

Nine Forms of Devotion

Smaranam

Remembering the Lord's Name

“The only hold that man has in this dreadful darkness is the Name of God. That is the raft which will take him across this stormy sea darkened by hate and fear, churned by anxiety and terror.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Smaranam or Namasmaranam is dwelling on the Lord in the mind, contemplating on His form, His beauty, His majesty, His divinity. It is the most effective method of cultivating love for God. Baba has said that the constant recital of the name of God from amongst any of the million names by which He is identified by human imagination or intelligence is the best means of correcting and cleansing the mind of man. Swami says, “Soham or Sairam or any such name has to be constantly vibrating in one's system with every breath. The restoration of faith in the Name is one of the purposes I have imposed on Myself in this incarnation.”



Prahlada is the supreme example of a devotee who demonstrated the power of constant remembrance of the Name of the Lord, whatever the ordeals one had to face. He repeated ceaselessly the Name of the Lord without fear or anguish when he was tortured by the demons at the bidding of his father, Hiranyakasipu. He was neither afraid nor distressed. Prahlada was fully conscious that the body composed of the five elements was perishable, while the Indweller was eternal. Hence he did not care what happened to the body. All his thoughts were ever concentrated on God.

Bhagawan says, *“It must be recognised that chanting the Name of the Lord is highly sacred and efficacious. It serves to remove the impurities in a person. It promotes good and sacred thoughts. When the heart is filled with truth and love, only ‘positive’ thoughts will arise. There is no meaning in reciting the name of Rama or Krishna once in a year. How often do you take your meals for the sake of the body? Does not the mind require to be fed equally? Contemplation of God is the food for the mind.”* A fashionable excuse by those who do not like this discipline is want of time. It does not need any special time or extra allotment of time. It can be done always, whether you are bathing, eating, walking or sitting.

“The Divine Name is highly potent. Even the wish-fulfilling celestial cow, Kaamadhenu, when it is tethered to the post, comes under control. Likewise, when the Supreme Lord, the Indweller in all hearts, is bound by the rope of devotion and tethered to the post of the tongue, He gets bound to the devotee. There are only two means by which the Lord can be bound or enjoyed, namely through the Name and through Love,” says Bhagawan Baba.

In *Namasmaranam* it is to be remembered that the recitation of the Name of God must not degenerate into mechanical routine. While chanting the Name, the meaning and mystery of that Name should be contemplated upon. Swami says, *“Of the various types of Bhakti, Namasmarana Bhakti is the best. In this Kaliyuga, the Name is the Path of saving oneself. If every sadhaka will consider the Name of the Lord as the very breath of his life and, having complete faith in good deeds and good thoughts, if he will develop the spirit of service and equal love for all, then there can be no better path for Mukti (liberation). Instead of this, if one sits in some solitary nook and holds his breath, how can he master his innate qualities? How is he to know that he has mastered them? Even if the attainment of Mukti is not directly realised as a consequence of taking up the Lord's Name, four fruits are clearly evident to those who have had the experience. They are (i) The company of the great (ii) Truth (iii) Contentment (iv) The control of the senses.”*

Swami says, *“There is yet another special form of glorifying the Name of the Lord. This is Naamalikhitam- writing the Name of the Lord. Contemplating on the Name of the Lord mentally,*

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uttering the Name by mouth and writing the Name by hand serve to perform Trikarana Suddhi (Purity of thought, word and deed)."

Baba has declared, *"I have no one Name to which alone I respond. I answer when addressed by any Name. All Names are Mine. Or rather, you are the ones who name Me. The Name 'Sita Ram' sufficed in the Tritayuga. The Name 'Radhey Shyam' sufficed in the Dwaparayuga. In this Kaliyuga, I tell you, all Names have full capability."*



Praising or chanting the Name of God is a special form of prayer. In many religions, the excellence of chanting the Name(s) of God lies in the mystic syllables, which invoke God's purity and sovereign power. It focuses the mind on the Ultimate Reality and calls forth its mystical elevating influence.

Almost every religion in the world recommends that we meditate upon the Word of God. St. John wrote in his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." While the Word, or teachings of God, have enormous power to transform and uplift our lives, just as important are the actual Names of God, which are sometimes praised aloud or quietly meditated upon. Vedic scriptures inform us that His Holy Names are invested with the Lord's full spiritual potencies. God and his Name are the same. The Stoic philosopher Maximus noted, "There is One supreme God who is, as it were, the God and mighty father of all. It is Him, whom we worship under many Names." Modern Jewish theologian Martin Buber also agreed that, "All God's Names are hallowed."

The Bible is replete with similar statements. In the Old Testament it is said, "The Name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe." The Psalms contain countless references to the Name of God: "All nations whom Thou has made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord: and shall glorify Thy Name." Christ, when teaching his disciples how to pray, glorified the Lord's Holy Name: "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name." And in his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul wrote, "For whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved."



Among the followers of Islam, the Names of God (Allah) are held sacred and meditated upon. According to tradition, there are ninety-nine Names of Allah, called "The Beautiful Names". They are found inscribed on monuments such as the Taj Mahal and on the walls of mosques. These Names are chanted on an Islamic rosary (Tasbeeh), which consists of three sets of thirty-three beads. Worshippers repeat the Names to help them concentrate their minds upon Allah.

The Sikhs place special emphasis on the Name of God. Indeed the Sikhs call God *Nama*- "The Name." Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, prayed, "In the ambrosial hours of the morn I meditate on the grace of the true Name," and says that he was instructed by the Lord in a vision to "Go and repeat My Name, and cause others to do likewise."

Rosaries are widely used in Buddhism; large ones by monks, smaller ones by the laity. The large ones have 108 beads, the two halves representing the fifty-four stages of becoming a *bodhisattva* (enlightened one). The large bead in the middle stands for Buddha. The Buddhist teachings reveal that by chanting the Name of Buddha, the worshipper becomes liberated from the cycle of reincarnation and joins the Buddha in the Pure Land, or spiritual world.

Swami says, *"Namasmaramam is the best means. Only, you do not really believe that it can cure you or save you, that is the tragedy. People believe in the efficacy of only costly, brightly packed, widely published drugs; the simple easily available remedy which is in everybody's backyard is ignored as useless. Namasmaramam leads to illumination. Its sacred vibrations remove the dross that defiles the mind."*