

Hanuman chalisa

Yagna by Pujya Swami Ishwarananda

This is a humble attempt to write down some of the highlights from the material covered in *Pujya Swami Ishwaranandaji's yagna* last weekend (4/18/08 through 4/20/08) at the San Gabriel Balavihar. Many words of spiritual wisdom flowed from the master throughout the lectures, and some of these have been collected herein. The ideas and themes have been rearranged and gathered under appropriate headings for convenience. We assume that the reader has a copy of the wonderful commentary of Hanuman chalisa by *Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayanandaji*. Material which can be found in that book is not repeated here. Mentioned in this writeup are many instances and stories from the Ramayana. They are not necessarily in chronological order, but are primarily meant to demonstrate a virtue or a principle. The first day's material is divided into three parts: (1) Introduction and historic perspective, (2) Hanuman the vaanara, and (3) general remarks on spiritual development. The second day's material is almost entirely on Hanuman's greatness. The third day's material is divided into two parts, (1) Hanuman and Rama, and (2) remarks on spiritual practices for all sadhakas. For slokas I have not used diacritical marks to indicate the pronunciation. Where the pronunciation is not clear, appropriate original texts must be referred to.



San Gabriel Balavihar, Chinmaya Mission, LA

First day of the yagna

1.1. Introduction and historic perspective

Tulsidasji is the author of *Ramcharitmanas*, which is Ramayana written in *Audhi* (a variation of Hindi). The Hanuman chalisa is his composition. Tulsidas is as celebrated as Sankara who established Advaita firmly in Bharat, and wrote commentaries on many of the Upanishads. It is important to understand these contributions in the appropriate historical context.

1. ***The days of karma kanda.*** Before the days of Sankara, most of the followers of the Indian scriptures were following only the Karma kanda, which is the ritualistic part of the vedas. This part has elaborate instructions for rituals, chanting, and so forth. This karma part is similar to rajasic activity with certain goals in mind such as achievement of fame, accumulation of wealth, strength, and so on. People absorbed in such rituals often missed the inner purpose of these rituals. They were engrossed completely in the outer activities (chanting, decoration, sacrificial rites, yangas, etc.).
2. ***Adi Sankara's influence.*** Adi Sankaracharya felt unsatisfied with the people of his time because they never went beyond the rituals. They never reflected on the deeper meanings. So, Sankara emphasized the path of knowledge (jnana marga). He wrote commentaries on the twelve major Upanishads. The Upanishads emphasize the supreme Self as the formless God (Brahman). Advaita vedanta says that this formless God is the substratum which forms our consciousness. The highest happiness lies in realizing this oneness with the supreme Brahman. Sankara emphasized this Advaita philosophy. Instead of looking for happiness in outside objects and activities let us look within, he said. Keep working, but change the purpose. Change the attitude. Be in the present moment and work for the sake of work, and do not be obsessed with the final goal. Do not work to gratify the ego, but work for the sake of work. Thus, he advised a change of mindset when doing work. Vedanta is not against work, only a change of mindset is suggested. Being in the present moment goes a long way. For example, during the weekdays do not think about weekends, but enjoy the work. During weekends do not keep thinking about Monday but enjoy the weekend moments.
3. ***Dry vedanta without bhakti.*** This vedantic approach began to take roots starting from the 8th century. But slowly it became a separate intellectual pursuit in itself. It became a dry subject where people conduct debates and arguments for the sake of establishing intellectual superiority. So this path was misused by people in the sense that it again served to gratify people's ego but in a different way. The original purpose of jnana was therefore forgotten.
4. ***The bhakti movement.*** This went on for a while. Clearly a major change of emphasis was needed

here. It is during this phase that the bhakti movement started taking place (during the 13th–14th centuries). Saints like Tulsidas and Surdas started making a difference. Tulsidas rewrote the Ramayana to emphasize bhakti. He wrote it in Audhi which was a very easy language to follow. He evoked bhakti in the minds of people by singing the glories of Rama. The original Ramayana which was written by Valmiki many centuries ago was in Sanskrit and emphasized dharma and virtues. Rama is portrayed as someone who performs karma (actions) with the right attitude, following the path of dharma. Valmiki Ramayana is like *Itihasa* (“iti-ha-asau,” or “this is how it happened”). He reported the story as is. Tulsidas retold the story emphasizing bhakti.

5. **Importance of bhakti.** The emotion of bhakti is absolutely essential for Self Realization. Dry intellect, without a sense of joy, is not enough. The enjoyment of knowledge comes from bhakti which also guards against pampering of the ego through intellectual achievements.
6. **Nature of bhakti.** What is the nature of bhakti? Loving God, performing puja, listening to stories and glories of God, enjoying the nature of the Self, revelling in establishment of Self, contemplation of Self, all these are different manifestations of bhakti, and create more bhakti.



7. **Tulsidasa and Ramayana.** Tulsidasa wrote the famous Hanuman chalisa to emphasize the devotion of Hanuman to Rama and also emphasize the many virtues of Hanuman. Both Tulsidasa and Valmiki emphasize the glory of Rama during the first half of Ramayana, and the glory of Hanuman during the second half. Tulsidasa says *bhakti is when the Lord recognizes you*. “Raghupati priya bhaktam”. There is a difference between you knowing the President and the President knowing you. There is a difference between you recognizing God and God recognizing you.
8. **Today we are weakened by weekends.** Today most people still live the karma kanda life. They are entirely absorbed in karma all week, and wait for the weekend to socialize and relax. All that happens is that

they get further weakened during weekends, because they only worry about the forthcoming week on weekends.

9. ***The merchant who never could forget work.*** There is this story about a merchant and his three sons. The sons were old enough and helped him in the shop. The merchant got old and was very sick. When he was in his death bed, he called out to his first son. “I am here, father”, said the first son and came in front of him. Then the merchant called out to his second son. “I am here, father”, said the second son and came in front of him. Then the merchant called out to his third son. “I am here, father”, said the third son and came in front of him. “Wait a minute, who is taking care of the shop then?” yelled the dying merchant.



1.2. Hanuman the vaanara

Why is Hanuman so great? His character had many flavors (sakala gunas). He was not just a devotee like Sabari, nor just a good brother like Bharata or Lakshmana. He was all of this. He was also a jnanai. He was incomparable.

1. ***Humility.*** Hanumanji's most explicitly noticeable virtue was humility. Indeed, what cannot be achieved with humility!
2. ***The great monkey.*** He was a vaanara. Not a mere monkey but “man ki” (of the mind). In fact the mind itself is comparable to a monkey because it jumps from thought to thought. Hanuman was no ordinary monkey. As far as strength and virtues go he was superior to all humans. He was faster than the mind. He was the most beloved of all Rama's devotees. Only Hanuman could help at certain moments in the battlefield when even Rama and Lakshmana fell down unconscious.

3. **Vayu the father.** Hanuman was born to Vayu, the wind God. (Some of the other vaanaras were also children of the gods. Vali was the son of Indra and Sugriva the son of Sun.) We cannot live without the benefits that arise out of the wind. Similarly Rama could not have achieved all he wanted to, without Hanuman's devotion and help. Today we take the wind god for granted. We try to pollute the air as much as possible. We almost seem to want to ensure that the next generation will not be able to use the atmosphere effectively!
4. **Childhood episode.** "Hanu" means "chin". When Hanuman was a child he was hit in the chin by Indra's vajraayuta, and the swelling remained and made a permanent change to his appearance. This incident happened because the child Hanuman swallowed the Sun thinking that it was a fruit, and the world became dark. The devas approached Indra, and he had to release the sun by hitting Hanuman's chin. The name "Hanuman" arose from this episode.
5. **Origin of Hanuman's strength.** Vayu, Hanuman's father became angry when he heard that Hanuman was hit by Indra. "You hit my son just for swallowing the Sun?", was his response. He withdrew air. The devas, Indra, and all the Gods came and begged him to restore it. Vayu demanded that the devas and the Gods give Hanuman a lot of power if the air had to be restored to the public. Everyone consented. Brahma said, "Hanuman will live as long as I do". Vishnu said, "He will be my greatest devotee." Fire said "you will never be burnt by fire". That is how Hanuman was able to burn Lanka without getting burnt himself. Vayu said, "Hanuman will be faster than me". So Hanuman became very powerful.
6. **But Hanuman forgets!** The child Hanuman, bestowed with so much power, became very naughty. He would often play pranks and irritate people including rishis. He once dragged an elephant and a tiger and tied them to two trees outside the hermitage of a yogi, knocked on the door and ran away. The yogi opened the door and got a shock. He became very angry. Through his divine power he found out that it was Hanuman's prank and laid a curse upon him. He said that Hanuman would forget about his powers and that he would regain strength only when he was reminded by another member of his clan. That is why Hanuman did not realize his own ability to cross the ocean until his clan reminded him of his own strength.

1.3. Remarks on spiritual development

A number of points on spiritual development emerged during the course of the first day of the yagna. Some of these are collected below for coherent reading.

1. **The role of a guru.** In spiritual life the role of a Guru is very important. Not just to learn, but to apply what is learnt in real life. This is not like technical knowledge which can be learnt without a Guru. Even Sankara stresses the importance of the Guru in the Bhaja Govindam:

*Guru charanaambuja nirbhara bhaktaha, samsaaraadachi raatbhava muktaha
Sendirya maanasa niyamaa devam, drakshyasi nijahridayastham devam (31)*

Meaning. “O devotee of the lotus feet of the teacher! May you become liberated soon from the samsara through the discipline of the sense organs and the mind. You will come to experience the Lord that dwells in your own heart.”

2. **Masterpieces never die.** When Swami Chinmayananda attained mahasamdhi, many of his devotees were heartbroken. Some of them went to Swami Brahmananda for comfort, and He said “The Master may have left but the masterpieces are still here!” If we are great it is because of the greatness of the Master flowing through us. It is the association with the wise that makes us respectable. Even the crescent moon derives its respect from the fact that it rests securely on Lord Shiva’s matted locks.
3. **Vasanas.** Our vasanas (latent tendencies accumulated from actions) are very strong and make the mind drift slowly even while we perform spiritual exercises. The level of vasanas depends on the nature of the devotee. In some it is like the smoke covering the fire, and only some mild effort is required to blow it away. In some it is like the dust on the mirror; considerable effort is required to wipe it off. In some it is like the womb covering the fetus. A great deal of effort is required to remove the covering. In Chap. 3 of the Bhagavat Gita, Lord Krishna says:

*Dhoom-naavriyate vahnir-yathaa-darsho malena cha
yatholben-aavrtto garbhas-thathaa tenedam-aavritam (3.38)*

Meaning. “As fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust, as an embryo by the womb, so this (wisdom) is enveloped by that (desire or anger).”

4. **Kleshas and the intellect.** Ravana had a strong intellect but did not apply it wisely. No matter how intellectual you are, there are certain kleshas (imperfections) that stand in the way. There are five imperfections mentioned in the scriptures. Avidya (ignorance), asmita (self centeredness), raga (desire), dvesa (likes and dislikes), and abhinivesa (attraction towards material things). It is the purpose of spiritual exercises to reduce the kleshas. Even in buddhism they list ten kleshas. Three physical kleshas (murder, theft, adultery), three mental kleshas (covetousness, malice, and scepticism), and four belonging to speech (lying, slander, abuse, and useless conversation).
5. **Purifying the mind.** Cleaning the mind is a continuous process. Make the mind tranquil, gentle, silent. This can be done only with continuous practice. Develop self control and purity of attitude. **Satsang**

(company of the virtuous and realized people) helps to remove the vasanas. More than anything else, continuous thought of God works the best.

Second day of the yagna

2.1. Hanuman's greatness

Tejas means spiritual valor. Hanuman's tejas came from his virtue and learning. He was on Arjuna's flag and could listen to the Bhagavat Gita directly from Lord Krishna, as it was taught to Arjuna. Hanuman's greatness issued out in his actions in many ways.

1. **Medhaashakti.** Medhaashakti is the power to retain what you read. Hanuman had great medhaashakti. It is not like speed-reading which is so fashionable today. What is important is what you are able to retain after reading something.
2. **Crash-course in Vedas.** Sun is the deity for the intellect, and moon is the deity for the mind. Hanuman went to the Sun and said "I want to learn all the four Vedas in 60 hours", and with Sun's help was able to do so! He wanted to give gurudakshina to the Sun. So, the sun god said "My son Sugreeva will be tortured by Vali. Go and be with him, and help him. Be his minister". This is how Hanuman became Sugriva's minister.
3. **Gift of speech.** Hanuman had great gift of the language. When he first met Rama, Hanuman was in the guise of a brahmin boy. When Rama describes this first meeting, he says "Not a single word uttered by this Brahmin boy is out of place". Every word was well chosen, economic, and sweet. We have to develop such sweetness of language by thinking about Hanuman's greatness. Hanuman's gift for speech is also evident when he meets Sita after the battle and describes how Lanka was conquered. He says "Owing to your glory Lanka has been conquered". It is Sita's steadfastness and faith on Rama, and unbending attitude towards Ravana that made Rama win the battle.
4. **Power of chanting.** The power of chanting comes from the metre (chandas) and the three swaras (svarita, udatta and anudatta). So, chanting the vedas with proper sound is very important. For example we chant the shikshavalli on graduation day with the proper intonation. This creates a certain agreeable impression in the mind of the student.



5. **Love for Rama.** Hanuman not only loved to praise Rama, he loved to hear praises of Rama. He often said “Let me remain in this body as long as there is Ramakatha going on”. That is why we always set up an asana for Hanuman when we talk about the glory of Rama.
6. **The best among servants.** There are three kinds of servants. The best kind of servant does much more than what he has been asked to do. The “medium variety” is one who does exactly what has been told. Just minimum. The worst kind is one who does not even do that. Hanuman was the best of the best.
7. **Praise from Sita.** About Hanuman’s abilities as a messenger Sita said, “You are the most virtuous messenger.” She said he was humble, simple, and sincere in what he does.
8. **Effect of praise.** When so praised Hanuman felt like a child praised by his mother. He felt proud and said, “Mother, I will now kill the rakshasis who held guard and tortured you here”. Sita said in reply, “No, they are not bad by themselves. They did what they did because of Ravana’s instructions. Now that Ravana is dead, these rakshasis will become good.” The truly great ones do not inflict injury on others, no matter how badly they have been treated.
9. **The hunter, the tiger, and the bear.** Some people inflict injury upon others even under the slightest provocation. There was a hunter who was once chased by a tiger. He climbed upon a tree but found that there was a huge bear sleeping in a branch above him. The tiger who could not climb waited patiently for a while, then said to the hunter, “While the bear is still asleep, why don’t you push him down?” The hunter thought it was a good idea and immediately pushed the bear. The bear woke

with a start, held on to another branch and escaped a fall. Now the tiger said to the bear, “Look, the hunter is our common enemy, so we are friends. Why don’t you push him down so I can kill him?” The bear said, “Sorry, I cannot inflict injury on another person like that.” The tiger said, “But the man tried to push you, remember?” The bear’s response was, “Sorry, I cannot go by what he did to me, I have to go by what I am supposed to do.” So the bear was more virtuous than the hunter.

10. ***Hanuman’s size.*** When Hanuman was crossing the ocean in search of Sita, he was stopped by Surasa, the sea monster who wanted him to enter her mouth. Hanuman made his body large, and complained that her mouth was too small. She made her mouth bigger, upon seeing which Hanuman made his body even bigger. This went on for a while, Surasa and Hanuman competing to get bigger and bigger. In the end Hanuman suddenly made his body tiny, quickly entered her mouth and came out safe and sound! So Surasa was very impressed, and she had to let him continue his journey. This story has a nice inner meaning. In life we often get into competition with others to establish our superiority. For example it can be a simple argument. We argue louder and louder, our intellects bringing up more and more points in favor of our position. Neither party is willing to yield an inch or give any credit to the other side. If you suddenly make yourself smaller, that is, reduce your ego and yield to the other person, how nice and well-received that will be! Saying “Yes, my friend, you are right about that! I overlooked this one particular point”, will suddenly ease the situation and help tremendously to contribute to happiness.
11. ***Reduce yourself to a zero.*** When Hanuman appeared in front of Sita for the first time, he did not want to be seen by the rakshasis who were guarding Sita. So he made his body tiny and chanted the name of Rama, until she was able to notice him. There is a deeper significance to this: you should make yourself small when appearing in front of the virtuous. So Hanuman always became small in front of Sita. When he offered to carry Sita back to Rama, she asked him how such a tiny monkey can carry a human. When questioned thus, he demonstrated to her immediately that he can make his body as large as he wanted to. Later when Hanuman met Rama to tell him that Sita has been successfully located, Rama asked “What did Sita say?”. In beautiful words Hanuman narrated all that he had heard from Sita. “Mother would not come back with me. She wanted to be rescued and brought back by you, and only by you my Lord!”
12. ***Vibishana and Hanuman.*** Hanuman’s humility is further demonstrated by the following incident. Vibishana wanted to move away from Ravana and join Rama’s camp. He asked Hanuman whether Rama would accept him or not. “All these days I have been dwelling in Ravana’s sinful land. Will Rama ever grace me with his friendship?” Hanuman said, “Look at me, a mere monkey! If Rama can shower

his grace on a tiny humble creature like me, will he not take you into His bosom! Surely he will accept you as a friend!” Thus assured, Vibishana was able to approach Rama.

13. ***Judge not in haste.*** When Vibishana finally approached Rama for friendship, everyone in Rama’s camp suspected. Everyone advised Rama not to trust Vibishana. But Hanuman was different. He said “Do not judge a person by face value or by the circumstances in which he was raised. Judge a person by his virtues”.
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Third day of the yagna

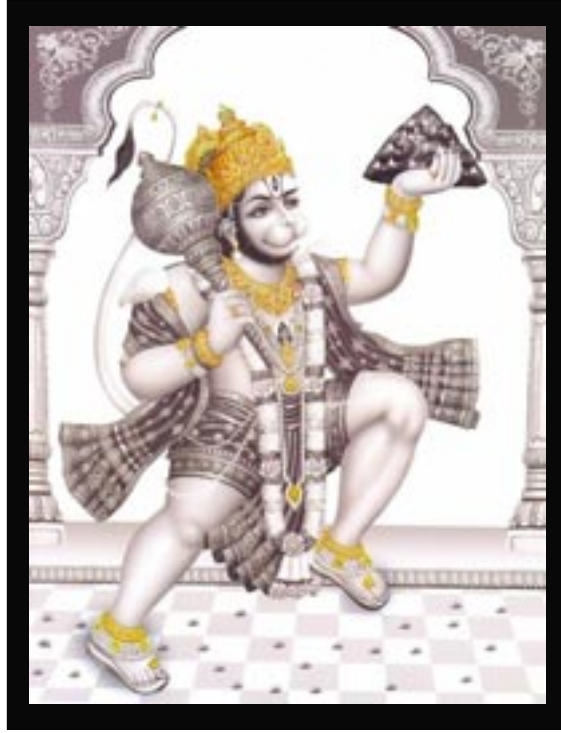
3.1. Hanuman and Rama

Mentioned below are further instances and stories from the Ramayana. They are not necessarily in chronological order, but are primarily meant to demonstrate a virtue or a principle.

1. ***Keep God’s name in your mouth.*** When Hanuman was ready to go looking for Sita, Rama gave him his ring and said “Show this to Sita. Then she will know you are indeed my messenger.” Hanuman kept the ring safely in his mouth. The significance is that if you have Rama’s name constantly in your mouth then all will be well. You will be successful. Even the most difficult task becomes easy, in fact a pleasure, when you have the Lord’s name in your mouth.
2. ***In search of Sita.*** In Valmiki Ramayana, when the vaanaras were in search of Sita, they were frustrated after many days of search. One day they were lying flat on the beach. They blamed Sugriva for putting them in this condition. Some said, “No, it was Hanuman who encouraged all this”. Some said, “No, it was Sita’s fault for following Rama when he came to the forest.” And so on it went, the blaming game, all the way back to Kaikeyi. After much deliberation it was decided that Hanuman would be sent across the ocean to find Sita. When Hanuman finally reached Sita she was almost getting ready to kill herself. He saved her just in time by presenting Rama’s ring. The rest of the story is of course well known.



3. **Hanuman temples.** Hanuman's greatness is such that it is possible to have a Hanuman temple without Rama but not vice versa. To get Rama's grace you first need Hanuman's grace. You go to Rama with Hanuman. "Rama is inaccessible without Hanuman's grace," says Tulsidas. Siddhabari has a huge statue of Hanuman. This was a very windy place, and they were determined to build an ashram here. Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda said, "First bring a Hanuman statue to stop the wind, and then build the ashram." So, that is how the ashram came to be.
4. **Carrying the sanjeevani.** Ravana was a very strong, dangerous, foe. He was dasamukha (ten faced). Not to be confused with dasaratha (whose chariot can travel in ten different directions). Dasaratha had ten controlled senses. Ravana had ten senses which were out of control. Look at the difference. Even if one of Ravana's heads was cut off, the other nine could create enough harm. Ravana made both Rama and Lakshmana unconscious. With Jambavan's advice, Hanuman brought the Sanjivani mountain which had the right mulikas to bring Rama, Lakshmana, and other soliders back to life. However, none of Ravana's soldiers were brought back to life because Ravana's orders were to throw the dead bodies of his soldiers into the ocean without delay.
5. **Rama and Bharata.** At the end of fourteen years when Rama was ready to return to Ayodhya, he sent Hanuman first. He said that Hanuman should go to Nandigram where Bharata was residing, and convey to him the message that Rama was arriving. "Watch Bharata's facial expression carefully, O Hanuman," Rama instructed. Even if there is the slightest trace of unhappiness on his face, I do not wish to take the kingdom back from him." Hanuman proceeded to Nandigram. As he conveyed the news of Rama's forthcoming arrival, Bharata's face was filled with joy and tears started flowing from his eyes. Cold tears of joy, not hot tears of anguish. This is narrated only in the Valmiki Ramayana.



3.2. Spiritual practices for all sadhakas

A number of ideas relating to spiritual practice were mentioned on the third day of the yagna. Some of these are collected below.

1. **Types of practice.** We can do puja, japa, or contemplation. When we do puja, all parts of the body are involved. In japa the mind and lips are involved the most. In contemplation it is only the mind. In meditation it is pure consciousness. Even the mind is stopped. So, as we make progress, it becomes more and more subtle. Ramana Maharshi says in the Upadesa saram:

*Kaavyavaan mana kaaryam uttamam,
Poojanam japaschintanam kramaat (4)*

Meaning. “Japa (which uses speech) is superior to puja (which uses bodily actions), and contemplation (which uses the mind) is superior to japa.” Progressing from one to the other is like learning to ride a tricycle, then a bicycle, and then a unicycle.

2. **Happiness and the Self.** It is human nature to go outwards, and seek happiness in material things outside. But what we really love is our own Self. It is a pity that we do not have this Self-knowledge. Being with the Self is happiness, and “not being with the Self” is unhappiness. When we go out seeking something, say money or fame and get it, we are temporarily happy because the mind temporarily stops going out, and there is no mental agitation. We are content to abide in the Self, very temporarily, without even knowing it. But soon another desire comes, and tears us away from the Self. Again unhappiness begins. What we already have in possession soon loses the power to make us happy, and we want more. It appears that the human mind is always “wanting to want” more than “wanting to enjoy what it has”.
3. **Matter matters not.** Material things do not have the power to make us truly happy. In fact, losing something that you hankered for and earned will only make you more unhappy than not having it in the first place.
4. **Emotions.** Negative emotions take us away from the Self and positive emotions bring us closer to the Self. If you unconditionally, always, abide in Self then these external conditions do not matter at all.
5. **Thought versus awareness.** Thoughts are nothing but perturbations of pure awareness (consciousness). Awareness undisturbed by thoughts is happiness. Go beyond thoughts, go beyond the need to create thoughts. Yogis realize this true happiness and they want to bring others also close to this blissful state. In Chapter 6 of the Bhagavat Gita Lord Krishna says this:

Yato yato nischarati, manschanchalam asthiram
Tatas tato niyam yaitad, atmameva vasam nayet (6.26)

Meaning. “From whatever cause the restless and the unsteady mind wanders away, from that let him restrain it, and bring it back to be under the control of the Self alone.”
6. **Raamras.** Mere yogic power is not enough. Such power, combined with Raamras is powerful. When asked who he was, Hanuman once said, “From the point of view of the body I am Hanuman. From the point of view of the mind I am a servant of Rama, and from the point of view of the Self, I *am* one with Rama.”
7. **God am I.** The most difficult task is to get the recognition that God is nothing but you. Your Self is God. All the kleshas arise only for those who are identified with their body and mind. Lord Krishna says in the seventh chapter of the Gita:

Bahunaam janmanaam ante, jnanavaanman prapadyate
Vaasudeva sarvam iti, samahaatma su durlabhaha (7.19)

Meaning. “At the end of many births the wise one comes to Me, realizing that all this is Vasudeva (the innermost Self); such a great soul (Mahaatma) is very hard to find.”

8. **Know your type.** For body-identified people the attitude of service (daasa bhaava) is a helpful practice. For mind-identified people singing the glory of God (bhakti bhaava) is helpful. Meditation helps for people identified with the intellect.
9. **Enthusiam is real prosperity.** Perform your spiritual practice without losing enthusiam, the Gita says. Enthusiasm is the key to everything. Hanuman never lost his enthusiam during the strenuous process of looking for Sita. Real prosperity is to keep an enthusiastic attitude continuously. Any task will be easy if it is done with enthisiiasm. Think big, and do big. Whatever you need to do, do it with enthusiam and dedicate it to God.

Notes taken and respectfully distributed by

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In His service.



Om Shantih Shantih Shantih