

THE ULTIMATE DANCE

Vol 7 Issue 9



Sankirtana, the congregational chanting of the holy names of Krishna to the accompaniment of music and dance, is actually meditation in its most profound, potent and practical form. Let's see how.

The purpose of meditation is to connect with and experience spiritual reality. Silent meditation, as done by through breathing exercises and yogic postures, tries to achieve this by negating the material, by deactivating the body and the mind. But since we're habituated to physical and mental activity, wouldn't it be easier and more natural if somehow the body and the mind could be used to raise ourselves to spiritual levels of consciousness? That is precisely what sankirtana does. Engaging the body in graceful dance for the pleasure of the Lord,

and the mind in prayerful contemplation on the sound of His holy names—especially the maha-mantra: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare—quickly and efficaciously transports our consciousness to the joyful realm of divine love.

Thus sankirtana acts like spiritual-music therapy to heal the soul in the current Iron Age, Kali-yuga. Just as iron burdens the person carrying it, negative thoughts and emotions burden most people in the present age. Sankirtana floods the heart with positive, precious, golden emotions like love, faith, and joy and flushes away negative, burdensome emotions like hatred, anxiety, and sorrow.

Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who appeared some five hundred years ago, revived and popularized sankirtana all over India. Lord Chaitanya displayed divine dance so enchantingly that His golden complexion, graceful gait, and intense devotional emotions charmed everyone—from aristocrats like the king of Orissa down to crime-hardened lowlifes.

Indeed, Shri Chaitanya's dance charmed even the Muslim emperor Akbar, who lived half a century later: "Hail Thee, O Caitanya, the victor of my heart.... O my heart's Lord, how can I express the love I have for Thee? Shah Akbar craves a drop from the sea of Thy love and piety." (Quoted by D. C. Sen in Chaitanya and His Age.)

These verses composed by a Muslim emperor in glorification of one who is commonly considered a Hindu saint illustrate the universal appeal of this dancing meditation.

As a spiritual master in Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's line, Shrila Prabhupada, through his ISKCON, popularized the divine dance of sankirtana in our times. Chanting and dancing devotees are now a familiar sight in major cities all over the world. Given that dance, an exuberant physical activity, and meditation, an introspective spiritual activity, intersect in this simple-looking dance, it can well be called the ultimate dance.

