

## Nine Forms of Devotion

### Keerthanam

(Singing the glories of the Lord)

*“Let your whole life be a spiritual song. Believe that God is everywhere at all times, and derive strength, comfort, and joy by singing His glory in His presence.”*

*- Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

Bhagawan Baba says, “Keerthanam is singing the glories of the Lord and Sankeerthanam means, singing continuously, aloud, without interruption and without hesitation. Whereas Keerthanam can be by one individual and can promote one’s own spiritual progress, Sankeerthanam is by a group of people. It can help the process of liberation, not only for the members of the group, but it will also be beneficial to those who listen and even to those beyond the circle of listeners; the whole world can benefit by the vibrations.



*Narada is the supreme example to the world of one who realised the Divine by continuously singing the glories of God in all circumstances and at all times. Narada, who was born out of the mind of Brahma, demonstrated to the world the supreme spiritual efficacy of singing the Lord’s glories.*

*Keerthanam or Sankeerthanam is of four kinds: Guna Sankeerthanam is praising the qualities and attributes of God through song. Bhava Sankeerthanam is expressing the inner feelings and emotions of the devotee. Leela Sankeerthanam is praising in song the sacred sports and divine play of the Lord. Nama Sankeerthanam is singing the Names of the Lord. This is the most efficacious of all forms of devotional singing. But in actual practice, the devotees derive joy from singing all types of devotional songs. Chaitanya was the exponent of Nama Sankeerthanam- ‘All Names are yours, there is nothing in the cosmos which does not bear the imprint of your Name or Form’- Chaitanya revelled in singing the Name of the Lord as signifying all that was beautiful and glorious in the universe.*

*The essential purpose of devotional singing is to earn the love of God. Combining one’s voice, tune, feeling and rhythm to the appropriate beat of the song, the devotee should immerse himself in the singing. Harmonising the feeling with devotion and love, the sacred words of the song should be an outpouring of love towards God. That alone is devotional singing. When the song is rendered without understanding the meaning of the words and without any inner feeling or genuine love for God, it is a mechanical performance. Bhava (feeling), Raaga (melody) and Thaala (rhythm) are the essentials for proper singing.*

*In community Bhajan singing, all the people should be fully absorbed in the devotional process and the ecstasy of that experience. The singing should be vibrant and soulful and not mechanical or drawling and uninspiring. What delight can be experienced when all sing in chorus, with the same feeling, in the same tune and to the same timing! When there is such unity the Divine can be experienced.*

*The Bhajans that are sung permeate the ether in the form of sound waves and fill the entire atmosphere. Thereby the whole environment gets purified. Breathing in this purified atmosphere, our hearts get purified. It should be remembered that the sounds we produce reverberate in the atmosphere. They remain permanently in the ether as waves and outlast the individual uttering the sounds. Today the atmosphere is polluted by unholy and vicious sounds. This results in the growth of evil thoughts and feelings, which lead to evil deeds. If the atmosphere has to be purified, it has to be filled with pure and sacred sounds.*

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*Global Akhanda Bhajan (non-stop twenty-four-hour global Bhajan by Sai devotees all over the world), is done not for the sake of one individual, one nation or one community. It is for the welfare of humanity as a whole. Singing with intense yearning for God and enjoying the experience of adoring Him, helps to purify the atmosphere and render it pure, calm and ennobling. It is with this high purpose in view that the programme of global sankeerthan was designed.”*



In most religions music is an important part of worship. In Christian worship in church, music is used to glorify God, and the most common way a congregation does this is through singing hymns and gospel songs. A hymn is an expression of praise, adoration and thankfulness to God. Hymns originally were written solely from the Psalms. Later composers wanted to make the hymns easier to sing, so they created their own. Gospel songs, although similar to hymns, have a different focus, they were originally created for the purpose of convincing people at camp meetings to become Christians. Whereas hymns communicate from men to God, gospel songs communicate from men to men. They are lighter in nature and easier to sing. The hymn gives adoration to God, and the gospel song exhorts others to make Him the central focus of their lives.

Many hymns are written directly from Scripture or include a paraphrase of a passage. The messages they convey attempt to bring people to a deep, personal relationship with God. Paul writes in I Corinthians 14:15, “I will sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also.” This involves understanding what is being sung. If the person does not understand what the congregation is singing, the message is of no use to him. Martin Luther said, “Besides theology, music is the only art capable of affording peace and joy of the heart...” After singing a hymn, members of the congregation feel uplifted and closer to God and are better prepared to learn from the rest of the service.

Qawwali is a form of music practised by Sufis to inspire religious devotion and instruction. Sufism is a mystical school of Islamic thought where truth and divine love are achieved through personal experience. During Qawwali concert, the music becomes hypnotic and meditative, leading to a trance-like state. In this heightened state, the participants can achieve fana- spiritual enlightenment.

Swami says, *Guru Nanak (The founder of Sikhism) was the initiator of the practice of community singing of devotional songs. He believed that through such community singing the common man can ennoble his life and experience the presence of the Divine in everyone.* The Sikhs consider music as the food of the soul. The sacred devotional music in Sikhism is called ‘Kirtan’. Kirtan is also one of the pillars of Sikhism and in that context refers to the singing of the Sacred Hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib (the Holy Sikh Scripture) to music. The Sikh Scripture contain 31 ragas and 17 thalas, which form the basis for Kirtan music



compositions.

Swami says, *Life is a song, sing it. That is what Krishna taught through His life. Arjuna heard that song on the battlefield, where tensions were at their highest and when the fate of millions was to be decided by the sword. Krishna sang the Gita for Arjuna to listen. He sang because He was Ananda (divine bliss), wherever he might be...in Gokulam, on the bank of the Yamuna or at Kurukshetra between the warring armies. You too must pass your days in song. Let your whole life be a bhajan. Let melody and harmony surge up from your hearts and let all take delight in the Love that you express through that song.*