

Holy Name in Excelsis.

BY SWAMI ASANGANANDA.

Centuries after centuries have rolled down the stream of time without the cognizance of human beings, but the 'Sanātana Dharma' or Eternal Religion has remained the same without undergoing any tangible changes or losing its special features due to shocks consequent on the ravages of all-destroying and all-conquering time. The glory and beauty of the religion reared on the fertile soil of 'Bhāratavarṣa' lies in the fact that it has never identified itself with any sect or creed but has, like an impartial mother, introduced innumerable avenues to the temple of *Kaivalya* or God-vision or *Nirvāṇa* to suit the varieties of tendencies and inclinations for all times and climes. And therefore the Religion is still vibrant with Life in spite of the presence of the offensive and defensive forces of modernism and iconoclasm. It has been admitted on all hands that of all the various processes for the attainment of the *Summum Bonum* of Life, none is so sweet, so easy and so effective and fruitful as *Nāma-Japa*. It does not require any encyclopædic brain, nor a colossal figure for the achievement of success; but it demands of the aspirant the price of 'नामे रुचि', *i. e.*, 'Real taste and faith in the Holy Name.'

Every idea or thought has got its corresponding counterpart in a term or word; therefore thought and

word cannot be separated from each other, although there may be several terms or words in the various tongues to convey the same thought or idea. Certain thoughts or ideas are not mere abstractions or qualities quite separate from objects, but they have their respective forms in the visible and invisible spheres. And it is admitted by all the great religious personages that the holy words or names are the bodies of various gods and goddesses and are the sound-symbols of the Divine Being.

The Hindus are of opinion that all sounds have their origin in the sacred and mystic word 'Om', which stands as the sound-symbol of *Brahma*. The word OM or AUM is the combination of the three most important letters or sounds, A, U and M, which encircle the whole kingdom of sounds. In his masterly commentary on the aphorism of Patañjali 'तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः' (His manifesting word is OM), Swami Vivekananda says, "In making a sound, we use the *larynx* and the palate as a sounding board. Is there any material sound of which all other sounds must be manifestations, one which is the most natural sound ? 'Om' (AUM) is such a sound, the basis of all sounds. The first letter A is the root sound, the key, pronounced without touching any part of the tongue or palate; M represents the last sound in the

series, being produced by the closed lips, and U rolls from the very root to the end of the sounding board of the mouth. Thus, OM represents the whole phenomena of sound-producing. As such, it must be the natural symbol, the matrix of all the various sounds. It denotes the whole range and possibility of all the words that can be made."

The sages of the Indo-Gangetic plains and the patriarchs of the Olympus have with one voice sung the praises of the mysterious sound-symbol, OM, *Logos* or Word. According to the Hindu philosophy, in the processes of creation, Lord Brahmā or Hiranyagarbha first manifested Himself as *Nāma* or Name and then as *Rūpa* or Form. The visible universe is that Form and behind it stands the indescribable Name or *Spṛṣṭa*, manifesting power as *Logos* or Word. This *Spṛṣṭa* has formed its symbolic expression in the sacred word *Onkāra* or *Pranava*. Shakespeare has rightly said, "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy." Indeed, this statement is nowhere fraught with such inner significance as in the field of religious experience. How the aspirant passes beyond the physical world and enters the portals of the kingdom of Heaven, how he delves into the ocean of *Samādhi* by repeating the holy names of God and how he forgets his normal body-consciousness, are matters which are not to be discussed or talked, but are things that are to be thought over, meditated and realized intuitively.

The *Japa* of a *mantra* or mantras, the uttering and muttering of the holy name or names of God is one of the most potent means for the attainment of God-vision and soul-salvation—'जपत् सिद्धिः' (*Siddhi* or success or vision of God is achieved through *Japa* and *Japa* alone). But alas ! very few know the secrets of *Nāma-japa* ! The holy name is repeated, lips are also found moving, and the beads of the sacred rosary are counted, but the goal of life remains as distant as ever. And, therefore, it behoves the aspirant to know the secrets of *Japa*. The sage Patañjali says in his *Yoga-Sūtras*: 'तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम्' (The repetition of this [OM] and meditating on its meaning [is the way]). Mere uttering and muttering of the holy Name without properly understanding its significance and without picturing within the mind the form conveyed by the Name is tantamount to the music sung by the robot, the mechanical man recently invented in U. S. A. The robot sings through mechanical devices but still remains the same robot. In order to have the beneficial and salutary effect of the 'Name' or *Mantra* on the mind and its thorough metamorphosis, the devotee should think of the real meaning simultaneously with its repetition. The power of the *Mantra* is unique. It takes the devotee step by step to the highest zenith of super-consciousness. The devotee, first of all, utters the Name, then soars in the kingdom of thought and next goes to the Object and at last enjoys the highest bliss accruing from the vision of the

Divine. Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Deva used to say, "The *Sandhyā* merges into *Gāyatrī*, *Gāyatrī* in its turn merges into *Om* and lastly *Om* loses itself into *Samādhi*." There is no denying the fact that as the *Mantra* is uttered with all devotion, faith and sincerity, the mind becomes collected and concentrated and thereby gathers the irresistible force which ultimately takes the devotee to the ocean of *Samādhi*.

God is one, but innumerable are the appellations given by the devotees. Father is the same father, whether he is called Pâter, Pitā, Papa, Appa or Baba. And whatever might have been the experiences of the saints in foreign lands, nobody can deny that legions of saints graced the holy land of Āryāvarta with their advent and tasted the cup of divine bliss by their personal endeavours and Sādhanas. They have introduced various modes of *Sādhana* and recommended various names for repetition according to the tendencies of individual aspirants. Then again there are numerous modes of *Japa*, verbal as well as mental. Sometimes, when the Holy Name is uttered or rather sung collectively, it generates a tremendous surging wave of enthusiasm and feeling which takes the multitudes of devotees far away from the physical plane. But there is the dreadful reaction which every sincere soul should be cognizant of. When the feelings are roused up through *Bhajan* or *Sankirtan*, there

is always the tendency of one's following the lower course and thus paving the way, if one happens to lack in self-control, for shipwreck in life.

Marvellous, indeed, is the efficacy of 'Holy Name'. It has acted like the 'Healing Balm' to wounded hearts, brought solace and consolation to bereaved souls whose dearest and nearest ones have been snatched away by the cruel hands of death, and it has endowed mighty emperors and potentates with infinite courage and equipoise when their empires and kingdoms crumbled to pieces before the onslaughts of powerful enemies. It is the harbinger of the New Life; it wipes out all the dross that has accumulated on the heart of the devotee. 'कृत्यं करोति क्लृप्तं कुहकान्तकारी' (Thy Name, O Lord, transforms vice into virtue and destroys illusion). What more does a devotee require, if he can get rid of all imperfections and illusion by chanting the holy name of God?

In this iron age, when people at large are elbowing each other to keep the body and soul together and therefore have very little leisure to devote to spiritual unfoldment and culture, the path of 'Nāradya Bhakti'—Devotion inculcated by sage Nārada—is the most congenial and easiest method to be followed by all sincere Bhaktas for God-vision and salvation—

हरेनाम हरेनाम हरेनामैव केवलम् ।
कलौ नास्त्येव नास्त्येव नास्त्येव गतिरस्यथा ॥