

Chanting the Divine Name—A “Sadhana” across Religions

Chanting the Divine Names of God is a common practice in Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism. Some Hindus chant the names of the Lord (like the Mahamantra, Rama Nama, etc.) to help focus their mind in meditation, while others chant them with devotion and in order to surrender to the Lord. However, the practice of chanting the name(s) of God is not exclusive to Sanatana Dharma. Many world religions, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Sikhism, place great importance on the name(s) of God and encourage followers to chant them.

The Bible constantly stresses upon the sanctity and significance of the name of God. The Lord’s Prayer, one of the foremost prayers in the Bible begins, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.”

The shastras of Sanatana Dharma say that Bhagavan is always present wherever there is Nama Sankirtan. Similarly, Jesus has said, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18.20)

The Jesus prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me) or just the name of Jesus is considered by some Christians (especially those belonging to the Eastern Orthodox Churches) to be a

powerful tool to achieving a state of unceasing prayer (attaining the Lord). (See inset about the book, *The Way of a Pilgrim*).

It is said in the Bible – “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” (2 Timothy 2. 19)

The practice of constant chanting is also common in the Western Churches in the form of the Rosary, especially among Roman Catholics. There are also other Christians who encourage chanting the Biblical name of God – YHWH (Yahweh/Jehovah). This practice is however a little controversial in part due to ambiguity about the correct pronunciation of the name YHWH and partly as the name is considered by some to be “unutterable”. However, there are Christians and Jews too, who encourage people to chant this name a set number of times daily (www.yhwh.com).

Muslims regularly chant the “Ninety-nine most beautiful names of Allah”. Prophet Muhammad has said, “Verily, there are ninety-nine names of God, one hundred minus one. He who enumerates them would get into Paradise.”

The *Adi Granth*, the Holy Scripture of the Sikhs, says “Contemplate solely the Name of God – Fruitless are all other rituals.”



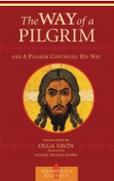
In a Zoroastrian *Yasht* (Songs of Praise) dedicated to God, 20 names are enumerated and a pledge from God is laid down that says, “Whoever uses these My names setting out of or returning home, on all occasions day and night, shall find My help ever ready to rejoice him.”

The Buddhist *Contemplation Sutra of Amitayus* says, “If there be anyone who commits evil deeds... let him utter the name “Buddha Amitayus” serenely and with voice uninterrupted; let him be continually thinking of Buddha until he has completed ten times the thought, repeating, ‘Namu Amida Butsu’. On the strength of uttering Buddha’s name he will, during every repetition, expiate the sins.”

The Name of God is held sacred in all religions, and they often do not differentiate between God and His Name. Religions are many, but God is one. All that the loving, omnipresent Lord wants is for us to call out to Him. And can there be an easier way to do this than to simply utter His name?

The Way of a Pilgrim

This book by an unknown author found its way to a remote Greek monastery in the 19th century and was first published in 1884. Originally written in Russian in the first person, it relates the experiences of a wandering Russian monk as he strives to reach a state of “unceasing prayer” by constantly chanting the Jesus prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me). It makes a very interesting read as it takes the reader into the world of the pilgrim as he travels around the Russian countryside with little more than a prayer rope and the *Philokalia*, a book of Christian writings by saints of the Eastern Orthodox traditions which speaks of the power of chanting the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The narrator talks of meeting his teacher who shows him the way of the Jesus Prayer, of his gradual spiritual development and also of his encounters with many kind (and unkind) folk.



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Profile of a Mahan

Yogi Ramsuratkumar

Yogi Ramsuratkumar, popularly known in Tamil Nadu as Visiri Samiyar (Swami with a fan), is part of the great, unbroken Jnani Parampara (lineage of enlightened saints) that India has sustained through the ages.

Born in 1918 in a village near Benares, Yogi, as a young boy, had a life changing experience. Just as a wounded bird changed the life of Sage Valmiki, the life of Yogi too was transformed totally on seeing a wounded bird that he accidentally hit. After the death of the bird, he was completely depressed and spent a long time with sadhus near the banks of Ganges. The association with the sadhus kindled a strong desire in him to realize the supreme truth. He went to South India and met the great saints Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Aurobindo. Then he met Swami Ramdas of Anandaashram in Kaserode, Kerala who eventually became his Guru. Swami Ramdas initiated Yogi Ramsuratkumar into the Rama mantra in the year 1952. Within seven days of constantly chanting the Rama Mantra "Om Sri Rama Jaya Rama Jaya Rama", Yogi attained self-realization. In Yogi's words, he narrated the experience as "After Ramdas killed this beggar in 1952, there was nothing left but My Father Alone".

For 7 years, he roamed the length and breadth of India, and finally settled in the holy town of Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu. Here he lived the life of a mendicant and slept beneath a tree. Initially the local people were apprehensive of the man who looked like a beggar. They harassed him immensely. But slowly with the help of a few supportive locals and westerners, the harassment ceased. The lives of many



devotees were transformed and they experienced divinity just by visiting Yogi and obtaining his blessings. In the 1970s and 80s he lived in a small house in a street adjacent to the Arunachaleswara temple and people flocked in thousands to have his darshan.

A devotee was once instructed by Yogi to leave for Chennai immediately. The devotee said, "I do not have enough money." Yogi immediately gave him Rs. 327.40. On reaching Madras, his wife who was in perfect health when he left Tiruvannamalai fell ill and had to be hospitalized. The surprised doctor said that they had come at the right time. Even a moment's delay would have cost her life. At the time of discharge after three days the medical bill was Rs. 327.40! He cured many devotees across the world from many dreaded diseases such as cancer, TB, etc. He performed countless miracles in the lives of his devotees, but never took any credit. He brushed aside any claim of miracles and once said "This beggar cannot perform any miracles. Only Ram Naam is performing miracles". He wanted people to realize that every second is God's gift and the whole cosmos is a miracle.

In 1993 an ashram was constructed in Tiruvannamalai and Yogi stated that his presence could be felt there at all times. In 2001, he left the mortal coil and attained Samadhi. All through his life there was only one message that he gave his devotees. "Never forget the divine name". Keep chanting the Divine name and that will cure all your material sorrows and give you eternal bliss, were his oft-repeated words. His ashram conducts Akhanda Nama (continuous chanting of the Divine name) to this day and many devotees still experience Yogi's presence and blessings in the ashram.

Under the Punnai Tree

By M. Young



The following is an excerpt from Yogi Ramsuratkumar's biography, *Under the Punnai Tree*, by M. Young.

"Look Perumal. This is where this beggar stayed," Yogi Ramsuratkumar pointed toward a locked room on one side of the cottage. I looked through the window into that room. What I saw made me shiver. I was deeply moved and with tearful eyes and a heavy heart, I turned and looked at the divine person standing nearby. 'My Lord! Was it here that my Lord lived?' I thought. What met the eyes in the room was dreadful. There were red scorpions also moving about with chameleons and some other reptiles. There were several clusters of white ants providing sustenance to these creatures. On the bundle of papers, and old clothes, a small snake was moving about. Though I narrate this quite easily, what I saw was something that was so shocking that one cannot forget the scene having seen it once. Even now, I remember it vividly.

I held the bars of the window and turned around. Two black scorpions, with their stings upraised, had begun to crawl towards my hand. Seeing this, Yogi Ramsuratkumar, whom I had turned around to watch, urged me to move, saying, "Hmm! Hmm!" and I snatched away my hand just in time. My mind was disturbed by number of thoughts. "That such a great man had to live in such a dwelling or in the midst of poisonous creatures! A rare and great man not being understood by foolish people who beat and torture him. Yet how patiently he bore with all." My eyes were filled with tears when I looked at that fine figure and face that saturated with love."



Srimad Bhagavata Saptaha Maha Yagna



Poonimaji at Shri Radha Krishna Temple

The Srimad Bhagavata Saptaha Maha Yagna organized by the Global Organization for Divinity (GOD) in Houston, TX from Nov 22-28 was a dream come true for all devotees in Houston as well as others who participated from different parts of the USA. Devotees from across the US, including Boston, California Bay Area, Chicago, Florida, Ohio, Seattle as well as other parts of Texas attended the grand Saptaha Maha Yagna.

Every day opened with Prabodhan at Sri Narayan Dave's residence in the presence of the Holy Paduka of Sri Muralidhara Swamiji. This was followed by Srimad Bhagavatam Moola Parayan and explanation led by Sri Narayan Sathiamoorthy from Boston, and Nama Sankirtan/Bhajans at the same venue. Divyanama Sankirtan and Radha Kalyanam were also performed on certain days. Srimad Bhagavata Katha by Poojya Poonima Kumarasamiji was held at Shri Radha Krishna Temple every evening.



(Above) Day events at Daveji's residence



(Above) GOD team bhajans and parayan by students of Bhagavatam 101 class.

(Below) Sujathaji and Zenithaji singing along with Poonimaji, and devotees dancing to Sri Swamiji's Kirtan.

The evening program at the temple started daily with one hour of kirtans by various local artists and bhajan groups, with the GOD team performing kirtans on Nov 24. The kirtans were followed daily by a short chanting of the dhyana slokas and a stuti from Srimad Bhagavatam led by the students of Poonimaji's Bhagavatam 101 telecon class. A souvenir was distributed to all attendees, which included a message from Sri Swamiji, the dhyana slokas, a prayoga sloka and kirtan for each day of the Saptaha and information about Nama Dwaar and Sri Swamiji.

The Srimad Bhagavatam Katha by Poonimaji in Hindi left everyone spell bound and craving for more. Her wonderful and powerful exposition of the Divine Mahapurana that is Lord Krishna Himself started with the elucidation of Srimad Bhagavata Mahatmyam. Over the next seven days she moved the audience with her narration of several Bhagavata charitras (stories) including Narada, Dhruva, Jada Bharata, Ajamila, Prahlada, Gajendra Moksha and Ambarisha, and finally concluded the Katha with the sweet lingering taste of Krishna Leela. The discourses were sprinkled liberally with bhajans, abhangs, dohas and Sri Swamiji's kirtans, with GOD members including Smt. Sujatha Sankar, Smt. Zenitha Mani, Smt. Geetha Aravind and Smt. Nisha Giri lending vocal support for the bhajans. Every day the Katha ended with a prayoga sloka and Sri Swamiji's kirtan. Flowers were then offered to the Srimad Bhagavatam Grantha by devotees as GOD members sang the Mahamantra. Sumptuous dinner prasada was served daily to all attendees. Over 100-150 people attended the event daily, with Thanksgiving Day (Nov 27) seeing the greatest participation at over 270.



(Above) Audience at Shri Radha Krishna Temple



The last day of the Katha featured parayan of 63 Sangraha slokas from the Bhagavatam (which bestow the fruit of reciting the entire Bhagavatam), presentations on the concept of 'Nama Dwaar' and short talks by Sri Subhash Mehta, Sri Jeevan R.

Shanta and Smt. Zenitha Mani about their personal life-changing experiences thanks to the Katha. Devotees also sang and danced to the tune of Sri Swamiji's Tamil kirtan "Kaliyaiyum balikollum...", a repeat performance after the song was a hit a couple of days earlier during the one-hour bhajan session by the GOD team. As the final session of the Katha ended, the heavens burst open with a heavy downpour as an indication of the Lord's blessings after accepting the Srimad Bhagavata Yagna and prayers of all devotees.

As said by Sri Swamiji in His message for the Katha, all those who participated in the Bhagavata Maha Yagna in any manner are Lord Krishna's chosen ones and are the recipients of the grace of Lord Krishna and our Sadguru Maharaj!

She who Ruled over the Lord Himse



Most of you kids in the US probably associate the month of December with Christmas decorations, carols and Santa Claus. In India too this time of the year, which is the month of Margasirisa according to the Hindu calendar, is associated with festivities; albeit a different kind. One year for us humans is said to be the equivalent of one day for the gods, and Margasirisa is said to be the auspicious "Brahma Muhurta" (pre-dawn) of the gods. Hence rising early and chanting the Divine Names of the Lord everyday during this month is considered to be very fruitful and beneficial.

In Tamil Nadu, the month of Margazhi (as Margasirisa is known there) is associated with the Vaishnavite saint, Andal, and her composition, the *Tiruppavai*. Andal was the adopted daughter of a devout Brahmin, Vishnucitta, in Srivilliputhur who was responsible for providing garlands daily for the worship of the Lord. Andal was found by Vishnucitta beneath a tulsi plant and he first named her Kodhai (flower garland).

Kodhai was in love with Krishna right from her childhood and always spoke of marrying Him. As a little girl, she imagined herself and her friends to be the gopis of Brindavan with Krishna amidst them, and composed the beautiful *Tiruppavai*,

which urges everyone to immerse themselves in His eternal love. She also composed the *Nachiyar Tirumozhi* which provides sound advice on how life should be dedicated single-mindedly to attaining the Lord.

Once Kodhai saw the garland her father had prepared for the Lord and tried it on, believing herself to be Krishna's bride. And indeed when she looked at her reflection, she only saw an adoring Krishna looking back at her. This ritual continued for a few days until one day Kodhai's father caught her wearing the Lord's garland and was shocked at the sacrilege. He admonished his daughter and made another garland to be offered to the Lord. That night as Vishnucitta slept, the Lord came to him in his dreams and told him that He preferred the garlands worn by Kodhai and that He would like to marry her at Srirangam (the famous abode of Lord Ranganatha in Tamil Nadu).

Vishnucitta then led his daughter to Srirangam at the appointed hour where she ran to embrace her Lord in the sanctum sanctorum. She merged with the Supreme and vanished without a trace. She came to be called Andal, the one who ruled

Kids' Quiz — Margasirisa Trivia



1. What is the another name for the month of Margasirsa?

- A. Dhanurmasa
- B. Bhadrapada
- C. Phalguna
- D. Sravana

2. What is/are the important day(s) in the month of Margasirsa?

- A. Vaikunta Ekadasi
- B. Arudra Darshan
- C. Hanuman Jayanti
- D. All of the above

3. Vaikunta Ekadasi is an important festival for:

- A. Lord Shiva
- B. Lord Ganapati
- C. Lord Vishnu
- D. Lord Rama

4. What compositions are sung in Tamil Nadu during the month of Margasirsa?

- A. Tiruppavai & Tiruvembavai
- B. Only Tiruppavai
- C. Tiruvasagam
- D. All of the above

5. What is Arudra Darshan?

- A. Celebration of the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva
- B. Festival of lights
- C. Festival of music
- D. Celebration of Narasimha Avatar

Answers:

1-A, 2-D, 3-C, 4-A, 5-A

Hey Kids!
Would you like to see your original religion/spirituality-related story, experience, poem or painting published here?
Send in your submissions to newsletter@godivinity.org.

Weekly satsangs are held regularly in the following cities:

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Boston, MA
Chicago, IL
Cortlandt Manor, NY
Dallas, TX
Houston, TX
Los Angeles, CA
Seattle, WA

A weekly telecon e-satsang is also held every Friday evening at 8:30 PM CST.

Email newsletter@godivinity.org for more satsang information.



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