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An explanation of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra

by Gopala Guru Goswami

Meaning as explained by Gopala Guru Goswami, disciple of Svarupa Damodara of Puri:

The word "hare":

*hari harati papani dusta cittair api smrtah
anicchayapi samsprsto dahaty eva hi pavakah
vijnapya bhagavat tattvam cid ghanananda vighram
haraty avidyam tat karyam ato harir iti smrtah*

"Just as the fire, on contacting an object, automatically burns it, so the name of Hari takes away (harati) or burns up all the sins of the people with materialistic hearts. It removes (harati) all ignorance and reveals the transcendental, blissful form of the Lord. Also, 'hari' means that personality who attracts (harati) the minds of all the people in the universe when they hear stories of His transcendental qualities; or, He who attracts the minds of people by His beautiful youthful form. 'Hari' in the grammatical form of address, the vocative, or calling out to a person, becomes 'hare'."

The word 'hare' has another meaning:

*svarupa prema vatsalyair harer harati ya manah
hara sa kathyate sadbhih sri radha vrsabhanuja*

Hara is Srimati Radhika, daughter of Vrsabhanu, who steals (harati) the mind of Hari, Kṛṣṇa, by her unalloyed love. Hara, in the form of address, also becomes 'hare'.

The word 'Kṛṣṇa':

*krsir bhuvacakah sabdo nas cananda svarupakah
taylor aikyam param brahma krsna ity abhidhiyate*

"The word 'kṛṣṇa' is composed of the root 'kṛsi' meaning 'bhu,' the shelter of all existence and the word 'na' meaning 'nivṛiti' or the form of supreme bliss. Combined they form the word 'kṛṣṇa' which signifies the param brahma, the supreme personality of Godhead with blissful form."

Kṛṣṇa in the form of address remains as 'kṛṣṇa.'

The word 'Rama':

*ramante yogino 'nante nityanande cidatmani
iti rama padenaiva param brahmadbhidhiyate*

"The param brahma is known as Rama because the yogis take pleasure (ramante) in meditating on His eternal, blissful form."

*vaidagdhi sara sarvasva murti liladbhidevatam
sri radham ramayan nityam rama ity abhidhiyate*

"The Supreme Lord is called Rama because He carries out pastimes of pleasure with the most beautiful Sri Radha."

*Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare Hare
Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*

Oh Radha, please attract my mind, and free me from this material world.

Oh Krsna, please attract my mind.

Oh Radha, attract my heart by showing your sweetness.

Oh Krsna, purify my mind by giving knowledge of how to perform worship of You through Your pure devotee.

Oh Krsna, give me steadiness to appreciate Your name, qualities and pastimes.

Oh Krsna, may I develop a taste for serving You.

Oh Radha, please make me qualified for your service.

Oh Radha, please instruct me on how I can serve you.

Oh Radha, let me hear of your intimate pastimes with your beloved.

Oh Rama (Krsna), let me hear of Your intimate pastimes with your beloved.

Oh Radha, reveal to me your pastimes with your beloved.

Oh Rama, reveal to me Your pastimes with Your beloved.

Oh Rama, engage me in remembering Your name, form, qualities and pastimes.

Oh Rama, please make me qualified for your service.

Oh Radha, be pleased with me.

Oh Radha, be pleased with me.