

The Glories of Nama-bhasa

The relevance of the Ajamila Story for the Sankirtana Movement Today

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For VIHE Bhakti Vaibhava Study of Canto 6



Study Aim:

Srila Prabhupada Mood and Mission (Personal Application)

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The Glories of Nama-bhasa

The Relevance of the Ajamila Story for the Sankirtana Movement Today

Introduction:

„My dear King, the chanting of the holy name of the Lord is able to uproot even the reactions of the greatest sins. Therefore the chanting of the saṅkīrtana movement is the most auspicious activity in the entire universe. Please try to understand this so that others will take it seriously.“

This is how Sukadeva Goswami concludes his narration about Ajamila, by emphasising the glories of the sankirtana movement. „The chanting of the saṅkīrtana movement is the most auspicious activity in the entire universe!“ — What a powerful statement!

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu had come five hundred years ago to establish the Yuga-Dharma, the congregational chanting of the Holy Name:

yuga-dharma pravartāimu nāma-saṅkīrtana
cāri bhāva-bhakti diyā nācāmu bhuvana

“I shall personally inaugurate the religion of the age—nāma-saṅkīrtana, the congregational chanting of the holy name. I shall make the world dance in ecstasy, realizing the four mellows of loving devotional service.“ *Adi 3.19*

Srila Prabhupada, as the sena pati — the commander in chief of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's Sankirtana Movement, continued the work of the Lord and the previous acaryas, and expanded the sankirtana movement throughout the whole world. Srila Prabhupada could do so because he was empowered and had unflinching faith in the instruction of his spiritual master, in the potency of the Srimad Bhagavatam and the Holy Name. While the Books gave the philosophical basis of his movement, he stressed the chanting of the Holy Name as the method to achieve perfection in this age of Kali Yuga:

harer nāma harer nāma
harer nāmaiva kevalam
kalau nāsty eva nāsty eva
nāsty eva gatir anyathā

„In this Age of Kali there is no other means, no other means, no other means for self-realization than chanting the holy name, chanting the holy name, chanting the holy name of Lord Hari.“
Bṛhan-nāradya Purāṇa

As the ambassador of the Sankirtana Movement, Srila Prabhupada was very much fond of the Story of Ajamila from the sixth Canto, after all, this narration reveals the glories of the Holy Name! Especially the merciful nature of the Holy Name is highlighted: Even when the Names of God are being chanted indirectly, indicate something else, one will still receive all auspiciousness.

In this Essay, we give a summary of the important aspects of the Story and in this way show the glories of Nama-Bhasa. Then, understanding these glories, we would like to reflect on its relevance for the Sankirtana Movement Today and in this way understand Srila Prabhupada's mood and mission better.

The Story of Ajamila

The following description is a summary taken from the verses of Chapter one and two from Canto six of the Srimad Bhagavatam:

Once upon a time, in the city of Kanyakubja, there lived a brahmana named Ajāmila. He was an exemplary Devotee of Lord Narayana, a reservoir of good character, good conduct and good qualities. Firmly established in executing all the Vedic injunctions, he was very mild and gentle, and he kept his mind and senses under control. Furthermore, he was always truthful and knew how to chant the Vedic mantras.

Once Ajāmila went to the forest to collect fruit, flowers and grasses. On the way home, he saw a lusty *sudra* shamelessly embracing a prostitute. It seemed that both were drunk. The *sudra* was smiling and singing and the Prostitute's eyes were rolling in intoxication, and her dress became loose. When Ajāmila saw all of this the dormant lusty desires in his heart were awakened. Although he tried his best to remember the instructions of the *sāstras*, by the force of Cupid he failed to control his mind.

Thus within a short time, he took her as a servant in his house and abandoned all the regulative principles of a *brāhmaṇa*. Ajāmila began spending whatever money he had inherited from his father to satisfy the prostitute and he even gave up the company of his very beautiful young wife, who came from a very respectable *brāhmaṇa* family.

While he thus spent his time in abominable, sinful activities to maintain his family of many sons, eighty-eight years of his life passed by. That old man Ajāmila had ten sons, of whom the youngest was named Narayana. When the time of death arrived, Ajāmila saw the Yamadutas, the messengers of death, fearful looking creatures, approaching him. Out of fear in a helpless way, he then was calling out the Name *Nārāyaṇa*, thinking of his son.

Although the Yamadutas had come to take away the soul of Ajāmila to the abode of Yamarāja in order to punish him for his sinful activities, they were stopped by the Vishnudutas, the order carriers of Viṣṇu, who immediately arrived when they heard the holy name of their master chanted by the dying Ajāmila.

Astonished and bewildered, the Yamadutas ask about the Vishnudutas identity and why they are stopping them from their duties. In this way, a very wonderful discussion between the Vishnudutas and the Yamadutas took place, in which the glories of chanting the Holy Name was established.

Finally, the Yamudatas returned to the abode of Yamaraja where they got instructed by the Lord of death about the true religious principles. Ajāmila, who had been saved by the Vishnudutas, received a second chance and thus went to Haridwar to perfect his life, engaging again in the worship of Narayana and then ultimately attain Vaikunthaloka.

Whoever hears this story will get the following sruti-phala:

„Because this very confidential historical narration has the potency to vanquish all sinful reactions, one who hears or describes it with faith and devotion is no longer doomed to hellish life, regardless of his having a material body and regardless of how sinful he may have been. Indeed, the Yamadūtas, who carry out the orders of Yamarāja, do not approach him even to see him. After giving up his body, he returns home, back to Godhead, where he is very respectfully received and worshiped.“ 6.3.47-48

The Three Stages of Chanting

As mentioned in the introduction, the specific glory of this story is that it is highlighting the merciful characteristic of the Holy Name and its powers even on the stage of Nama-bhasa.

Ajāmila chanted not with the intention to call out for God but was thinking of his little son, named Naryana. Nevertheless, his chanting was accepted as Nama-bhasa, chanting without offenses. Before explaining this further, let's remind us of the three stages of chanting:

The three stages of chanting the Holy Name are Nama-aparada, chanting on the stage of offenses, Nama-bhasa, chanting on the stage of purification and Suddha-nama, the pure chanting of the Holy Name of the Lord.

Nama-aparada should be avoided. At this stage, it is absolutely impossible to attain pure love of God! One should aspire to progress to the next level as quick as possible because by continuing committing offenses against the Holy Name one loses taste in spiritual activities. Certainly, we should strive for Suddha-nama, the pure stage of Chanting. It is said that on this stage, Krishna personally appears on the tongue of such a chanter and dances there! Krishna fully reveals Himself, together with the entirety of His innumerable potencies. This chanting bestows pure love of God, Krishna Prema!

In between those two stages, the stage of offenses and the stage of perfection in the middle stage, the stage of purification, called nama-bhasa. On that stage, the Holy Name has not yet manifested his full potency, but the influence of the Holy Name is already manifesting in very powerful ways. This can be compared to dawn: although the sun itself is not yet visible, the light of the sun is already dissipating the darkness and with that all the inauspicious elements of the night such as fearful animals, rouses and thieves!

In other words, the effects of Nama-bhasa are quite incredible and include the following:

- Development of Faith
- Extinction of sinful reaction
- Liberation from the effects of Kali Yuga
- Disappearance of fear and advent of peace
- Protection from the influence of ghosts and adverse planets
- Attaining the four goals of life (dharma, artha, kama and moksa)
- Spiritual bliss

For our discussion on the Ajamila Story and the glories of nama bhasa the effect of `extinction of sinful reaction` is especially relevant. Lets have a closer look at what exactly happened to Ajamila:

The Glories of Nama-bhasa

„(..) When he saw them (the fearful Yamadutas) he was extremely bewildered, and because of attachment to his child, who was playing a short distance away, Ajāmila began to call him loudly by his name. Thus with tears in his eyes he somehow or other chanted the holy name of Nārāyaṇa.“ 6.1.28

„My dear King, the order carriers of Viṣṇu, the Viṣṇudūtas, immediately arrived when they heard the holy name of their master from the mouth of the dying Ajāmila, who had certainly chanted without offense because he had chanted in complete anxiety.“ 6.1.29

These are some of the key slokas describing Ajamilas chanting. It's very clear that Ajamila did not consciously call for the Lord. He was remembering his son and calling for him. But since the name of the Lord and Lord himself are non-different, the name Nārāyaṇa as unlimited powers.

Srila Prabhupada explains in his purports that: „although Ajamila had completely forgotten Nārāyaṇa, he was calling his child, saying, „Nārāyaṇa,“ Somehow or other, therefore, he was attached to the name Nārāyaṇa. Such unconscious devotional activities are called ajñāta-sukṛti. So, in other words, he was unknowingly chanting the name of Nārāyaṇa, and the holy name of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is so transcendently powerful that his chanting was being counted and recorded.“ - from 6.1.26

Another aspect is that Ajamila had previously worshiped Narayana and therefore there was some affection, some devotion for Nārāyaṇa in his heart. by chanting the name Nārāyaṇa, although thinking of his son, still, it must have reminded him in some way also of Lord Nārāyaṇa. This is confirmed by various acaryas:

Srila Prabhupada: „Therefore, although the contaminated Ajāmila was calling for his son, by concentrating his mind on the holy name of Nārāyaṇa he remembered the Nārāyaṇa he had very faithfully worshiped in his youth.“

Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī: „because Ajāmila constantly chanted his son's name, Nārāyaṇa, he was elevated to the platform of bhakti, although he did not know it.“

Śrīla Vīrarāghava Ācārya: “Although at the time of death he was chanting the name of his son, he nevertheless concentrated his mind upon the holy name of Nārāyaṇa.“

Śrīla Vijayadhvaja Tīrtha: „Directly or indirectly, Ajāmila factually remembered Nārāyaṇa at the time of death. “

Another important factor in this relation is that Ajāmila did not commit any appeared in his chanting. It was indirectly, not conscious, but nevertheless it was not offensive. To chant the holy name of the Lord with the motivation to counteract one's sinful activities, or to commit sinful activities on the strength of chanting the holy name, is offensive (nāmno balād yasya hi pāpa-buddhiḥ). But Ajāmila did not chanted the holy name of Nārāyaṇa to counteract sins; he simply chanted the name Nārāyaṇa to call his son. In other words, his chanting was considered to be innocent, free from aparadha and therefore effective!

Still we me wonder, and certainly did the Yamadutas do so: How is it that just by calling out the Name of God, not even directly calling him, one becomes free from all sins?

In order to explain this to the Yamadutas, the Visnudutas gave very vivid examples that illustrates the principle behind the power of the Holy Name:

Example of Fire:

„As a fire burns dry grass to ashes, so the holy name of the Lord, whether chanted knowingly or unknowingly, burns to ashes, without fail, all the reactions of one's sinful activities.“ 6.2.18

Example of Medicine:

„If a person unaware of the effective potency of a certain medicine takes that medicine or is forced to take it, it will act even without his knowledge because its potency does not depend on the patient's understanding. Similarly, even though one does not know the value of chanting the holy name of the Lord, if one chants knowingly or unknowingly, the chanting will be very effective.“ 6.2.19

We might be aware of the danger of fire or not, a fire will burn everything that comes in contact with. We might understand how a medicine works or not, if its taken it will cure ones disease. Similarly, one may or may not know the power of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, but if one chants the holy name one will become free from all sinful reactions. This is also confirmed in many other puranas such as the Bṛhad-viṣṇu Purāṇa, where it is stated that simply by chanting the Holy Name of the Lord, a sinful person can counteract the reactions to more sins than he is able to commit! Just imagine how many sins once can commit in a whole life time...! But just chanting the Holy Names one can destroy even much more sins! The Garuda Purāṇa compares the chanting of the Holy Names of the Lord to the roaring of a Lion and the sins of such a person to small animals that flee in fear!

Thats the reason why the Vishnudutas forbad the Yamadutas to take Ajamilas soul, because he was freed from all sins as soon he called out the name of Vishnu, and therefore was not anymore a candidate to be taken to Yamaraja:

„At the time of death, this Ajāmila helplessly and very loudly chanted the holy name of the Lord, Nārāyaṇa. That chanting alone has already freed him from the reactions of all sinful life. Therefore,

O servants of Yamarāja, do not try to take him to your master for punishment in hellish conditions.“

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The relevance for the Sankirtana Movement Today

It is not surprising that this narration of Ajamila was dear to Srila Prabhupada. The relevance for the Sankirtana Movement is very obvious. Although the Age of Kali is an ocean of fault there is one good quality: Simply by chanting the Holy Name one can be delivered. *kaler doṣa-nidhe rājan asti hy eko mahān guṇaḥ kīrtanād eva kṛṣṇasya mukta-saṅgaḥ paraṁ vrajet.*

Hearing about the power of the Holy Name gives us confidence that our preaching work of spreading the Holy Name will be effective, will have a powerful impact. Even if people are very sinful, they can become purified simply by chanting the Holy Names, as Ajamila did.

For the pious brahmana Ajamila, the scene of a sudra embracing a prostitute was enough to feel agitated, so much so, that his whole life was spoiled. In today's world of Kali yuga, passion embracing of man and woman has become a daily affair on the streets of western cities. Sexuality without any restrictions is celebrated as a form of freedom and as the greatest pleasure in life. As a consequence the majority of people in Kali yuga are full of lusty desires and are constantly engaged in sinful activities. But just by hearing a group of Devotees performing a Harinama, even the most sinful get a chance to be freed from their sins and start their devotional service.

Srila Prabhupada refers to his personal experiences of preaching in the west in a purport related to the Ajamila Story:

„In the Western countries, where the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is spreading, learned scholars and other thoughtful men are realizing its effectiveness. For example, Dr. J. Stillson Judah, a learned scholar, has been very much attracted to this movement because he has actually seen that it is turning hippies addicted to drugs into pure Vaiṣṇavas who voluntarily become servants of Kṛṣṇa and humanity. Even a few years ago, such hippies did not know the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, but now they are chanting it and becoming pure Vaiṣṇavas. Thus they are becoming free from all sinful activities (..) This is practical proof of the effectiveness of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement..“

Even the greatest critics of the Hare Krishna Movement had to admit that many of these young people had actually developed a much more pious and healthy lifestyle after joining ISKCON.

We can just imagine how pleasing it must have been for Srila Prabhupada to see how these Hippies started to turn into Vaishnavas, developing all kinds of good qualities and giving up previous bad habits.

Understanding the potency of the Holy Name, as members and preachers of the Hare Krishna Movement we should become very enthusiastic to spread the Holy Name. If people just get a chance to hear the maha mantra, if they just chant the maha mantra once, their lives can become perfect.

sāṅketyaṁ pārihāsyam vā
stobhaṁ helanam eva vā
vaikuṅṭha-nāma-grahaṇam
aśeṣāgha-haram viduḥ

„One who chants the holy name of the Lord is immediately freed from the reactions of unlimited sins, even if he chants indirectly [to indicate something else], jokingly, for musical entertainment, or even neglectfully. This is accepted by all the learned scholars of the scriptures.“ 6.2.14

This means that whoever hears or chants any names of God gets unlimited benefits even if the person is not aware of what is happening! Four different kinds of nama-bhasa chanting are described in this sloka:

Sanketya - indirect chanting
Parihasya - chanting jokingly
Stobha - musical entertainment
Helana - indifference or contempt

Let's have a closer look at each of them:

Sanketya - indirect chanting

Someone chant the name of God but is actually not aware that he is doing so. For example, there is a company that sells furniture with the name Conforama. Whoever says, „Let's go the Conformama, I need a new sofa!“ gets spiritual credits, because the word Conforama includes a name of God, Rama! In Germany, there is famous margarine that is called Rama. I remember an Advertisement on TV where you saw a family taking breakfast together handing each other the Rama Margarine on the table. Thousands of people chant every morning the names of Rama while they spread margarine on their pieces of bread! Even if the letters are not joined directly but are pronounced at the same time it has an effect. How does that work? Let's take the name of the former President of the USA, Barack Obama. There is a hidden Rama in the Name: **Barack Obama**, ra-ma! That's called Sanketya, indirect chanting!

Parihasya - chanting jokingly

Sometimes we experience while performing our preaching work that people on the streets make fun of us. The call out „Hare Rama, Hare Krishna, Hare Hare!“ in a joking mood. Others find the Hare Krishna people so unusual that they get fun out of it to dress up like a Hare Krishna for the occasion of a carnival for example. On the internet one actually can buy orange robes, the `Hare Krishna - Dresses` to disguise oneself as a Hare Krishna member. Certainly, people will laugh at them and say „Haha, you are dressed as a Hare Krishna!“. Also, Hollywood has had many movies that include some scene with Hare Krishnas, most of them played by actors. I remember an episode of the Muppet show where Kermit the frog was approached by people in distress and he answered them „Have you tried `Hare Krishna?!“ All these forms of parihasya are accepted as nama-bhasa chanting.

Stobha - musical entertainment

In many dramas in India, you see someone playing the sage Narada Muni with a Vina in his hands singing „Naryana! Naryana! Naryana!“ Again, such singing is accepted as Nama-bhasa. Any musical performance that includes the Mahamantra or names of god is part of this category. I personally heard the Maha Mantra for the first time, at least in this life, from a tape recorder playing the Hair Musical!

Helana - indifference or contempt

Even if the Holy Names are spoken in a mood of contempt, still benefit will be there. That's why Srila Prabhupada used to ask the devotees when receiving News Paper Articles: „How many times did they mention Hare Krishna?“ Whether the content was positive or negative, Srila Prabhupada was more concerned that people would get a chance to hear the name of God. „Even people who do not like us and want to suppress the movement are also somehow or other chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. They say, "The Hare Kṛṣṇa people should be chastised." Such foolish people do not realize the true value of this movement, but the mere fact that they want to criticize it gives them a chance to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, and this is its success.“

Srila Prabhupadas Preaching Mood

Srila Prabhupada had enormous faith in the Holy Name. Srila Prabhupada's purports of the Bhagavata reflects this faith strongly. Whenever Prabhupada gets a chance or good reason for, he

quotes the full Mahamantra in its purports just to make sure his readers get the point of the importance of the Holy Name and that they get the benefit of reading it.

In the early days of ISKCON, Sankirtana was the whole program; chanting the Holy Names in the streets for many hours every day. Nowadays, Kirtana and Mantra singing has become quite popular in the western world, especially among yoga circles. But it was actually Srila Prabhupada who introduced the chanting of mantras, especially the maha mantra in the western world. He fulfilled the prophecy that the Holy Names of the Lord will be chanted in `every town and village`.

Srila Prabhupada also emphasized that among all instructions he gave to us, the most important is to chant Hare Krishna. Chanting was also Srila Prabhupada's main Motto that he promoted „Chant Hare Krishna and be happy!“

Behind Srila Prabhupadas enthusiasm to spread the Holy Name was not only the Instruction of his Spiritual Master to do so, but also deep personal realizations how people suffer in this world without Krishna Consciousness. In other words, Srila Prabhupada shared the Holy Name with everyone out of enormous compassion. This jiva daya, compassion for others is the driving force behind a true preacher. Such a pure devotee of the Lord just can't tolerate to see the suffering of others. He is para-dukha-dukhi, unhappy seeing the suffering of others and therefore feels a strong desire to help them.

As followers of Srila Prabhupada we have to absorb this mood of compassion and this kind of faith in the Holy Name. Faith in the Holy Name as the best means to help others includes two aspects: Our personal practice and the preaching work. We can not call ourselves followers of Srila Prabhupada without doing our part to spread the Holy Name. Preaching is part of our life, it is very essential for our own spiritual growth and is what will attract Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhus mercy. At the same time, we can only give what we have. The more purity we develop ourselves the more people we can reach.

What can we learn from the story of Ajamila for our own practice? It can give us a lot of faith and conviction that this process of chanting has the power to purify us!

Srila Sukadeva Goswami points out that:

„While suffering at the time of death, Ajāmila chanted the holy name of the Lord, and although the chanting was directed toward his son, he nevertheless returned home, back to Godhead. Therefore if one faithfully and inoffensively chants the holy name of the Lord, where is the doubt that he will return to Godhead?“ 6.2.49

In other words:

Ajamila chanted without faith.

What will happen if one chants with faith?

Ajamila chanted while dying.

What will happen if one chants while living?

Ajamila chanted to indicate his son.

What will happen if one chants to indicate Lord?

Ajamila was most sinful.

What will happen if a sinless person chants?

An inspiring meditation I felt!

Certainly, one who through out his life chants the Holy Name in a spirit of pleasing Krishna will attain the highest perfection. There is not doubts about this!

And in regard of preaching, reading Srila Prabhupadas books makes it very clear that he wanted us to continue his work. For that we have to become saintly personalities ourselves in order to effectively convince others to follow the same path:

„Even by a little association with devotees, the conditioned soul can get out of this miserable material condition. This Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is therefore trying to give everyone a chance to associate with saintly people. Therefore all the members of this Kṛṣṇa consciousness society must themselves be perfect sādhus in order to give a chance to fallen conditioned souls. This is the best humanitarian work.“ 5.14.38

The urgency and importance of preaching can be understood by the following words of Srila Prabhupada, who says that we insist that everyone should join this chanting:

„Although unfortunate people also get this opportunity (sadhu sanga) , due to their great misfortune they cannot take shelter of pure devotees, and consequently they continuously suffer. Nonetheless, this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement insists that everyone take to this path by adopting the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra. The preachers of Kṛṣṇa consciousness go from door to door to inform people how they can be relieved from the miserable conditions of material life.“ - 5.14.39

We conclude this essay with a request of Srila Prabhupada to all of us to sacrifice our lives for the greater cause of Krishna Consciousness. As mentioned in the beginning, this Sankirtana Movement is the most auspicious activity in the entire universe (tasmāt saṅkīrtanaṁ viṣṇor jagan-maṅgalam) therefore one should be ready to dedicate oneself fully to this mission:

„The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement needs many exalted, learned persons who will sacrifice their lives to revive God consciousness throughout the world. We therefore invite all men and women advanced in knowledge to join the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement and sacrifice their lives for the great cause of reviving the God consciousness of human society.“

Hari Om Tat Sat, Hare Krishna!

Krishna Premarupa Dasa, Vrindavana, October 21, 2019