Harmonium

The harmonium is a classical Indian instrument that we use in kīrtana. It is made out of wood, and has many reeds that are used for making the sounds. You can play many notes on the harmonium.

Usually, the person who leads also plays the harmonium, and he makes sound by pumping air into the harmonium. The air comes out of the reeds making the sound. We start by learning the ‘Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Da, Ni, Sa’ and we sing while we play that.
After some time, we learn some melodies to play for kīrtana. Kīrtana is very important. Caitanya Mahāprabhu said that ‘harer nāma harer nāma harer nāma eva kevalāṁ kalau nāsty eva nāsty eva nāsty eva gatīr anyathā’—there is no other way no other way no other way to get out of the material world during Kali-Yuga than chanting the lord’s holy names. ‘Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare’. I want to play the harmonium in kīrtana so that I can please Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

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On Tolerance

All Glories to Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Madana Mohana, I am lame and ill-advised, yet They’re my directors, and Their lotus feet mean everything to me.

Tolerance is the ability to endure without adverse reactions. Tolerance means that you are undisturbed. If you are not disturbed you can focus, and become steady. We have to tolerate suffering. One of the characteristics of a sādhu is tolerance, everyone has to tolerate, but a sādhu’s tolerance and an ordinary man’s tolerance are different. This is because the sādhu knows that he is not the body. Since he has no attachment to the body, he is indifferent to its sufferings.

A tolerant person doesn’t make excuses, he doesn’t need to. Since a tolerant person is not overwhelmed by any circumstances, he is capable of transcending them; a tolerant person expects very little, so he is not disappointed when things don’t work his way.

If you are humble, it is very easy to tolerate, even as much as if you are not humble it is not possible to tolerate; if you are not humble, and try to tolerate, you will break. Tolerance is often compared to a tree, it stands through everything—enduring—for a long time, but in a storm, when there is continuous pressure, and the tree, all firm, refuses to bend, it breaks. On the other hand, the grass, often compared to humility, bends and can last through the storm. If a person tried
tolerating someone or something and wasn't humble, he wouldn’t be able to; the
tolerance would be forced and unnatural. If a person is humble though, the
tolerance would manifest naturally; being humble means realizing your true
nature and duty, and when the person realizes how insignificant he is, and how
he should serve the servants of the servants of Kṛṣṇa, tolerance will become as
inherent to his nature as humility, none of it will have to be forced—and of course,
you can’t develop humility without tolerance, they go hand-in-hand.

The way to develop both is by associating with devotees who have those qualities, association gives us the qualities of the other person. If you are tolerant and humble it will be natural for you to offer respect to others and expect nothing, after all, offering respect to others is an off-shoot of humility, and expecting nothing an off-shoot of tolerance. You will be able to chant the holy names of the Lord constantly—that is—perfection because if you can chant the holy names constantly you will be able to get rid of all your anarthas, and develop love for Kṛṣṇa. There is a low chance of committing offenses since most of our offenses are based on the lack of those two qualities. With humility and tolerance, you will be able to get the blessings of the Vaiṣṇavas since you will be so pleasant to be around, and probably be engaged in their service. We need to always remember Kṛṣṇa and never forget Him; and these qualities can help us chant constantly, as Mahāprabhu says, which makes them essential for any serious devotee to cultivate, and therefore we must endeavor to cultivate them.

Hare Kṛṣṇa
Why we engage in Deity Worship

Throughout our spiritual life, we have always heard that we should constantly be engaged in devotional service and stay Kṛṣṇa conscious, but how is it possible? We have so many responsibilities to do to maintain ourselves and our families. There is no way we can be in the temples the whole day. Yet there is no need for that; we can live normal lives and still be performing devotional service. We just need to live according to the pañcāṅga-pūjā.

Pañcāṅga-pūjā are the five aspects of deity worship by understanding and applying which one can connect his whole day in the service of the Lord. The first aspect of pañcāṅga-pūjā is called abhigamana or approaching the temple. This refers to all the activities we do till the end of maṅgala āratī; such as bathing, putting tilak on, cleaning the temple, etc.

The second part is upādāna, gathering articles for worship. This is the time you prepare everything for the pūjā itself (saṁbandha): setting up your table with bhoga, flowers, tulasī, and other paraphernalia.

After all the items are in place, we can start the third aspect ‘yoga’ preparing the mind and consciousness for the pūjā. This is what the mānasa-pūjā is for, dhyāna or meditation on the Lord.

Only when the previous three aspects are properly done can one start the fourth one ‘ījya’ the worship itself.
The fifth aspect ‘svādhya’ is there to develop a proper attitude for devotional service through the following śādhanā, hearing Kṛṣṇa-kathā, chanting the Holy Name, receiving guests, studying śāstra, living in the dhāma, and many other activities that cultivate our understanding and the mood of pūjā. In this way, by structuring our lives according to pańcāṅga-pūjā every hour in our day will be directly connected to the service of the Lord, which will help us attain our ultimate goal of always remembering Kṛṣṇa and never forgetting Him.

Hare Kṛṣṇa

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THE WORLD TODAY

Take a look at the world around us. It’s a mess.

Look at the world’s politics, at the economy, the healthcare system, the average person’s lifestyle. These have all been steadily decreasing over the past few decades. But yet, in the last year and a half, they went plummeting at a speed never seen before. We attribute this to many things—many different problems caused by our Karma.

We tend to analyze their causes and effects hoping to fix the problematic situation we are in; but unfortunately, we can only temporarily fix the situation. The root of the problem remains—just like a weed—as long as the root remains in the ground, it’s only a matter of time until it emerges once again.

Let’s take into consideration, it is true that in the unlikely event of an absolute, worldwide peace, the issues we see nowadays would be mostly removed; if we fix our bad influences on the earth, we will surely improve the situation of the world, but it will not fix the ultimate problem, the first-ever problem we as
living entities have ever encountered. And what problem was that? We wanted to enjoy separately from Kṛṣṇa.

This was the first mistake we made—to decide to come to the material world in the first place. And as long as we continue to live in the material world, as is described in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, there is danger at every step.

So, we may fix problems. We may fix the situation and our interactions. But problems will continue to pop up, and instead of trying to patch up the problems and struggle to live in this miserable place, why don’t we move on to someplace better? The spiritual world, the only place where we, being sad-cid-ānanda, can be truly happy, by being engaged in the eternal devotional service of Śrī Śrī Rādhā Kṛṣṇa.

This is the only way we can truly save ourselves from this predicament.

Hare Kṛṣṇa

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Why Holy Places?

There are many places of pilgrimage. These places are visited by thousands and thousands of people. But why do they travel such long ways just to get to these holy places? Why are they so important and of such high value to the people?

Holy places are places where the Lord and his devotees appeared and performed pastimes, so they are of utmost importance and spiritually very beneficial. Devotees of the Lord visit these holy places to receive the mercy of the Lord for their progress in their spiritual life. Some also go for getting material benefits not realizing the importance and the value of these places.
The belief in God is the pre-eminent nature of the living entity. So, when you know that God Himself has come to this material world then why wouldn’t you take this mercy and get the most of these holy places where the Lord Himself along with His pure devotees appeared? This is why it is so important to people.

We hear many times that holy places are non-different from others like Śrīdhāma Māyāpura is non-different from Śrī Vrindāvana Dhāma, so why do people go to both of them? This is explained in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam that one should not visit the different holy places seeing them as different and one having something the other doesn’t, but rather to get the association of the devotees in that holy place. This should be the mood.

There are also cases where people are living in the holy places but not taking advantage of them and this is as good as not being in the holy place. If one somehow gets the amazing mercy to be in a holy place, then he should try his best to take advantage of the holy place and take it as mercy given by the Lord and His devotees for his spiritual progress. There might also be some who are not physically in a holy place but their minds are absorbed in the holy place and so they get the same benefit and mercy as being in the holy Dhāma.

The Gurukula Parikramā Experience

In the Gurukula we have the amazing opportunity to be in Śrīdhāma Māyāpura. We perform the Navadvīpa Maṇḍala Parikramā every year before the festival of Gaura-Pūrṇimā and this Parikramā shows us the places of the Lord's pastimes and how fortunate we are and also sets our mind to be focused on Lord Gauraṅga and thus we can serve Him throughout the festival and especially on the day of Gaura Pūrṇimā.

We also have a yearly Parikramā to different places in India. Sometimes we go to North India and visit the holy places there like Jaipur, Udaipur, etc, and
sometimes to South India to places like Śrīraṅgam, Tirupati, Ahobilam, etc, and we have a very nice time visiting these places and learning about them.

We also do the Vraja Maṇḍala Parikramā. This Parikramā is one of the best as you get the full experience and get the association of the Vrajavāsīs. In this Parikramā we walk with very few items and go begging from house to house to get our prasādam, we find shelter to sleep and continue the next way, and like this, we depend on Kṛṣṇa, and the experience is a very rare one.

By visiting these holy places and taking advantage of them, you are very much focused on the Lord, and learning about the pastimes never gets old but rather more and more relish-able as you hear more and this got me very spiritually aware and really helped me understand the Lord a bit more every time and helped me in my spiritual progress immensely.

I encourage everybody to go to these holy places which are rarely attainable even for the demigods and take full advantage of them. You have been given this wonderful opportunity to help you in your spiritual life so take it while it is available, as you never know when you will get this amazing opportunity again.

Hare Kṛṣṇa
Rainy Season in Gurukula

Now Gurukula is going through the monsoon season. In the morning sometimes it is raining and the ashram boys wake up and get wet, and the day students come fully wet from home, and then everyone looks for something dry to wear.

During the day everything goes quite normal, and everyone needs to follow the schedule. Sometimes everything slows down and becomes gloomy and slow, but sometimes everyone is running around, getting fully wet, and having fun. So, everything becomes a little dependent on the rain, but altogether it is not a terrible way to spend your time. During free time there are many things that the boys can do; slide in the mat hut, play in the rain, or play many different board games in the dry building. Some chant Japa and read books, and everyone ends up spending a great time while they are free.

In this way monsoon is a little difficult for the cloth to dry, and stay dry, and the whole atmosphere is austere, but Gurukula boys can make the most of it.

Hare Kṛṣṇa
On playing Sitār

I have been into music from quite an early age. I really like to sing, and I use to spend a lot of time in front of a harmonium. About two years ago I started to play sitār and somehow or other I got the mercy to have an amazing teacher. Learning sitār guided me in my character development and made me a better person.

One day Śrī Bhakti Prabhu was invited to Gurukula by some boys who were really interested in taking some sitār classes from him. Eventually, I also became interested in learning and so I started coming for the classes.

Sitār is a very austere instrument to learn. It takes a lot of sacrifices and daily practice. For the first three months, I have been simply playing scales. The weird posture leaves you with sore legs and the metal strings with blisters on your fingers.

But throughout this contentious austerity was one thing that got me through, my wonderful teacher, who was always there for me, constantly inspiring and pushing me forward. Śrī Bhakti Prabhu is extremely personal and selfless. He teaches by his personal example and is extremely sensitive and caring. For those first three months, he would regularly come to Gurukula and sit right in front of me, patiently watching my progress and occasionally correcting the position of my fingers, and so on. But apart from learning the skill, I was and still am being taught how to properly utilize music in Kṛṣṇa’s service.

When we have a unique ability, our minds always tend to think about how to make ourselves greater. In this way, sometimes even devotees get bewildered by their skills and start hankering for fame, wealth, etc. What must be clear to everybody, in this case, is that our lives are meant to awaken our nature and offer
ourselves to Kṛṣṇa. In this mood, we may offer our abilities and not be bewildered because we have a clear fixed goal.

For example, if there is a kīrtana going on and the singer is trying to show his beautiful voice, there is no devotional atmosphere for everybody to focus on chanting and meditating on the Lord. The person must be offering his voice to try pleasing Kṛṣṇa and, in this way, everyone benefits.

I have had a hard time grinding my ego when encountering such situations. I would see so many opportunities and get a little crazy. Therefore, many times I got into trouble.

I somehow always had trouble being punctual. many times, I was late for a class or rehearsal and that made me constantly get chastised. In this way, I was taught how to stick to my word, and how to care for and respect others.

Again, I would like to say that for all this knowledge and realizations I am greatly indebted to Śri Bhakti Prabhu who is just so humble, tolerant, and patient. Learning Sitār definitely changed me in a good way and I will be forever grateful for that.

Hare Kṛṣṇa
Tulasī Devī

As Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavas, we worship Tulasī Devī because She is very dear to Kṛṣṇa.

She is on our Tilaka, and Her name is also Bhakti Devī. When we worship Kṛṣṇa we have to use Tulasī. Also, Tulasī fulfills all desires, but not immediately. And if you go around Tulasī all your sins get destroyed, even such as killing a brāhmaṇa or a cow.

Tulasī is so special that we use Her for offering. She is very dear to Kṛṣṇa. There is a story that shows that Tulasī is dear to Kṛṣṇa. The story starts when Kṛṣṇa took the form of Govardhana on the first Govardhana Pūjā, when He ate all the offerings which the Vrajavāsis offered Him. He still wanted more so He said ‘Ānīyor’ which means ‘bring me more’, and Lord Balarāma understood it was Kṛṣṇa so He gave Him a Tulasī leaf, and Govardhana didn’t want more.

Hare Kṛṣṇa
Snāna Yātrā

Snāna Yātrā is the bathing festival of Lord Jagannātha.

Once King Indradyumna conducted an inauguration festival of Lord Jagannātha. He also bathed Lord Jagannātha, so we also perform the bathing festival.

The Lord of the Universe (Jagannātha) bathes only once a year, and then he gets sick. Then from the day of Snāna Yātrā, he takes rest for two weeks and takes medicine. We perform Snāna Yātrā to please the Lord, on the same day when King Indradyumna performed abhiṣeka.

After two weeks of rest, he goes on a procession called Ratha Yātrā. Śrīla Prabhupāda the Founder Ācārya for the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness; introduced the festival to the world, and now we celebrate the festival everywhere in the world. Snāna Yātrā Māhāmahotsava Ki Jai.

Hare Kṛṣṇa
Ciḍā Dahi Festival

Once Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmī met Nityānanda Prabhu seated on an elevated platform with His followers. To feed His followers Nityānanda Prabhu asked Him to celebrate the ‘ciḍa dahi’ festival.

Receiving the instructions of Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu, Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmī obtained large quantities of flattened rice, milk, yogurt, sugar, fruits like bananas, and clay pots. Then they cooked and offered the ciḍa dahi to Mahāprabhu.

When Nityānanda Prabhu invoked Mahāprabhu in His mind he appeared and accepted everything. He then started feeding Nityānanda Prabhu with His hand and Nityānanda Prabhu started feeding Mahāprabhu with His hand.

These pastimes were only visible to the devotees. The devotees were eating the ciḍa dahi on the banks of the Gaṅgā, and some were eating even inside the Gaṅgā.

There were so many devotees, that everywhere you looked there were devotees. Everyone was in ecstasy. This is all described in the Caitanya Caritāmṛta. That’s why, every year we celebrate the ‘ciḍa dahi’ festival.

Hare Kṛṣṇa