



JAPA WORKSHOP

With reference to
Siksastakam

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Japa Workshop based on Siksastaka

Seminar outline—Student's edition—Eight Day Seminar

Day One

Ceto darpana marjanam—sraddha, sadhana bhakti—teaches the process of congregational chanting. By hearing about the effects of chanting the holy name faith in the chanting is created.

ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam bhava-mahā-dāvāgni-nirvāpaṇam
śreyaḥ-kairava-candrikā-vitarāṇam vidyā-vadhū-jīvanam
ānandāmbudhi-varḍhanam prati-padam pūrṇāmṛtāsvādanam
sarvātma-snapanam param vijayate śrī-kṛṣṇa-saṅkīrtanam

Glory to the Śrī Kṛṣṇa saṅkīrtana, which cleanses the heart of all the dust accumulated for years and extinguishes the fire of conditional life, of repeated birth and death. This saṅkīrtana movement is the prime benediction for humanity at large because it spreads the rays of the benediction moon. It is the life of all transcendental knowledge. It increases the ocean of transcendental bliss, and it enables us to fully taste the nectar for which we are always anxious.

Points of discussion:

Problems in chanting

Analyzing the dust covering the heart

What are the anarthas?

Benefits from chanting the holy name

Tips for good chanting:

Make a resolution the day before

Start early the next morning.

Concentrate the mind on the sound vibration

Homework: Try tips for good chanting

Day Two: Namnam akari—sadhu sanga, bhajana kriya, anartha nivrtti—sadhana bhakti—how one can realize his inability to take up this chanting. Kṛṣṇa is so kind that He is appearing before us as the holy name, but we commit so many offenses that we have no attraction for Him.

nāmnām akāri bahudhā nija-sarva-śaktis
tatrārpitā niyamitaḥ smaraṇe na kālaḥ
etādṛśī tava kṛpā bhagavan mamāpi
durdaivam idṛśam ihājani nānurāgaḥ

O my Lord, Your holy name alone can render all benediction to living beings, and thus You have hundreds and millions of names like Kṛṣṇa and Govinda. In these transcendental names You have invested all Your transcendental energies. There are not even hard and fast rules for chanting these names. O my Lord, out of kindness You enable us to easily approach You by Your holy names, but I am so unfortunate that I have no attraction for them.

Points of discussion:

Overcoming Nama aparadha—offenses to the holy name

How offense is committed

Positive action to counteract offenses

Tips for good chanting:

Meditate on the Pancatattva mahamantra

Pronounce the holy name clearly and distinctly—constantly pray for Kṛṣṇa's mercy to chant attentively

Sit straight

Homework: Try tips for good chanting

Day Three--Namnam akari—sadhu sanga, bhajana kriya, anartha nivṛtti—sadhana bhakti

Overcoming Nama aparadha—offenses to the holy name

How offense is committed

Positive action to counteract offenses

Counteracting Inattention

Tips for good chanting:

Chant your rounds fluently without interruption

Select a place free of distraction

Concentrate the mind on the sound vibration

Homework: Try tips for good chanting

Day Four—Trnadapi sunicena —nistha: sadhana bhakti: the procedure of chanting.

trṇād api sunīcena

taror api sahiṣṇunā

amāninā mānadena

kīrtaniyaḥ sadā hariḥ

One should chant the holy name of the Lord in a humble state of mind, thinking oneself lower than the straw in the street; one should be more tolerant than a tree, devoid of all sense of false prestige and should be ready to offer all respect to others. In such a state of mind one can chant the holy name of the Lord constantly.

Points of discussion:

Overcoming Namabhasa—the clearing stage of chanting

Qualification for chanting: Mood of humility

Tips for good chanting

Preparation for chanting:

1. In order to calm the mind, breathe deeply before chanting

While chanting:

2. Write down and look at the mantra from time to time
3. Forget the past
4. Try to imagine the state of mind of trnad api sunicena—humility, seeing yourself as a servant of the holy name

Homework: Try at least one tip for good chanting

Day Five--na dhanam—ruci—sadhana bhakti—how to rid oneself of deception and detrimental mundane desires

na dhanam na janam na sundarim
kavitam va jagad-isa kamaye
mama janmani janmanisvare
bhavatad bhaktir ahaituki tvayi

O almighty Lord, I have no desire to accumulate wealth, nor do I desire beautiful women, nor do I want any number of followers. I only want Your causeless devotional service birth after birth.

Points of Discussion

Ways of dealing with the mind

Exercise: In pairs, one is chanting and one is the mind. How to control the mind.

Write different means of dealing with the mind.

Mentality or motivation conducive for chanting

Exercise: Before chanting, do deep breathing exercises.

Tips for good chanting:

Before chanting, surrender to the Lord in the mind.

Bring the mind back when it drifts away

Don't plan your daily schedule—write down any important thoughts

Homework: Try tip for good chanting.

Day Six--Ayi nandanuj a—asakti—sadhana bhakti—the jiva's original spiritual identity

ayi nanda-tanuja kinikaram
patitam mam visame bhavambudhau
krpayā tava pāda-pānkaja-
sthita-dhūli-sadṛśam vicintaya

O son of Mahārāja Nanda [Kṛṣṇa], I am Your eternal servitor, yet somehow or other I have fallen into the ocean of birth and death. Please pick me up from this ocean of death and place me as one of the atoms at Your lotus feet.

Points of discussion

Meaning of the holy name

Mood conducive for chanting

Mood: calling out helplessly, please accept me

Discuss experiences of calling out while chanting

Significance of Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet

Exercise: Chant while meditating on picture of Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet.

Brainstorm: Discuss moods in chanting

Tips for good chanting

Prepare the mind by praying before chanting

Meditate on the meaning of the holy name—please accept me in your service

Homework: Try tip for good chanting and bring one prayer in glorification of the holy name.

Day Seven—nayanam--bhava —how one experiences his good fortune of coming closer to the Lord

nayanam galad-aśru-dhārayā
vadanam gadgada-ruddhayā girā
pulkair nicitam vapuḥ kadā,
tava nāma-grahaṇe bhaviṣyati

O my Lord, when will my eyes be decorated with tears of love flowing constantly when I chant Your holy name? When will my voice choke up, and when will the hairs of my body stand on end at the recitation of Your name?

Points of Discussion

Prayer

How to gain a taste for chanting.

Tips for good chanting:

Meditate on the panca tattva mahamantra before chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahamantra

Chanting everywhere

Chanting at all times

Chanting in the morning

Chanting at least sixteen rounds

Homework: Try at least one tip for good chanting

Day Eight—Yugāyitam--vipralambha prema—chanting in, ecstatic prema in separation from Kṛṣṇa.

yugāyitam nimeṣeṇa
cakṣuṣā prāvṛṣāyitam
śūnyāyitam jagat sarvaṁ
govinda-viraheṇa me

O Govinda! Feeling Your separation, I am considering a moment to be like twelve years or more. Tears are flowing from my eyes like torrents of rain, and I am feeling all vacant in the world in Your absence.

Asliṣya va—sambhoga prema

āliṣya vā pāda-ratām pinaṣtu mām
adarśanān marma-hatām karotu vā
yathā tathā vā vidadhātu lampāto
mat-prāṇa-nāthas tu sa eva nāparaḥ

I know no one but Kṛṣṇa as my Lord, and He shall remain so even if He handles me roughly by His embrace or makes me brokenhearted by not being present before me. He is completely free to do anything and everything, for He is always my worshipful Lord unconditionally.

Points of discussion:

Appreciating the holy name

Appreciating the higher stages in chanting

Final tips for good chanting:

Chanting loudly enough to hear oneself

Chanting should be accompanied by regulative principles

Chanting in front of tulasi

Commitments to improve chanting

- Prayers -

Kayena vaca manasendriyair va
Buddhyatmana vanusrta svabhavat
Karomi yad tat sakalam purasmai
Narayanayeti samarpayami

Whatever I have done with my body, said with my words, thought with my mind, perceived with my senses or comprehended with my intelligence, I offer it to the Supreme Lord, Narayana.

Nikhila sruti matuli ratna mala
Ayuti nirjita pada pankajanta
Ayi ukta kulair upasymanam
Paritas tvam hari nama samsrayami

Srila Rupa Gosvami's Sri krsna namastaka: The tips of the toes of the lotus feet of the holy name are constantly worshipped by the glittering chain of jewels known as the Upanisads. The holy name is loved by all liberated souls.

nivṛtta-tarṣair upagīyamānād
bhavauṣadhāc chrotra-mano-'bhirāmāt
ka uttamaśloka-guṇānuvādāt
pumān virajyeta vinā paśughnāt
Maharaja Parikṣit SB 10.1.4:

Glorification of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is performed in the paramparā system; that is, it is conveyed from spiritual master to disciple. Such glorification is relished by those no longer interested in the false, temporary glorification of this cosmic manifestation. Descriptions of the Lord are the right medicine for the conditioned soul undergoing repeated birth and death. Therefore, who will cease hearing such glorification of the Lord except a butcher or one who is killing his own self?

Personal evaluation of my chanting japa

		Answer	Am I improving ?	Am I feeling satisfied with my performance?*
A	How many rounds of japa do I chant			
1	Minimum daily			
2	On Ekadasi			
3	On festival days			
4	During Kartik			
5	Before Mangala Arati			
6	In a row without interruption			
B	Do I fall prey to bad habits such as:			
7	Japa prajalpa: I entertain conversations while chanting japa			
8	Activity japa: I chant japa while driving, typing, etc.			
9	Thinking japa: I plan my day while chanting and think about various things			
10	I often have rounds left at night that I struggle to complete			
11	I sometimes complete my rounds the next day			
12	I sometimes fail to chant my minimum prescribed number of rounds			
13	I often fall asleep while chanting			
14	I go to bed late			
15	I eat before sleeping and feel heavy in the morning			
C	What kind of chanting do I practice?			
16	I chant: (Sitting down/Walking/Standing/Laying down/Other)			
17	I chant: (In the morning early/During the day/In the evening)			
18	I chant (All my rounds at once/Sporadictly)			
19	I chant best: (Alone/In a group/With one companion/Other)			
20	I sometimes feel bored while chanting			
21	While chanting I expect: Devotional service/Material benefits/Liberation from material suffering			

22	I manage silencing my mind while chanting and I hear the name uninterrupted, free from thoughts: (Sometimes/Daily/For how long)			
23	I chant extra rounds out of inspiration: (Never/Sometimes/Daily - How many)			
D	Do I value and respect my japa mala?			
24	Is my bead bag always clean			
25	Do I always know where my beads are			
26	Do I always carry my japa with me			
E	Am I making an effort to understand how to chant?			
27	Do I read about the holy name regularly			
28	Do I know the ten offences by heart			
29	Am I making a conscious effort to avoid the ten offences			
30	Whom do I associate with chants good japa			
31	Do I discuss chanting japa with others			
32	Do I keep a diary recording my performance			
33	Do I know what my main anarthas are			
F	Am I focused?			
34	Since how many years have I been chanting japa?			
35	Honestly and realistically, is japa chanting my (First/Second/Third/Last) priority			
36	Have I improved my japa over the years?			
G	Personal problems influencing my japa chanting			
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*Not at all / A little / Sufficiently / Fully

What improvement have I made?

In general, when do I manage chanting nicely?