

Rama Nama—the means to Rama

Chanting the Rama Nama can accomplish anything in the world. The lives of numerous saints like Kabirdas, Swami Ramdas, Samartha Ramdas, Sri Tyagaraja, Yogi Ramsuratkumar among several others stand testimony to this claim. But what is the origin of Rama Nama?

The great saint, Sri Tyagaraja asks and answers this question in his kirtan “Evaru Nee”. He asks, “Who are you Rama? Are you Siva? Are you Vishnu?” Then Tyagaraja himself says that the Ra from the Ashtakshara Mantra – Om Namō Narayanaya, and Ma from the Panchakshara Mantra – Nama Sivaya (both key syllables without which the mantras turn negative) have been picked up to coin the Taraka Mantra (Rama Nama). Taraka means ‘helps to cross over’. This mantra helps to cross over the ocean of Samsara and hence the name.

Countless stories can be expounded to highlight the greatness of Rama Nama. In Manu Smriti, Manu writes that if one does the japa of Rama Mantra, it is equivalent of doing japa of all mantras. The life of Sage Valmiki shows that even chanting this mantra in reverse, without knowing its meaning can transform a sinner into an enlightened person. A story of the purification of a woman by merely chanting the Rama Nama once, is seen in the life history of Bhagavan Nama Bodendral Swami who lived as recently as the 17th century AD. Goswami Tulsidas says Rama, during His incarnation, liberated all the Ayodhya-wasis, but the Rama Nama liberates anyone who chants it.

Rama Rajya is said to have been prevalent when Lord Rama ruled the earth and established a perfect society where all subjects lived peacefully and harmoniously. Sri Muralidhara Swamiji has said that a modern day Rama Rajya is not far away. What does Rama Rajya really mean in today’s world?

It is every man’s dream to lead a peaceful life – one that is not troubled by fear, a life free from the shackles of sorrow and stress, and filled with love and happiness. If everyone in a society had all this, is that not truly Rama Rajya?

The key to achieving this is within each one of us. Each individual will have to wake up and be transformed spiritually. Only such a transformation of all the individuals within a society can establish Rama Rajya there. But is that possible in this day and age where everyone seems to be running about and looking for peace on the outside?

Sri Swamiji says that it is possible, and only through the simple means of chanting Rama Nama and the Names of the Lord.

A few dozen years ago, Tiruvannamalai (where Lord Siva resides in the form of the Arunachala hill, located about 200 kms southwest of Chennai) used to be a deserted little village, even on the auspicious full moon days. But today one can barely set foot in this town on the monthly full moon days or on the annual Karthigai Deepam day when a huge lamp is lit on the summit of Aru-



nachala. Crowds on these days exceed 2 million! The legend of the temple town dates back thousands of years, and it would make one wonder

what has changed in recent times to cause this sudden following. Sri Swamiji says that the reason for this is the tapas of the Mahatma, Yogi Ramsuratkumar, who lived for many years in Tiruvannamalai and chanted the Rama Nama. If such a major transformation can happen due to a ‘beggar’s’ (as Yogi called himself) constant chanting of Rama Nama, what doubt should one have when Sri Swamiji says that Rama Rajya is not far away?

It will happen. It is up to us to get on the bandwagon in order to experience complete peace and harmony.

Sriram Ramanujam, Houston, TX

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Swami Abhedananda—a torch-bearer of the Mahamantra

If the world were to be imagined as a house, then *Bharatavarsha* (Indian Sub-continent) can be rightfully called as the shrine of the house. From time immemorial, India has been the spiritual powerhouse of the world and it continues to be so. Great saints have incarnated continuously, one after the other till date glorifying the path of Bhakti and Nama Sankirtan.

Swami Abhedananda of Tiruvananthapuram, Kerala is one such great Saint of the 20th Century who advocated the “Hare Rama...” Mahamantra as the simplest means to attain liberation.

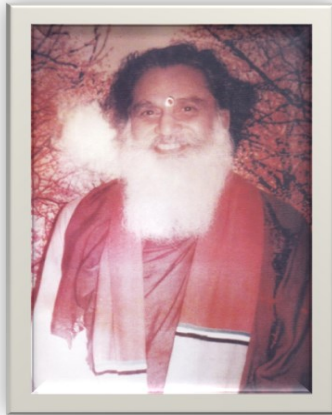
Velayudhan was born to the devout Krishna Pillai and Lakshmi Pillai in April 1909. The little Velayudhan was inclined towards spirituality right from his childhood. The spiritual quest in him was kindled by the stories of the glories of the Divine narrated to him by his mother and uncle. At the age of 14, the young Velayudhan’s spiritual quest took shape with the blessings of Sri Vidhyadiraja Chattambi Swamikal, the great saint of Kerala, and a contemporary of Sri Narayana Guru.

Leaving his family behind, he renounced worldly life and travelled throughout the country. He visited various saints like Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai, from whom he derived great spiritual strength. At the age of 27, he was formally initiated into the monastic order and came to be known as Swami Abhedananda Bharati.

Swamiji preached Bhakti. His love and compassion permeated the hearts of all devotees alike. Drawing inspiration from the life of the great saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, he dedicated his life towards spreading of the Divine Name, specifically the “Hare Rama...” Mahamantra. Innumerable devotees followed him as he went on Nagara Kirtan singing the “Hare

Rama...” Mahamantra in the streets of Tiruvananthapuram early in the mornings

Swamiji strongly believed that spirituality can bring about unity in humanity, which was discriminated by caste, creed and race. He prescribed singing the Names of the Lord with Bhakti and singing it aloud shedding away inhibitions (*bheri*). The *Koti Archana* program which involves chanting the Hare Rama Mahamantra a crore times offering flowers to the Lord by devotees transcending caste or creed is being followed in various parts of the country even today.



Whenever there was no satsang, Swamiji preferred solitude. He would suddenly disappear from his ashram and get away to Brindavan where he would revel in the bliss of devotion surviving on alms. He had a great devotion to Radha Devi and went to Barsana (the birth place of Radha Devi) on Radhashtami (the birth day of Radha Devi).

Swamiji did not believe in setting up monasteries. When devotees approached him with such a request, he would say, “Not one; let us establish many of them!” Swamiji would ask them to chant the Mahamantra incessantly in their own homes and thus each home would become an ‘Ashram’!

On 24th February 1955, Swami Abhedananda lit a lamp in the ‘Abhedasramam’ in Tiruvananthapuram and commenced chanting of the Hare Rama Mahamantra around the lamp, stringing a *tampura*. Since then, Mahamantra chanting has been incessantly happening there - every moment of the day and year round. The lamp has never been extinguished and the *tampura* that he held has never touched the ground. When one steps into this ‘Mahamantralayam’, one instantly feels

the divine bliss of the Mahamantra.

Once when in Hrishikesh, *Ganga devi* (Goddess of the Ganges) appeared to Him seeking Hari Nama Kirtan to be performed in her banks, similar to the one that happens in the banks of Yamuna. Accordingly, an ashram was set up in Kankhal near Hardwar.

Sri Swamiji attained *Maha Samadhi* on October 29, 1983. Before Swamiji left his mortal coil, Ganga Devi permeated the body of Swamiji in the form of light after which he shone lustrously. He instructed his disciples to let his body flow in the Ganges after his departure and not to construct any shrine.

River Ganga is said to destroy all of one’s sins. Mahamantra Kirtan has been prescribed as the path for this age. Swami Abhedananda lived as the very form of Mahamantra and Ganga Devi also is said to have resided in him. So by merely reminiscing the divine life history of this great saint, one gets the merits of a dip in the Ganges as well as chanting the Mahamantra, thus getting absolved of all sins.

April 12 2009 marks the birth centenary of Swami Abhedananda. May we pray with Mahamantra Kirtan on this great day to be blessed with devotion through incessant chanting of the Mahamantra.

Narayanan Sathiamoorthy, Boston, MA

Compiled from the discourses of Sri Muralidhara Swamiji and www.abhedashramam.org.

★★★★★★

Recently a Sanyasini and disciple of Swami Abhedananda visited the Premika Bhavanam shrine of Sri Muralidhara Swamiji’s satsang in Chennai and gave a discourse there. A divine light emerged from her and subsumed the entire satsang hall for a few moments after which it faded back into her. This happened a couple of times. Our Sri Swamiji, who could experience this divine bliss, attributed the light in the Sanyasini to Mahamantra Kirtan.

★★★★★★



Bharata Pradakshina 2 — Kerala

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.

Over 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.

Poonthanam

This article of the Bharata Pradakshina series will focus on the state of Kerala, having in its bosom the holy soil of Guruvayoor. In this soil was born a great poet saint Sri Poonthanam. Legend has it that Poonthanam got married at an early age. But the couple did not have a child for a long time. They propitiated Lord Guruvayoorappan (Sri Krishna) and were blessed with a son. To celebrate this occasion, he invited his friends and relatives. But the son died an hour before the ceremony. Grief stricken, Poonthanam's only refuge was Guruvayoorappan and he started considering Sri Krishna as his son and finally attained Liberation. In his work *Jnanapana* (Song of Wisdom) he writes, "While little Krishna is dancing in our hearts, why do we need little ones of our own?" Poonthanam spent the rest of his life reading the Bhagavatam and singing the Lord's glories in simple Malayalam. His contributions to Malayalam devotional literature include *Bahsakarnamritham* and *Anandakarnamritham*.

Though he did not know Sanskrit, his love for Lord Guruvayoorappan was so great that he used to chant the Vishnu Sahasranama daily with tears. There was an erudite scholar and great Sanskrit poet at that time who used to laugh at Poonthanam's Sanskrit reading and recitation of *Vishnu Sahasranama*. One day Poonthanam wrongly recited "Padmanabho Maraprabhu" and the scholar openly laughed at Poonthanam and corrected him saying that Padmanabha was not Maraprabhu (Lord of trees) but Amaraprabhu (Lord of immortals). Immediately, there was a celestial voice from the inner shrine that said, "I am also Maraprabhu (Lord of trees). I like Poonthanam's bhakti more than your vibhakti (learning or knowledge in Sanskrit grammar)."

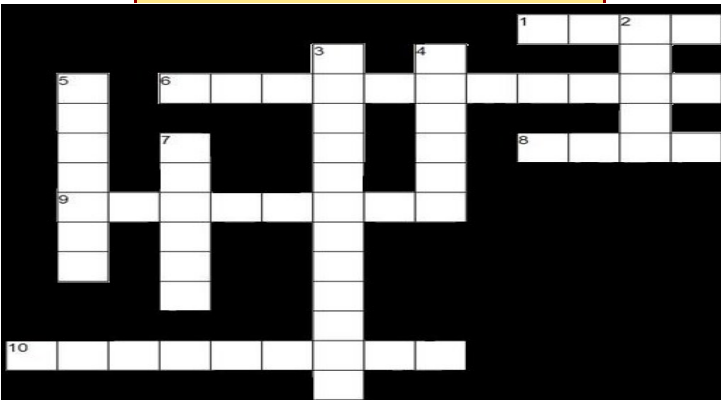
The following verse is from *Jnanapana* where Sri Poonthanam glorifies the chanting of the divine name.

**Guru Nathan thuna cheiga sanththam,
Thiru namangal navin mel eppozhum,
Piriyathe irikkanam nammude,
Nara janmam saphala makkeduvan.**

**Request I, for the grace from my Guru without fail,
So that Lord's holy names are always on my tongue,
And continue to be there forever without change,
So that this human birth of ours becomes most fruitful.**

**Aravind Thathachari, Orlando, FL
Illustration: Sri Priya Sarathy, Charlotte, NC**

Crossword—Rama Trivia



ACROSS

- 1 King Janaka's daughter's name (4)
- 6 Guru who taught Rama and Lakshmana the knowledge of celestial weapons (11)
- 8 The demon Maricha disguised himself as this animal (4)
- 9 Rama belongs to this dynasty (8)
- 10 Rama's birth star (9)

(See Page 4 for solution)

DOWN

- 2 Rama has ____ (number) brothers (5)
- 3 Place where Gopanna built the famous temple for Rama (12)
- 4 River that flows by Ayodhya (9)
- 5 Capital city of Sita's father (7)
- 7 King Dasaratha's kingdom (6)

**Compiled by Ramya Srinivasan,
San Jose, CA**

New Hanumanji near Chennai



This 24ft tall Hanumanji was installed on Mahashivaratri day, adjacent to Sri Muralidhara Swamiji's Ashram at Madhurapuri near Chennai, India.

Hanumanji witnesses Lord Krishna's Lilas twice. Can you guess where?

The first is during Damodar Lila. In Sri-mad Bhagavatam Sri Suka says, "After suckling Krishna, Yasoda let Him down to go and remove the boiling milk off the fire. Angered, Krishna broke all the curd pots with the churning rod and with artificial tears, went to a secretive place, and sat over a mortar to eat the butter. He also fed it to a monkey nearby." And there is our beloved Hanuman happily eating butter off the Lord's fingers! That's the reason why Hanuman is still smeared with butter to this day (like the Lord did to him).

Later, Hanumanji is present on the flag of Arjuna's chariot during the Mahabharata war—a prime seat from which he enjoyed the greatest of all discourses—the Bhagavad Gita!

Source: www.madhuramurali.org

Satsang News and

Houston, TX

On Feb 28, Akhanda Mahamantra Nama kirtan was performed from 6 AM to 6 PM at the residence of Nisha and Sriram Ramanujam on the occasion of the second birthday of their daughter, Madhuram. Throughout the day, about 40-45 devotees came and chanted the Mahamantra, some for a few minutes and others for hours! A kids program with games was conducted in the evening, with participation from about 15 kids. The last half hour of chanting was done with great fervor by about 30 people, both adults and kids. All the attendees took home abundant blessings from Sri Krishna and our Guru Maharaj.



Bay Area, CA

Regular weekly Nama satsangs were conducted every Saturday at the Fremont Temple. Bhagavatam Study Circle sessions were held on Mar 7 at the residence of Chitra and Rajagopalan. Students learned Kunti Stuti parayana and discussed Chapter 5 of Canto 1 in detail. A pop quiz was conducted at the end of the second session with avid participation from everyone present.



Chicago, IL

A wonderful satsang was held on Ekadasi day, Mar 7, from 4 to 6 PM with avid participation from Sri Vinod who is Sri Swamiji's devotee from Chennai, India. The satsang started with Mahamantra chanting and was followed by numerous kirtans on the glories of Lord Sri Krishna and our Guru Maharaj.



Orlando, FL

Akhanda Mahamantra kirtan was conducted on 28 Feb at the residence of Geetha and Aravind Thathachari.

A special satsang was held on Mar 15 at the residence of a neighboring family. The satsang started with 20 mins of Mahamantra kirtan. This was followed by kirtans on Sri Krishna and a short talk by Aravind Thathachari on the need for Mahamantra in this age.

Seattle, WA

Seattle satsangs in March revolved around Lord Venkateshwara. Mahamantra chanting was followed by Sri Venkatesha Sthothram, Mahalakshmi Ashtakam and Sri Krishnashtakam. Children narrated stories and sang bhajans based on Ra-

GOD conducts three different
Srimad Bhagavatam Study Circles -
**Two in the Houston area (Houston and Pearland)
and one in Bay Area, CA.**

The sessions are held every alternate weekend.
**Those who live outside these regions are welcome
to participate in the sessions remotely.**

Come avail of this unique opportunity to study this
crown jewel of our scriptures, the mere reading of
which bestows Liberation!

For more information contact

**Houston: Sriram Ramanujam (832-515-1251)
Bay Area: Sankar Venkatramani (408-507-0241).**

Upcoming Events

Mar 29, 5 AM-5 PM, Orlando, FL

Akhanda Mahamantra Nama Sankirtan at the residence of Geetha and Aravind Thathachari. Ph: (321) 214-3424

Apr 3, 6 PM, Houston, TX

Special Rama Navami satsang at the residence of Daya and Narayan Dave. Ph: (832) 243-6036

Weekend of Apr 4, Chicago, IL

Nama Dwaar Kids' Program

—A fun way for kids to learn about our religion. Date subject to change. For more information contact Yamini ZivanPrakash. Ph: (630) 747-6249

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 national telecon satsang is also held every Friday evening at 8:30 PM CST.

Email newsletter@godivinity.org for more information.

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Illustrations—Nithya Balasubramanian, Sri Priya Sarathy.

ERRATUM: In the Feb-Mar issue of the newsletter, the article *The Whole Trouble is for the Book-Worms*, erroneously mentioned Yogi Ramsuratkumar in the list of uneducated Mahans. We apologize for the mistake. This has now been corrected.