

Śaranagati

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THE LAST FISH

Today I came by a scene that immediately caught my attention. A few Vraja-vāsīs surrounded a decorative pond filled with goldfish. Their leader was standing in the water catching the fish. With a net he caught fish after fish and transferred them into a bucket. The other Vraja-vāsīs applauded as if they were watching a wrestling match and siding with the champion. Then the leader ordered the bucket to be transported to Rādhā-kuṇḍa by motorcycle so that all the fish could live in this holiest of lakes. His team of cheerleaders left with the bucket and joyous exclamations of 'Jaya Śrī Rādhe!' The scene consisted of four grown-up men on a motorcycle heading off on bumpy roads towards Rādhā-kuṇḍa with a bucket teeming with fish-life.

But one fish had been left behind in the tank... After the men returned it was caught and given a special ride to Rādhā-kuṇḍa. When the Vraja-vāsīs were gone for the second time, I saw a little black fish hiding behind an old pot in the water. Since the water was being drained out of the pond, this fish would have been left behind and would have dried up under the scorching sun. So I pointed the black fish out to the leader, not sure of what he would do. After all, this was not a goldfish – it was some small black fish.

The Vraja-vāsī leader smiled, got into the tank and began to go after the fish who desperately tried to escape. When his men got back he ordered this fish to be driven to Rādhā-kuṇḍa as well.

In the West no-one would have paid attention to one useless small black fish. But here his little life mattered, too. When I praised the men for their compassion one of them commented: "Family member!" and the others started to laugh approvingly.

Later that day I read a prayer:



"O fish-like soul, why do you remain in the net of *māyā* trapped by your desire for totally insignificant pleasures? Now remain subservient to Kṛṣṇa, and on the strength of *bhakti*, sport freely in the waters of the ocean of Kṛṣṇa-prema."

I see that here at Rādhā-kuṇḍa, all devotees are bound to be caught in the net of Rādhā's love – one after another – provided they stay and do not 'escape' the mercy.

What is that love?

It is something generally not felt in this world. It is the expression of the pure soul, freed from its compromised position in the many relationships of this world, which are based more or less on different degrees of selfishness.

If we could love someone to the point of total forgetfulness of our own desires, the existing social norms and conventions, even the rules of ordinary religions – then we would perhaps touch the ends of the shadow of Rādhā's and her *gopīs*' love for Kṛṣṇa. Otherwise it would not be possible for us to even begin to understand.

It is by this type of love that the absolute truth, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, becomes controlled, shrugs his shoulders, and helplessly declares: "You have won – I cannot reciprocate in kind!"

Śacīnandana Swami's Vṛndāvana Diary 2014, part two.

SANKALPA – FIXING THE GOAL

Whenever we chant a mantra, it is most important to be aware of its meaning. Otherwise the syllables, words, and finally the complete mantra pass through our mind almost like an announcement or advertisement flashing on a digital display in the corner of a shop window. Such ads go unnoticed and leave little impression. Only when we involve the consciousness, when we deliberately meditate on the meaning of the mantra, does it become fully effective.

Kṛṣṇa makes the same point in his teachings to Uddhava: “A mantra is purified when chanted with proper knowledge.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 12.21.15)

Patañjali, author of the *Yoga-sūtras*, also stresses this point: “The sacred word *om* connotes *īśvara*, the supreme controller. One should chant japa of *om* along with understanding its meaning.” (*Yoga-sūtras*, 1.28)

In his own inimitable way, Śrīla Prabhupāda strongly advises us to understand the meaning of what we are chanting: “Of course, those who are actually following the rules and regulations of *gāyatrī-mantra* will gradually come to the spiritual understanding. But not by official chanting. That will not help. ‘Because, I have got *gāyatrī-mantra* burple bura burra...’ [makes sound] Finish. Not like that. Don’t cheat yourself. Try to understand!” (Lecture, November 26, 1972)

The great sage Yājñavalkya gave the following instructions: “Meditate on the syllables of the mantra, the meaning of each word, and the meaning of the whole mantra. Without knowing its meaning, one will not attain the goal intended by chanting that mantra.” (*Yājñavalkya-smṛti*)

The *gāyatrī-mantras* are extremely potent. They are nondifferent from their presiding deities. When we chant them perfectly, with proper understanding, Kṛṣṇa will reveal himself through them. By the potency of the *gāyatrī-mantras*, the *sādhaka* will overcome the illusions of material existence and then, by the mercy of the Holy Name, eventually regain his *svarūpa*, his eternal constitutional position in the kingdom of God. To attain this goal and not something else, it is necessary to fix the mind on the right conception while meditating on *gāyatrī*. Therefore before chanting the *gāyatrī-mantras*, *sādhakas* traditionally pronounce a *saṅkalpa*, a declaration of one’s intention and goal. While chanting they keep this *saṅkalpa* consciously fixed in their mind. This helps them to remain firmly focused on the mantra meditation.

Our *sampradāya* specifically recommends two processes to help the *sādhakas* firmly establish his *saṅkalpa*. The first is to chant the name of the mantra’s presiding deity, either mentally or verbally, while touching the heart to indicate the deity’s seat. The second is to pray to the deity to please accept the prayer included in the mantra meditation.

Excerpt from Śācinandana Swami (2005). *The Gayatri Book*. Berlin: Śaraṇāgati Publishing.

ALONE WITH THE HOLY NAME

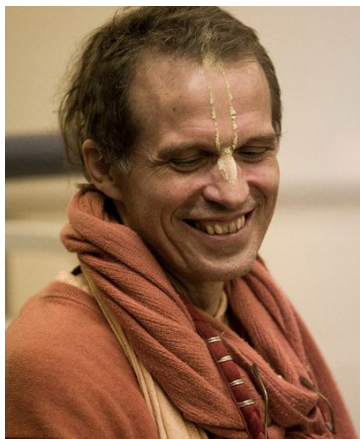
So my child, you want to know
what it is like when you are alone
all day long with the Holy Name?

It is like the rising of a second sun
on the horizon of the heart
on a stormy day.
After some time all the clouds are gone.

Poem by Śācinandana Swami. September, 2014.



Photo by Mickey Shah



MEET ŚACĪNANDANA SWAMI

upcoming seminars & events:

Nov. 9-14	Holy Name Retreat, Varṣāṇā, India
Nov. 19-25	Govardhana Retreat, Govardhana, India
Dec. 28 - Jan. 1	Saṅga-melā, Golaka Dhama, Germany
Jan. 23-25	Radhadesh Mellows, Rāḍhadeśa, Belgium

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