

Why Chant the *Hanuman Chalisa*?

In 1996, I visited Maharaj-ji's temple at Kainchi. At the time, one of his very old great devotees, Shri Kehar Singh, was also staying there. I spent many hours talking and sitting with “Poppa,” as he was called. As I was getting ready to leave for America, he gave me his blessings and a bit of advice. He asked me if I knew why we sing the *Chalisa*. I said, “To praise Hanuman.” He asked me if I thought that Hanuman needed me to praise him. “Of course not,” I said.

Then he explained, “Even as a child, Hanuman had such strength and was so mischievous that he would cause havoc all around. One day, his playfulness had been disturbing a saint during his worship. The saint lived many miles away in the jungle, but Hanuman was throwing things around, as a child will do, and something landed in the saint's hermitage. So he cursed Hanuman that he would not remember his strength unless he was reminded.”

We sing the *Chalisa* to remind Hanuman of who he is. In the very last verse, we ask him to come live in our hearts. It's not necessary to ask Hanuman for anything, for he knows all. But as human beings, we honor and express the longing of our hearts, recognizing our predicament—that we are stuck in the feeling of separateness. This reaching out destroys the sense of distance from the Beloved. Hanuman is the “knower of all hearts” and lives only to serve God within us and prepare us to live fully in the spirit. His entrance into our lives brings about the fulfillment of every desire.

Many people fantasize about going off to a cave somewhere, far away from “the world,” where they imagine they will find peace of mind and live in some state of bliss. But the truth is that the cause of our unhappiness lies within our own hearts, so no matter where we go, we take it with us. That's the bad news, but it's also the good news. If it is true, it means that everything we see in the supposed outer world is really a reflection of—or a reaction to—our own state of being. If we look around and see anger, fear, and suffering of all kinds, it is the result of the *way* we see, not *what* we see. Of course, horrible conditions exist, but being stuck on a superficial level, we can't see what underlies them: the vast presence in which all things have their existence. It is because of this incomplete way of seeing that each of us suffers in our own personal way.

Someone once asked Baba Nityananda if he felt pain. He said, “Yes, but not the way that you do.” The great saints feel all the suffering in the world, but, as Sharon Salzberg says, their hearts are “as wide as the world,” wide enough to hold suffering and transform it into compassion and love for all beings. This is where all of us are headed. But how do we get there?

The way we live these days doesn't allow much time or space for spiritual practice. We are always rushing around, busy with work, family responsibilities, and our own

fascination with the “stuff” of this world. We are floating down the stream of life without a way to get to the shore. Our own habits and desires conspire with our negative emotional attachments to keep us locked out of our own hearts. Even if we have the desire to do some kind of spiritual practice, the *vasanas*, or tendencies of our minds, keep us spinning around, preventing us from finding any peace.

In a bhajan, Bhimsen Joshi sings:
Oh Lord, I have done pilgrimage to all the holy places,
But when I do puja, all I see is my desires.
How will I ever cross this ocean of life?
I wash Krishna’s feet in my heart,
But I don’t listen to what anyone tells me.
Let me always stay at your feet.

Where and how can we take refuge at those feet? The *Hanuman Chalisa* is chanted specifically to clean the mirror of our hearts so we can come into direct contact with the grace of Hanuman. His river of grace flows into our nearly dried-up stream and fills it with the water of life, awakening us to the awareness of Ram’s (God’s) presence within. This is when our hearts truly come alive. Once the waters of two rivers mingle, they can never be separated.

Taking refuge is a subtle and important concept. When we sincerely take refuge in a “higher power,” it is an implicit recognition that we need help. More than that, it is the recognition that help *is* available. This is the beginning of developing real faith—not blind faith, but faith based on our own experience. It is opening to the realization that things are not the way we think they are, and that someone is there to help us—someone who knows what is to be known.

Hanuman is that Mahadeva (the Great Lord),
Mahakala (the Cosmic Nature of Time),
The eternal goodness,
The blissful one who bestows liberation,
Allowing seekers to merge with him and attain his state,
As well as bestowing the enjoyment of all one’s cherished objects of desire.

The *Chalisa* invites Hanuman to come, but we are not always ready for him. We don’t believe it could happen—that so much love could come to live in us. Hanuman brings with him all the beautiful qualities of strength and gentleness, courage and fearlessness, love and compassion. More than that, he throws out all our old moldy furniture: all the unwashed pots and pans, all the old dirty clothes piled up in the corner, all our stuff, our selfish little secrets, and all we hide from ourselves and others—all the mold and dirt we have gotten used to living with! He doesn’t give us time to clean up for him—he does the housecleaning himself, going from room to room throwing stuff out the windows, as we follow him around and say, “Oh no, not that too!”

Once Hanuman has moved in, then we are truly ready to begin the practice of repeating the Divine Name: Ram. The Name is a mystery. It is said that God and His Name are not different. This is not the simple mechanical repetition of sounds, but a deep and ancient path to Realization. It is the transmission of awareness of the presence of God within us.

Maharaj-ji was continuously uttering “Ram, Ram . . .” Even while talking, he could be seen moving his thumb continuously around his finger as if repeating a mantra. At times he became so engrossed that he appeared to be lost in himself. He often said, “Ram’s form left this world, Krishna’s form left this world, but the Name stays. By reciting His Name everything is achieved,” and shaking his head, he reiterated, “Everything is achieved.”

Someone once asked Maharaj-ji, “Isn’t it hypocritical to worship God when you are not sincere in your devotion?” Baba (Maharaj-ji was referred to as Baba or Baba-ji, as well) answered, “If you can’t do it with true feeling and you don’t want to otherwise, what will you do then? Something is better than nothing. To begin with, one may not be entirely sincere, but in due course of time, the thoughts get purified and the honesty of intention comes by itself. Can anyone have the vision of God with naked eyes? One must have divine sight to visualize Him, and a person only gets it after the purification of thoughts. For this, a pious life, bhajan, and spiritual practice are essential. Go on reciting Ram, and one day the true call for Ram will come out and you will be redeemed.” According to Baba, one true recitation of the Name of Ram from the heart was equal to countless recitations otherwise.

Saints from almost every tradition talk about the power of the Name.

Shirdi Sai Baba said: “Saints testify that in this Name resides the power of the presence of God . . . Beginning with simple repetition, gradually but inevitably, the Divine Power, which is hidden in it, is disclosed and takes on the character of a ceaseless uplifting of the heart, which persists through the distractions of the surface life.

Ramana Maharshi said: “When singing the Divine Name becomes continuous, all other thoughts cease and one is in one’s real nature, which is invocation or absorption. We turn our minds outwards to things of the world and are therefore not aware that our real nature is always invocation. “

Sri Ramakrishna said: “Each and every revealed Name of the One Reality possesses irresistibly sanctifying power. Even if the energy of the Divine Name does not produce immediate results, its repetition will eventually be fruitful—like a seed fallen on the roof of a deserted house which crumbles over decades, finally enabling the germinated seed to take root. The conventional world and the conventional self are this disintegrating old structure. “

Maharaj-ji often talked to his devotees about the Name.

Kishan Lal Sah often visited Kainchi to have Maharaj-ji's *darshan*. His devotion was such that he looked upon Maharaj-ji as God. In spite of his faith, he was experiencing some depression. It happens on the spiritual path that a devotee sometimes finds himself feeling separated from God. He was disturbed by the evil he saw in the world and by the lack of his own spiritual progress.

As he approached Maharaj-ji and bowed, Maharaj-ji began to speak to his thoughts: "You see others trapped by Maya (illusion). Narada and Bharata were trapped by Maya. These great sages were trapped by it, so what to say about others?"

Kishan Lal thought he should ask about Maya, but before he spoke, Baba said: "This temple and whatever is seen by the human eye is illusion. What can you do about it? Delusion makes everything look real."

Kishan thought to himself that there must be a way to be free of Maya, so Baba said, "Attachment is only dispelled by His Grace."

Kishan thought, "How can we obtain His Grace?"

Baba-ji said, "Constant repetition of God's Name, with or without devotional feeling (*bhava*), even in anger or lethargy, brings out His grace in the form of blessedness (*mangal*) all around. There is no room for any doubt about it."⁴

At the deepest level, the names of God are really our own true Name, the name of our own true nature. They are the names of the deepest place within us. As we turn and move towards that place, we can begin to let go of and free ourselves from obsessive, destructive, negative ways of thinking about ourselves and others.

When I was learning the *Hanumat Stavan* (which can be found on CD 2), I came across this line: "I meditate upon Hanuman, with ruddy face and a body that glows like a mountain of gold, who can bestow all boons and fulfill all desires, and who resides under the Parijata tree, his eyes always red with tears of love for Sri Ram." It was an eye-opener for me. It means that whenever Hanuman is not busy doing special service to Ram, he is lost in love. It is through the power of his attachment to the Name of Ram, to this love, that he is freed from any attachment to the things of this world: fame and shame, loss and gain, love and hate, fear and longing.

Hanuman is fully immersed in the Name of Ram. Wherever he is, Ram's Name will be there. Wherever Ram's Name is, there can be no room for unhappiness. It's impossible for us to imagine what this will be like. Only those who know, know. This is why we

chant the *Hanuman Chalisa*. Out of our darkness we call for the light, never imagining that it will come. We keep calling with all our heart and then, finally, just when we think we can't take any more, the first rays of the dawn's light reach our hungry eyes. Amazing Grace! Hanuman's light is brighter than a million suns; his face is colored with all the beauty in this world. When he arrives, all our suffering is destroyed; we have reached the path and our way is open before us, bathed in the light of Love.