

Divine Name in Advaitism

by Haranachandra Bhattacharya

In Book XII of Srimad Bhagavata Sri Sukadeva has imparted the following instruction to King Parikshit as the very essence of the Bhagavata: –

Kalerdoshanidhe raajanasti hyeko mahan gunah |

Keertanaadeva Krishnasya muktabandhah param vrajet ||

Krite yad dhyayato Vishnum tretaayaam yajato makhaih |

Dwaapare paricharyaayaam kalau tadHarikeertanaat ||

“This Kaliyuga is said to be a mine of evils, yet it has a unique significance that merely by chanting the Name of Krishna one gets liberation from the bondage of Maya and attains the Supreme. Whatever could be obtained in the Satya Yuga by practicing meditation, in Treta by performing sacrifices, in Dwapara by worshipping the Deity, is achieved in Kali by the mere chanting of Hari’s Name.”

The Vishnu Purana also corroborates the same fact when it says:

Dhyaayan krute yajan yajnaihtretaayaam dwaaparearchayan |

yadaapnoti tadaapnoti kalau sankeertya Kesavam ||[VI.ii.17]

Of the ninefold forms of Devotion as enumerated below, the second in order is Kirtana or loud chanting and singing of the Divine Name:

Sraavanam kirtanam Vishnoh smaranam paadasevanam |

Archanam vandanam daasyam sakhyam aatmanivedanam ||

Sage Sukadeva has repeatedly eulogized Kirtana-Bhakti as the best and easiest for the men of Kali.

Sri Gouda Brahmananda Saraswati in his commentary ‘Nyaaya-Ratnavali’ on the ‘Siddhanta-Vindu’ (verse 8) of Sri Madhusudana Saraswati, the illustrious exponent of Advaita Philosophy, explains the term, ‘Kirtana’ as follows: “*Sagunasya nirgunasya va vaachakasya shabdoc-*

chaaranam”— Kirtana means the uttering of a word denoting the Personal or Impersonal aspect of God.’

Kirtana derives its supreme value from its objects, viz., the holy Name of the Divine, and therefore in the foregoing lines it is not so much the kirtana that has been extolled, but more so the sacred Name of

the Lord, to which the kirtana owes its importance. That is why in the *Brhannaradiya Purana* it is the Name of the Lord, and not Its kirtana, that has been declared as the sole refuge for the jivas of Kaliyuga.

Persons who are not fully conversant with the teachings of Advaita Philosophy erroneously believe that there is no place for Bhakti in Advaitism. The *Bhakti-Rasayana* was written by no less a personage than Sri Madhusudana Saraswati, the well-known exponent of Advaita Philosophy. Again, in his commentary on the following verse of the *Bhagavad Gita* –

Sarvadharmaan parityajya maamekam saramvraja |

Aham tva sarvapaapebhyo mokshayishyami ma shuchah ||

The reputed Swami has classified Bhakti into three grades – the lower (adhama), the middling (madhyama) and the higher (uttama). In his commentary, *Nyaya Ratnavali*, on *Siddhanta-Vindu*, Sri Gouda Brahmananda, the famous commentator of ‘Advaita-Siddhi’, has given a detailed exposition of Bhakti.

Not only that, Bhagavan Shankaracharya in his gloss on the *Brahma-Sutras* has declared japa, fasting, and prayer, etc. to be auxiliary to Brahma-Jnana – the knowledge of Brahma. Three kinds of japa have been enumerated in the Scriptures; they are – *Manasa japa* (mental repetition), *Upamsu japa* (repetition in a low whisper) and *Vachika japa* (verbal repeti-

tion). The mental repetition of a mantra side by side with meditation on the form of one’s Ista Devata (favourite deity) is called *manasa japa*. The repetition of a mantra within one’s mouth (i.e. in a low whisper inaudible to others) is called *upamsu japa*, and the repetition of a man-

tra in a distinct voice audible to others is called *vachika japa*. Kirtana is included in this last category.

According to Sri Shankaracharya, kirtana, i.e. loud chanting of Divine Names is a sure means to Brahma-Knowledge, because the Acharya calls japa as a means of attaining Brahma-Jnana and kirtana is included in *vachika japa*.

The Acharya has recognized Bhakti also as a means of God-Realization in as much as he calls *Devaaradhana* (worship of a deity) a means to the attainment of Brahma-Knowledge and worship of a deity is not possible without Devotion. Thus we see that Nama Kirtana and Bhakti occupy an important place in the scheme of Advaita Philosophy.

Courtesy: 1938 edition of Kalyana-Kalpataru Magazine.

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Infinite Ways to Infinite Bliss

Excerpts from the discourses of Sri Muralidhara Swamiji of Chennai, India.**

Grooming our children towards a better tomorrow

Once a person was caught stealing someone's wallet. He was handed over to the police. On investigation, it was found that he had a long history of stealing from his neighbors and friends. That day he had been caught red-handed. Charges were filed against him and he was produced in the court.

The magistrate asked if he had anything to say before the judgment was delivered. The accused then said, "Your honor, I plead guilty to all the charges and I am also aware that I am going to be punished. But I have a request to make. It is my request that my mother should have an equal share of the punishment accorded to me."

The magistrate was both astonished and confused at these words and asked him to explain. The accused said, "In my childhood, I used to sneak into my neighbors' homes, filch petty things, and show them to my mother. Every time I did so, my mother would feel proud of my 'feat' and would highly appreciate my behavior. Today, I stand before you as a thief, thanks to my mother's encouragement. Had she been severe with me the first time I committed thievery and stopped me from repeating it, I would have grown into a good citizen. So my mother is equally responsible for these crimes."

Parenting is an art. A tender mind can be molded into any shape or form, and it is the responsibility of the parents to shape their ward's mind and heart in such a manner that they grow up to become good citizens of the world.

Today's literature and media repeatedly

stress on one fact - Education without moral values ruins a person and hence spoils the society. Only moral values and fear of God can save the society today.

Orthodox religious practices (like 'madi', 'aachaaram', etc.) are no longer relevant to modern times. Instead of confounding the child's mind with such concepts, it is advisable to sow the seeds of moral values and discipline in their minds. Teach them to be honest and inspire in them values of truthfulness and reverence for elders. Teach them to be God-fearing.

Groom them to have an ambition in life, but not be over-ambitious. Teach them never to nurture desire for others' belongings and never to receive any gift or offering from others even if given voluntarily, if it is not really essential.

Teach them the value of money and not the greed for it. Implant in the young minds the basic precept that monetary comforts are not the only comforts in life and that moral values should never be compromised for money.

'I have stuck to noble values like honesty and truthfulness all my life; yet, I have to face ordeals in life,' would be the immediate reaction of even a grown-up.

In Mahabharata, we find that Dharmaputra suffered in spite of being benign at heart. Do the comforts that Duryodhana enjoyed signify that he was a good soul? Do not evaluate your goodness against your life in the world. The two do not stand comparison. What is



the true reward for your righteousness? It is the mental clarity and inner excellence that you will achieve in your life. The worldly comforts are but trifling when compared to this great asset. As a parent, internalize this golden rule and pass it on to your children.

Don't make your child a bookworm. Accord as much importance to play as you do to their studies. It is from the playfield that the child brings home the noble quality of equanimity in victory and defeat. There is no better place for the child to inculcate the value of give-and-take. These are virtues that will be the guiding stars for success when the child grows up and faces the world.

Always communicate in the child's language. Feed them with values in the form of fables, stories of great men who have stood by principles and values, and stories of Mahans and Saints. Keep repeating these values to the child regularly. Constantly reminding children of these disciplines will certainly make an impact in their minds and bear fruit in the long run.

As your children grow into mature adults, they should be able to evaluate their life. 'Am I leading a worthy life?' This is the prime question that they will need to answer at various points in their journey of life. Tomorrow, if they have to answer it positively with a clean, guilt-free heart, you as parents have to take the right step today.

From Adi Shankara to Kevin Kelly

by Bala Subramanian, Seattle, WA

Kevin Kelly is the former editor of *Wired* magazine, and a known name in tech circles. His keynote address in an EG (Entertainment Gathering) conference was about the next 5000 days in the life of the Web. He says "the entire Web (and by extension, the Internet) can be looked at as just one machine and this machine is omnipresent and is all knowing. There is no downtime and the capacity, memory and processing power is doubling every second. All our devices are simply windows to world". He goes on to

talk about a day where every bit will be owned by the Internet and everything is a part of the whole called the Internet.

If we turn the clock about 2500+ years back, our forefathers knew about a concept which dealt with the relationships between everything that exists on earth – that of Brahman. The core aspect of our Sanatana Dharma, this speaks about Brahman as the one which encompasses the entire universe. It is from Brahman that the universe, world, flora, fauna, animals and humans came. While Brahman is inside everyone and is everything, it is also unchanging, infinite and transcendent from all. One of the key words to describe Brahman is Sat-Chit-Ananda – Infinite Being, Infinite Consciousness, Infi-

nite Bliss. When people attain Mukti (Liberation), they experience and realize that they themselves are Brahman. In Mundaka Upanishad, Brahman is described as follows: "**That supreme Brahman is infinite, and this conditioned Brahman is infinite. The infinite proceeds from infinite. Then through knowledge, realizing the infinitude of the infinite, it remains as infinite alone**". The main goal of Sanatana Dharma is to pursue the realization of the truth about Brahman and identification with it.

Just like sideburns and salwar bottoms, it seems that even the concept of Brahman in making a comeback, albeit clothed in the internet world.

Kids' Corner

Nama Snowman
by Kishori, 2nd Grade
Chicago, IL

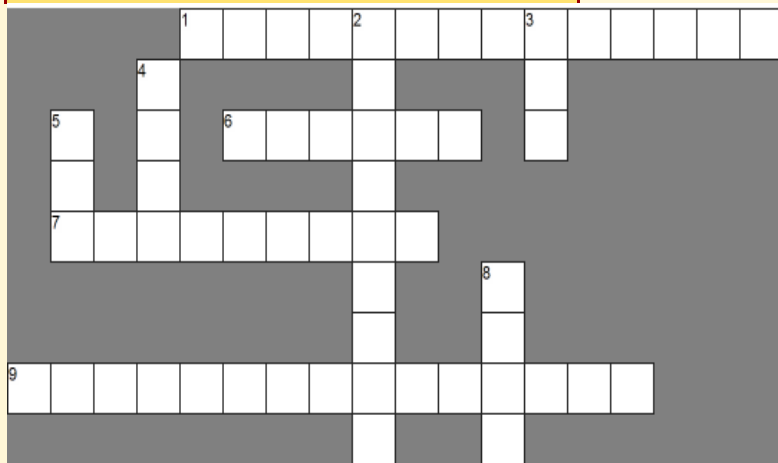


Hanuman
by Meera Kumanan, 5th Grade
New York



Crossword—Pongal Trivia

Compiled by Ramya Srinivasan, San Jose, CA
Sankranti is a harvest festival celebrated across India in mid-January. In Tamil Nadu, the festival is called Pongal.



Bharata Pradakshina 1 — Tamil

By Aravind Thathachari, Orlando, FL; Illustrations by Sripriya

The divine soil of Bharat has been fertile with innumerable saints from time immemorial. Such rare gems have been born all over Bharat. Many of them sang the glories of the Lord and were a living embodiment of Bhakti. The remarkable aspect of this is that although many of these saints were born in different centuries, their sayings have been consistent. Their only preaching to mankind is to chant the names of the Lord.

In the next few months, we will briefly see how every Indian state has been graced by 'bhakta' saints who glorified the easiest and the most effective path of chanting the Lord's Names.

Azhwars from Tamil Nadu

'Azhwars' denotes those who are deeply immersed in devotion to the Lord. There were 12 Azhwars in all who lived during various periods between the sixth and ninth centuries, and were devotees of Lord Vishnu. They composed a total of 4000 pasurams (verses) glorifying God and these have been said to be on par with the Vedas. A pasuram (in Tamil) sung by Sri Thirumangai Azhwar goes thus:



"Kulam tharum¹, selvam thandidum², adiyār paduthuyar āyinavellām
Nilantharam seiyyum³, neellvisumbarullum⁴, arulodu perunilam allikkum⁵
Valantharum⁶ matrum thandidum⁷ pertra thāyinum āyina seyyum⁸
Nalam tharum sollai nān kandukonden⁹ 'Nārāyana' enum Nāmam!¹⁰

Meaning:

⁹I have realized the word that bestows all goodness – ¹A good family, ²wealth, ³solve all the problems of devotees, ⁴Vaikuntha, ⁵land, ⁶strength and ⁷all the good things. ⁸It will take care of you more than a mother – ¹⁰It is the name "Narayana".

What will you get by chanting 'Narayana'? Everything!

DOWN

- 2 Sweet plant chewed abundantly during Pongal (9)
- 3 Animal remembered on the day after Pongal (3)
- 4 For how many days is the Pongal festival is celebrated in Tamil Nadu? (4)
- 5 God honored during the Pongal festival (3)
- 8 Pongal is celebrated during this Tamil month

(See Page 4 for crossword solution)

ACROSS

- 1 Person from Mahabharata who left the mortal coil during this time, after end of the war (14)
- 6 Sweet dish prepared to celebrate the harvest festival in Tamil Nadu (6)
- 7 On the day of Makara Sankranti, the sun begins its journey _____ (9)
- 9 This Sanskrit word literally means "transition of Capricorn" (15)



Satsang News and Events



Srimad Bhagavatam Study Circles—California and Texas

Following the successful Bhagavatam 101 telecon classes conducted in Oct-Nov 2008 and Dec-Jan 2008-09 by Poojya Poornima Kumarasamiji, regular Srimad Bhagavatam study circles have been started in the California Bay Area and in Houston, TX.

The study satsangs start with parayana of the Dhyana slokas, Kunti Stuti and other slokas of Bhagavatam. Later, explanations for the verses as well as chapter summaries are discussed by members of the group. Poornimaji herself called into the first session of each location's study circle and encouraged the participants to whole-heartedly dive into the ocean of Srimad Bhagavatam. Slokas and chapters are dealt with serially in each class. **New participants, including those who did not attend the Bhagavatam 101 classes, are welcome to attend these study circles.** The sessions are generally held twice a month. For more information about Bay Area, CA sessions, contact Sujatha Sankar at (408) 507-0289. For Houston, TX information, contact Sriram Ramanujam at (832) 515-1251.

Satsangs across the US

Chicago, IL

On Jan 7, Vaikuntha Ekadasi, despite heavy snow, a satsang was successfully held at the residence of Yaamini and Zivan Prakash, along with new participants. Mahamantra Nama sankirtan was performed for at least an hour, followed by the rendering of Sri Swamiji's Tamil kirtan, "*Kaliyayum bali kollum...*". Following this, devotees shared their experiences and Nama *anubhavas*. Prasad was then served and first-time attendees were given Sri Swamiji's book, *Answers and Beyond*.

Orlando, FL

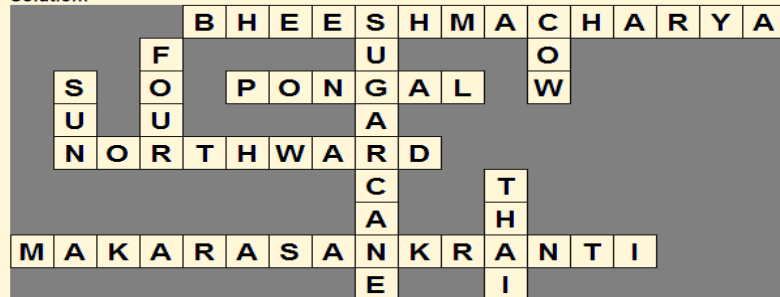
On Vaikuntha Ekadasi, Akhanda Mahamantra Nama sankirtan was performed at the residence of Geetha and Aravind Thathachari from 6:30 PM to 1:30 AM.

Akhanda Nama kirtan was also performed at Orlando on Jan 1 and Jan 10 from 6 AM to 6 PM.

Seattle, WA

The members of the Seattle satsang sang Andal's Tiruppavai during the entire month of Margasirisa. The final satsang for the month ended with the final *pasuram* (verse) and was followed by Sri Swamiji's kirtans. Participants then shared their encounters and experiences with great Mahans and *sthalams*. The general sloka theme for the month was Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Arunachala Aksharamanamaalai*. Events for kids included sloka chanting and Ramayana quiz contests, which were a big hit with the children.

Solution:



Upcoming Events

Jan 31, 3:30-5:30 PM, Chicago area

Satsang with Bhajans and Hari Nama Sankirtan at the residence of Yaamini and Zivan Prakash at
3091 Coastal Dr, Aurora, IL 60503
Ph: (630) 747 6249

Feb 1, 4:00-5:30 PM, Boston area

Satsang with Nama Kirtan, Vishnu Sahasranama and discourse at the residence of Ranjani Rajashekhar at

71 Messenger St, #1030

Plainville, MA 02762

Ph: (508) 618-7770

Feb 1, 8:30-10:00 AM, Houston area

Srimad Bhagavatam Study Circle at the residence of Zenitha and Ram at
745 International Blvd, #106
Houston, TX 77024
Ph: (713) 290-0669

Weekly satsangs are held regularly in the following cities:

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

A weekly telecon e-satsang is also held every Friday evening at 8:30 PM CST. Anyone across the US is welcome to participate.

Email newsletter@godivinity.org for more satsang information.

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Illustrations—Nithya Balasubramanian, Sripriya Sarathy.