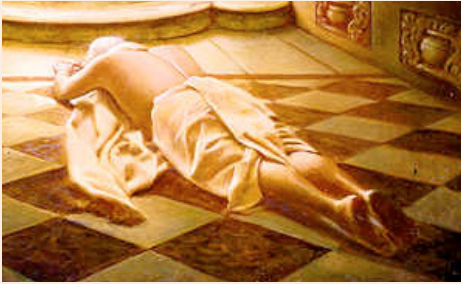


THE TOUCHSTONE OF THE HOLY NAME



Amṛta Vāṇī 1	Chanting Attentively
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3) FAITH – THE ONLY QUALIFICATION

THE TICKET INTO THE PALACE OF BHAKTI

In spiritual life we are trying to reestablish a lost relationship. There is a bridge that we have to cross if we want to find this relationship – the bridge of faith. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.3) Kṛṣṇa says, “Those who are not faithful in this devotional service cannot attain Me, O conqueror of enemies. Therefore they return to the path of birth and death in this material world.” Obviously, we would not invest in the process of devotional service, if we didn’t have faith that it is worthwhile.

However, faith has different intensities, and to reach perfection in *bhakti* our faith needs to be of the most intense and strong type. We should consider the development of our faith as most fundamental. There is only one thing you need to perform *bhakti-yoga*, and that is faith. Without faith you cannot reach *bhakti*. Śrīla Bhaktivinode Ṭhākura says, “There are preconditions for charity, sacrifice, ritual bathing and reciting mantras; for chanting the holy name, the only precondition is faith.” (*Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi*, chapter 2)

There are no material qualifications for *bhakti*: “Where were the hunter Dharma’s piety, Dhruva’s maturity, and Gajendra’s knowledge? Where was Kubjā’s beauty? Where was Sudāmā’s wealth? Where was Vidura’s noble birth? Where was Ugrasena’s chivalrous strength? Lord Mādhava is pleased only by devotional service and not by material qualifications.” (*Śrī Dākṣiṇātya in Śrī Padyāvalī*, 8.8) The only way to render pleasing devotional service is to have faith. If you have faith you are allowed to enter the palace of *bhakti*.



What does it mean to have faith? Bhaktivinode Ṭhākura says it means to be fully convinced that in this world there is nothing like the holy name. The holy name is the greatest treasure in Kṛṣṇa’s storehouse, and in this world only the name and the individual souls are spiritual. So every morning before you chant you can say to yourself, “Let me join the two spiritual entities of this world together: the name and my true self. Everything else has nothing to do with my constitutional position.”

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura writes that faith consists of two things: belief in the *bhakti*-scriptures, and a solemn exclusive desire to attentively follow the process of devotion. According to Patañjali faith means not doubting and having a favorable attitude towards one's object of devotion. So we should place this kind of faith in the scriptures and in Kṛṣṇa: "I cannot understand him with my antlike vision, but he is God, he is Kṛṣṇa."

THE BIRTHPLACE OF FAITH

You can only get faith in the name from those who have it. You cannot get it from materialistic people who are faithless, just as a beggar cannot fill his stomach if he seeks the help of other beggars.

When you are with devotees their faith enters your heart. They may speak, or sing, but what happens essentially is that their faith passes on to you. The association of devotees will give you the inner strength to follow the path of devotion. We all know how important it is to get the association of devotees – not just *sikha* devotees, but real devotees, devotees that are devotees in the heart. In their association faith is born.



SURRENDER TO THE HOLY NAME

What else can we do in order to deepen our faith? We can go deeper in the six forms of surrender: accepting everything favorable and rejecting all that is unfavorable for the execution of *bhakti*; depending on Kṛṣṇa as our maintainer and protector; feeling humble in regard to our own condition, and completely surrendering ourselves. Jīva Gosvāmī equates faith with surrender.

Not surrendering means to maintain our conception of "I and mine" and not placing our faith in Kṛṣṇa as the central point of our identification as our master, maintainer etc. An unsundered person thinks, "I am the master here. This household belongs to me. The fruits of my work are mine because I worked so hard for them. I am their enjoyer, whether they are bitter or sweet. I am my own protector and maintainer. This woman is my wife, here is my brother, he is my son. By the sweat of my brow I earn my own living. Success is the reward of my endeavors." (*Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi*, chapter 13) Bhaktivinode Ṭhākura comments, "Intoxicated with egoism, these materialistic persons overestimate their ability and intelligence."

The remedy is to "center our attachments and relationships around Kṛṣṇa, thinking: 'He is the real master and Lord, and his will is my imperative. I am ready to act only to fulfill Kṛṣṇa's desire and won't even think about my own wishes. I will adjust my household affairs for the Lord's satisfaction. By his wish I will cross the material ocean. In times of both joy and sorrow I will remain eternally Lord Kṛṣṇa's servitor. Only by his desire can I become compassionate to the suffering of others. All my moments of material enjoyment and my moods of austerity are experienced solely due to the Lord's will.'" (*Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi*, chapter 13)

In sum, live a simple life, this helps you to reduce your world of "I and mine", and bring more association of the holy name and devotees into your life. You will see how your sense of ego leaves you, how you will increase your surrender, and with that, deepen your faith.

