service: fear, hope for a better future, and duty - and perform devotional service out of *rāga* or attachment for Kṛṣṇa.

Think about it again: how long can you go on practicing devotional service in a mechanical way?

Rāga - attachment for Kṛṣṇa - is the only thing which will keep one in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. On the road to taste you must leave some things behind (e.g. attachment to money, mundane wealth, followers, admirers, lamentations of loss, etc.) and at least theoretically detach from the material world, as *māyā* is actually simply deceiving us. In this way, we have to be willing to give up that which binds and blinds us.



HOW TO GIVE UP UNNECESSARY ATTACHMENTS?

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura gives us a way: “One who knows the true value of things will only accept as much as he needs to maintain himself. If he takes too much or too little, he falls from his position in transcendence.” (*Bhajan Rahasya*, chapter 4)

In other words, a devotee accepts things which are needed to maintain a natural lifestyle. All of us are born with a certain nature. Therefore, we need to understand what our nature is and engage it fully to serve Kṛṣṇa. This is the only way we are going to be able to give everything to Kṛṣṇa and develop taste!

Our motto should be: I want to keep myself nourished in every way so that I can serve Kṛṣṇa with actual attachment for him and develop taste for performing devotional service. Therefore, keep your body and mind active and interested, so that you develop exclusive taste for Kṛṣṇa, not for sense enjoyment. This is how you can live your life without disturbances.

THE THREE FRUITS OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

As you advance upon the road to taste you can expect the following three fruits:

- 1.) **Bhakti** (love for the activities of devotion) - attraction for activities such as hearing and chanting about Kṛṣṇa
- 2.) **Anubhāva** (love for the object of devotion) - an experience of Kṛṣṇa’s nature and sweetness that comes by chanting the holy name in *kīrtana* while looking at the deities and feeling connected to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa
- 3.) **Virakti** (detachment from unwanted things) - simultaneous detachment from worldly attachments and material relationships when you develop love for the object and activities of devotional service

FIND YOUR ENTRY POINT IN BHAKTI

You will develop these three things naturally if you learn the art of intelligently engaging the senses in devotional service. Where you engage your five senses is where you will develop taste. In this way, we need to find our entry point in *bhakti*; i.e. to engage your nature in devotional service and develop more and more attachments for devotional service. Hear about spiritual things, chant about Kṛṣṇa, see things related to Kṛṣṇa, smell things related to Kṛṣṇa, and worship the deity of Kṛṣṇa. In other words, surround yourself with the items and objects of devotional service so that you can naturally engage all your senses in Kṛṣṇa's service.

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura therefore says, "When a devotee practices devotional service under the shelter of a bona fide spiritual master he engages his ear and other senses in acts of *bhakti* by hearing and chanting about Kṛṣṇa." (Sārārtha Darśini, 10. canto, p. 300)

Remembering Kṛṣṇa - that which engages the mind; offering obeisances - that which engages the whole body; personally serving Kṛṣṇa's deity form - that which is good for developing a personal relationship with Kṛṣṇa, etc. Thus, the devotee makes the transcendental qualities of the Lord the object of his senses and the devotee who takes shelter of Kṛṣṇa transcends all the material modes.

Think about what you can actually do in your life to engage your whole being in activities which would nourish you and give you taste in spiritual life!

There are so many saintly people who have tried to cut the knots of material attachment by renunciation. But they have not been successful. What we do in *bhakti* is that we engage our external and internal senses with Kṛṣṇa - this is what it means to practice on the level of taste, since it totally spiritualizes our life.

—❖❖❖ PRACTICE ❖❖❖—

TASTE FOR DEVOTIONAL SERVICE

Bhakti comes from *bhakti* - in other words, only those who have *bhakti* can give us *bhakti*. Similarly, by associating with those who have taste, we can develop taste for devotional service too. *Sat-saṅga* or proper association is manifested in healthy *vaiṣṇava* relationships which give birth to the desire to serve Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. For this reason, we need devotees who are able to support us and stand by us so that we do not fall.



The *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* describes that devotee association is the birth place of devotional inclinations. If *Kṛṣṇa-mati*, or the desire to serve Kṛṣṇa, is not born in *vaiṣṇava* association, this means that the effect of our association is counter-productive.

If we do not direct our inherent *bhakti* towards Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, it will find different ways of expressing itself, e.g. romantic love towards another human being. Such mundane love, however, can never completely satisfy us.

Similarly, we may chant for millions of lifetimes but if we chant with offenses we will not be able to develop taste and attain love for Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, we should focus our energy on striking at the root of all offenses - inattentive chanting - and in this way we will heal all other offenses too.

THREE PRACTICES THAT MUST BE FOLLOWED BY ALL CHANTERS

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has given us two guide books for chanting, namely the *Harinama-cintamani* and *Bhajan-rahasya*. In *Harinama-cintamani* (15.103) he elaborates on three practices that must be followed by all chanters:

- 1) Seek the company of saintly devotees
- 2) Stay in a peaceful surrounding or in a secluded place while chanting
- 3) Develop the determination to chant regularly and properly

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura adds: "On the strength of these three things, once can attain his natural glory as a spirit soul!"