

CHAPTER 6

LET
your
HEART SING



THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, the sages of the *Rig Veda* sang these praises to God:

Like the cry of watchful birds swimming in the water,
like the loud claps of thundering rain clouds,
like joyful streams gushing from the mountain,
so do our hymns sound forth to the Lord.¹

The impulse to sing for God is as ancient as the universe itself. Many cultures have been kept alive through the power of singing. In the very early days, this is how wisdom was preserved and passed down from generation to generation—through singing. Singing in praise of God is an intrinsic part of every being, every religious tradition.

Why has this practice endured through the ages? What is the secret? The answer is quite fascinating. Although the singer uses his voice to glorify God, it is the singer himself who receives the greatest benefit. Sing and see what happens to your heart. Sing and see what happens to your very being. The one who offers a song of love to God tastes a nectarean fruit. Singing opens the heart and makes paradise manifest. They say when someone is crying, sing to them. When difficulties come before you, sing to them. Singing removes barriers and invites you into a greater world. Singing in praise of God connects one place to another, one heart to another. It uplifts your spirits. You receive a fresh spirit. In Siddha Yoga meditation, this joyful sound is known as chanting.

Chanting is one of the most effective ways of becoming absorbed in God's presence. Chanting is a joyful meditation

on God. Chanting reveals the courage in your own heart. It rings with contentment. Chanting is one of the key factors in imbibing the message *Wake up to your inner courage and become steeped in divine contentment.*

WHEN WE CHANT, we sing the names of God to classical Indian melodies known as ragas. Each raga evokes a particular mood. The notes are chosen and combined in such a way that they draw you very deep inside. They take you deep into meditation, into the mood of the particular raga. These ragas evoke great feelings when they are sung. Sometimes you wonder where these beautiful feelings have been hiding inside you. And when these melodies are combined with the names of God, tremendous power is generated within you.

As you repeat these names of God again and again, great devotion is released in your heart. These syllables are very powerful. They touch different parts of your being. It may take a little time to go deep into the womb of the chant, but wait—it does happen. A shift takes place. When that shift happens, it really happens, and you just know it. You become completely intoxicated. Being in this body becomes entirely comfortable.

Most of the time everyone is absolutely uncomfortable in this body. No one is really happy with his or her body. "I'm too fat!" "I'm too thin!" "I'm too tall." "I'm too short." "I'm beautiful." "I'm ugly." "Oh, I can be better. I should be more like that person." "Oh, look at her hair. It looks so much better than mine." "Oh, I ate too much. I really ate too much. I can't believe I ate so much. My stomach is bursting." "Oh,

my pillow is too soft. I've got a cramp in my neck." No one is comfortable in this body.

But if you chant the name of God and allow yourself to be totally suffused with the light of God, this very body becomes a temple. Every little thing that bothered you about your physical being, every little thing that made you uncomfortable about the way you are, about the way you talk, about the way you laugh, about the way you cry, about the way you sleep, about the way you get up—it all changes. Somehow, everything has beauty and grace; everything has a mesmerizing quality like that of nature. Instead of being self-absorbed in an egotistical way, you rise above all that. You begin to understand what God has given you: your body, your life, and everything that exists.

In Siddha Yoga meditation, we don't set out to change the world. We are not asking anyone to change his religion. We are not asking anyone to change her family life or lifestyle. No. We have not set out to change the world in that way. But we have set out in this world to make people become aware that God is in everything. Wherever you are, you can experience God right there in that very moment. When this awareness increases, then whatever you do, you are able to reproduce the love of God. You come from that place.

BABA MUKTANANDA LOVED TO CHANT. It seemed that Baba found an opportunity every day to speak about the glory of chanting. Once he said:

Chanting the name of God is yoga. It has great shakti. That shakti stills the mind and fills the heart

with love. Chanting destroys worry and pain and creates joy. It purifies the atmosphere both within and without. It kills the germs of restlessness in the mind. Whoever chants God's name with enthusiasm is filled with divine bliss.²

Baba puts it so clearly. "It kills the germs of restlessness in the mind."

Baba's words have a very contemporary significance. These days, everyone is so busy. You try to do so many things at once. With the information superhighway, every moment pulses with a staggering amount of business. Whether it's the world of computers, e-mail, faxes, and cell phones, or the world of TV and sound bites, everything is moving so fast. For what? Communication. This is the age of communication. There are seminars on communication. There are theories on the art of communication. Everyone is communicating these days.

With whom are you communicating? What connectedness do you feel with all these communications? With whom are you truly connecting? Where do you feel united? When do you experience the bliss of union? You are like a horse that starts out trotting, then cantering, then galloping, then galloping faster, then galloping faster and faster until you are racing flat out as though knees are digging into your ribs and spurs are cutting into your flanks. But who is whipping you? Who is whipping you into this frenzy? Who?

So many households are running to keep up with themselves. So many businesses are rat races. Think about it. With all this happening, who has time? Who has time to listen to the wind sweep through a canyon, to listen to an ailing palm

tree or the silent song a pebble sings on the pavement? Who has time to help the poor or to feel the burden the earth carries?

Who has time to notice the silent tears of a hungry bird or to hear the silence of the desert? Who has time to listen to the prayer of jasmine flowers or to relish the delicious grapes of the vineyard? Who makes time to watch the moon rising, to behold the sunrise and the sunset?

Who has time to hear the affectionate words of loved ones, to listen as a little child talks about her time in school, or even to listen to the sound of your own breath? Who makes time to sit with the elders by the campfire, hearing the old stories and praising God? Who has time to hear the sweet music God whispers when you fall asleep at night?

You don't have time for this, do you? You are so busy, so very busy. Isn't that true?

Oddly enough, even with all the "busy-ness" of life, every person still finds time to worry. In an attempt to overcome this mounting tension, a person adds even more to his or her "to do" list. But then, the remedy moves even further away. The germs of restlessness of the mind become intolerable. Troubles pile up even higher than the clouds. Can't we put an end to this vicious cycle? Isn't there a way out?

Yes, there is. Just let the heart sing. Free up your time and chant! Chanting releases immense energy within you. It is astounding. It has the power to allow your sadness to surface. Then it wipes away the tears of sorrow and releases a fountain of joy. That is when your tears of sorrow become tears of joy.

Nagging thoughts do arise as you chant, only to be dissolved in the power of sound. Hidden feelings of unworthi-

ness emerge from your heart, only to disintegrate in the power of sound. The discomforts of the mind and heart appear before you, only to say good-bye as the power of chanting takes hold of your heart. Even if anger comes up or pride sticks its head out, if fear is stalking you or jealousy is brewing, you just know these things no longer have a hold on your heart. They no longer shape your life.

IN REALITY, YOUR WHOLE BEING is made up of joy. The Upanishads say:

You are born of love, you live in love,
and you merge into love.
You are born of joy, you live in joy,
and you merge into joy.

Your whole being is made up of great joy and ecstasy. Therefore, you are naturally pulled toward the power of chanting, the singing of the heart. This pull is very strong, so let your heart sing. Flow with the natural inclination of your heart, your very being.

There was a poet-saint named Mirabai, who lived in India in the sixteenth century. Before she became a saint, she was a queen. It wasn't easy for her to chant the name of God whenever she wanted because the king and the people of the court did not appreciate her behaving like a monk or a devotee. They wanted her to observe all the royal duties. And she was willing. At the same time, she wanted to chant Krishna's name. She felt inside her heart that she was married to Krishna, and chanting His name released great purity and energy. In one of her songs, she says:

Mira is intoxicated with God's love.
She has become so absorbed in Krishna's love
that she roams through the streets
singing God's praises and chanting His name.
No one can stop her, Mira says.
No one can criticize her or stand in her way.
Intoxicated with divine love,
she sings the names of the Lord—
Govinda, Gopala—in great ecstasy.

Through chanting, divine joy is released. Through chanting, your inner being is transformed. Through chanting, your surroundings are sanctified. Through chanting, your courage shines forth and you become steeped in divine contentment.

This is why Siddha Yoga students chant so much. They chant whenever they arrive in a new place. They chant when they are driving. In fact, chanting with a benevolent intention has become a magnificent tradition. People chant during the birth of a baby, before exams, at a wedding, to celebrate their success, to send good wishes, for solace at the bedside of a patient, to invoke grace at the time of death. On countless occasions you can chant. Anytime you don't know what to do, you can chant. People ask, "What should I do when I begin my job?" Chant. "What should I do when I have to make a very important call?" Chant before you make the call. It totally changes your perception. You become filled with divine energy and great inspiration.

THERE WAS ONCE A KING named Akbar. He liked to ask his prime minister Birbal very difficult questions. One day he called Birbal and said to him, "Can you bring me the worst thing in this world?"

Birbal nodded his head. "Tomorrow, Your Majesty."

The next day when Birbal came before the king, the king asked him, "Have you brought the worst thing in the world?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," and he pointed to his tongue.

The king was curious. "Will you please explain yourself?"

"Your Majesty, this tongue is so wicked. It can say the worst things about people. It can wound so many hearts. It indulges in sweets and other delicious foods and makes the body sick. The tongue is the worst thing you can ever find in this world."

King Akbar was quite satisfied with that answer. Then he asked, "What about the best thing in the world? Can you bring me that?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. Tomorrow."

The next day when he approached, the king asked, "Have you brought the best thing in the world?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," and he pointed to his tongue.

This time, the king was very curious. "Can you please, once again, explain yourself?"

"Your Majesty, the tongue can say the best things about people. It can make everyone very happy. The tongue can speak so sweetly that it can heal the wounds of every heart. The tongue is precious. It is better than the best. It can control itself and make the whole body healthy. And moreover, this very tongue can chant God's name. It can praise God and make God's light manifest in everyone's life."

The tongue is the best thing you have. Use it to chant God's name. Baba used to say that chanting is a royal road to liberation. He had a unique way of emphasizing this point. He would say, "Chanting is a kind of insurance policy that

guarantees God-realization, and anyone who doesn't chant won't enjoy this guarantee."³

It's a great insurance policy—chanting God's name. The power of chanting can transform your thinking, your understanding, and even your behavior. Let it enliven the way you do things, the way you look at things, the way you speak. Become fearless by taking refuge in the power of chanting.

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