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The End of All Longing

The chanting of the holy name of Krishna
as realization of the fundament of existence
in the here and now¹

from the perspective of the Gaudiya Vaishnava Tradition

By

Edmund Weber

Translated by Petra Huy-Kraft

Dedicated to
Sacinandana Swami
and the other singers
who made Krishna's Holy Name resound
during the Kirtan Festival
in Radhadesh (Belgium)
in January 2017.

The Chanting of Krishna's Holy Names²,

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare /
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare,

is without any doubt the religious centerpiece of the worldwide *sankirtana* movement³ of the religious culture of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas and an essential element of any authentic religion⁴ in general.

The religious community of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas founded in Bengal in the 16th century refers to Shri Krishna Caitanya, who is not only regarded as their founder, but furthermore, as an incarnation of Krishna and Radha⁵.

Shri Krishna Caitanya laid down his realization of the human existence in a hymn-like form in the "*Eight Verses*"⁶.

The first verse doubtlessly shows that this realization is not reserved for a small group of chosen ones, but that on the contrary it is meant for the general public. Everybody should hear it, because it is an essential blessing/benediction for humanity at large. Therefore, in the first verse of his song of praise the singer glorifies this *sankirtana* movement spreading this benediction:

"Glory to the Sri Krishna Sankirtana, which cleanses the heart of all the dust accumulated for years and extinguishes the fire of conditional life, of repeated birth and death.

This sankirtana movement is the prime benediction for humanity at large because it spreads the rays of the benediction moon.

*It is the life of all transcendental knowledge. It increases the ocean of transcendental bliss, and it enables us to fully taste the nectar for which we are always anxious."*⁷

The chanting of the holy names repeatedly detaches the spirit from the notion of the necessity of an existence based on works and suffering, and the greed for an unlimited time of life and death, i. e. the passion of self-dependence, which follows from this notion.

The chanting of the holy names, and no other activity whatsoever, makes the transcendental benediction grow, which is unavailable and impossible to produce, and provides the consciousness with the unique possibility of actually tasting the nectar of the unconditionally presented perfection of existence. The karmistic thinking⁸, however, is convinced that one is able to reach such perfection simply by works and sufferings.

Therefore, the karmistic conscience is unable to taste the nectar of perfection given unconditionally in the here and now, but it is forced out of metaphysical existential fear to abuse life's work as a mere psycho-technical means for the creation of an ultimately senseless perfection phantom, a sense of life that is always the same. As if life needed a meaning in the face of grace. In the *sankirtana* of the holy names man is exposed in the here and now to the absolute, free and ultimate benediction, detached of any work and suffering, in a sensual, i.e. acoustic way.

Shri Krishna Caitanya, however, saves the *sankirtana* consciousness from secretly reversing it again into an elaborate method which can only be practiced by specialists through hard mental and bodily training. Such training would entail that the freed consciousness fell again back on its own works and own suffering as a means to a self-defined purpose, thus exposing itself again completely to dependency of the self.

It is the liberating discovery of Shri Krishna Caitanya that such religious top performances are obsolete and that a simple mental and bodily activity any child is familiar with, simple spontaneous singing, makes the holy, the fundament of existence, enter the consciousness.

This spontaneous elemental activity, which can mobilise the innermost part of consciousness, is albeit ultimately in vain repeatedly perverted by baroque religious cultures, in that even this original activity, the chanting, will be taken and misused as a performance to reach Krishna's absolute grace, which is not caused by any work or suffering. The chanting, this manifestation of unfathomable freedom and spontaneity, turns into a shabby means of miserable narrow-hearted persons, who even draw this flower of human existence through the dirt of attempting – though in vain - the bribery of the holy.

But the chanting of the holy names does not prove to be a fictitious salvation of a work which can easily be done, but, on the contrary, as a radical *anti-work* concerning the salvation. The chanting of the holy names is by no means a tool to acquire salvation, but only the state of certainty that salvation is given in the priori and and a posteriori never to lose perfection of existence.

The existence is and remains free from any setting of meaning and purpose, because the grace which alone causes it, always fills the innermost of man unconditionally and will never run dry as such. It is in the simple chanting and not in such major works of culture that one can taste the nectar of the transcendental perfection.

The final judgment on existence was always pronounced by grace, no matter how one's own or external judgments on intellectual, moral or emotional formation of existence may turn out.

Thus, Shri Krishna Caitanya firmly opposes the karmistic religion, because he acknowledges Krishna's absolute grace: *kṛipā*⁹ is the only cause of existence.¹⁰

In the chanting of the holy names one can foresee how the undetermined grace whose primal force is beyond any calculation and charging, paves the way from uncertainty to the certainty that every man is *gratia plena*, 'full of grace'¹¹, that the Lord "provides the fundament (of existence) for free."¹²

*If man is gifted with grace by nature,
why then should he endeavour for salvation or lose it?*

The certainty of the ineradicable grace which manifests in the chanting of the holy names in one's conscience does not depend on the fact that one is convinced of it. Convictions are like a rustling in the wind – you cannot rely on it.

The certainty referred to here means that despite all doubts one may have against Krishna's free grace, which is not dependent on work and suffering, as a fundament of existence, the effectiveness of grace remains untouched. However, the chanting of the holy names glorifying Krishna's absolute grace is able to address and withstand this doubt deeply rooted in our consciousness.

Calling the mere chanting of the holy names a medium of certainty of the ineradicable grace is an outrageous provocation for the ideology adhering to the alleged works and suffering as a fundament of existence; and the chanting is certainly intended as such by Shri Krishna Caitanya.

According to his experience of existence, man is not given the fundament for his existence to freely dispose of and shape it. It is not at all his business to lay down this fundament himself, or to determine the worth, sense and meaning of life and death and thus dispose of himself, by means of his own works or sufferings which are transacted and endured according to the rules of the law of divine *dharma* or even according to his own arbitrariness.

According to Shri Krishna Caitanya, the fundament of existence is solely in *kṛipā*, in free and unconditional grace. It is grace which constitutes the only existence.

It is the ocean of grace on which and from which consciousness shapes existence as a *culture*. This vital existential *design*, i. e. the way of life to be determined by the *dharma*, the divine law, is radically distinguishable from the *fundament* of existence, the indeterminable foundation of existence, Krishna's freedom.

If free consciousness tries to rise above this ocean of grace by forming its own existence, i. e. culture in the broadest sense, in illusory independence by declaring its creations to be the fundament of its existence, then it is submerged in the floods of grace. Consciousness loses the knowledge of its own truth and is forced to live in an illusion that conceals its indeterminability and freedom. Nevertheless, it remains in the ocean of grace, for an eventual escape from the free fundament of existence is impossible.

Every human being is inherently integrated by nature in this original state of grace, beyond his moral qualities, his skin color, his sex, his profession, his nationality or religious culture, his deeply rooted existential doubt. No one has worked and earned this status and will never be able to.

This state of grace is a pure state, as if it was genetically inherited and not conditioned by any kind of existential formation, and as such is unavailable for works and sufferings or the activities of the mind shaping existence. The fundament of existence as absolute freedom is independent of all forms and thus proves the absurdity of ultimate self-dependence.

The free fundament of existence resembles a volcano, which spits out lava on its own and thus extinguishes all grown culture, but at the same time prepares a new fruitful topsoil on which new possibilities for life can arise.

Just as it is absurd to try to fill the volcano - in order not to be at the mercy of it - with natural material and thus to seemingly suffocate the volcano, so it is absurd to determine the fundament of existence theoretically or practically by means of existential forms, i.e. to manage it somehow or even to replace it with cultural goods such as moral values, political events, scientific-technical constructions or aesthetic structures.

The mind lives solely from the volcanic grace as its infinite fundament. On this fundament, which cannot be culturally controlled or manipulated, existence can develop in a finite way.

This finite self-forming, the culture, however, belongs to the essence of existence. Although it is essentially indeterminable in its fundament and essence, its existence can be determined in a finite way by its appearance in time. With this finite self-determination, it is in dynamic contradiction to its own indeterminable fundament. This insoluble dialectical relationship of indeterminable fundament and determining design has the consequence that recurring revolts against forms of existence - which have become historically unreasonable and then become particularly aggressive as the foundation of existence - break out, thus revealing the untenability and lack of fundament of every culture, every so-called meaning and ideology of values, every positive or negative determination of existence.

For when the Spirit looks into himself, into the very basis of existence, or in other words, looks into the face of Krishna, the 'black'¹³, during darshan¹⁴, he sees only creative negativity, the creative freedom of the absolute and the holy.

In religious revolts, all kinds of karmistic religious cultures, which emphatically support self-dependency as the foundation of existence through cultural achievements, are swept away again and again in religious history by the uncontrollable violence of the indeterminable fundament of existence.

Shri Krishna Caitanya and Martin Luther were contemporaries pioneering in such a religious upheaval, a modern religious revolt in which the independence of existence from its own foundation raises its voice loudly as the praise of God or Maha-Mantra, i. e. the grace of the holy as the sole fundament of existence.

Since grace is the fundament of existence, man is also by nature a *bhakta*¹⁵, i.e. a 'part' of the grace of Krishna. To be certain of this is not the result of fixed, cumbersome and strenuous exercises or other religious techniques. Being a bhakta does not mean having a special position in the realm of Krishna, since everyone is part of Krishna's grace. Happy are the men who are certain of this.

This Krishna nature, this absoluteness of the very essence of human existence, is therefore not created in the chanting of holy names, but rather made clear to the consciousness. When one gathers in the name of Krishna and sings his names, the absolute, holy, Krishna himself in the here and now, always present, is revealed to this very consciousness - without any work and suffering aimed at merit. In the chant of the holy names, one can have the certainty to live in the authentic paradise, in Vishnu's *vaikunṭha*¹⁶, no matter how weak or non-existent the subjective perception of this state may be.

The complete visualization of the true paradise therefore does not depend on doctrinal conviction, e.g. that *vaikunṭha* exists beyond space and time, or is of ecstatic fulfillment, which must be manifested in intense psychological reactions, or of so-called moral purity, which has to be expressed in randomly created behaviors: the active or passively experienced chanting of the holy names is sufficient.

However, according to Shri Krishna Caitanya, the holy names are not limited to a few. Rather, they are infinite.

*"O my Lord,
Your holy name alone
can render all benediction to living beings,
And thus You have hundreds and millions of names
like Krishna and Govinda." 17*

Whatever name Krishna is called upon, whether as Adonai, as Trinity, as Allah, as Ahura Mazda, as Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, as Shiva, as Kali, etc.: He is always meant. It is therefore not important in the songs of the respective holy names whether they are only those used in their own religious culture, but whether they manifest the power of "all benedictions" in chanting or whether they only serve to confer a holy gleam upon the self-dependence based on their own works and suffering. But then they are no longer real names, only forms of existential self-deception.

All the chants of the holy names are all about bringing to life the unrestricted grace of Krishna. Whenever it is sung - wherever it is sung - it applies:

The chanting of the holy names itself is the true paradise.

This is clearly stated in the reports about the pastimes or Lilas of Shri Krishna Caitanyas: The incarnation, i.e. the present reality of Krishna, the holy, the fundament of existence, does not reveal itself in fantastic events of apocalyptic proportions or in spiritual and secular heroes, shaping the world, or in overwhelming cultural works that have endured for thousands of years, but simply in the chanting of the holy names:

*"In this age of Kali
It is the holy name of the Lord, the Hare-Kṛṣṇa-Maha-Mantra,
which is the incarnation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. 18*

Hence, the fundament of existence in the chanting of the holy names is not only revealed without the mediation of work and suffering, and that one can be certain of

their full presence, but that the chanting of the holy names as such is the holy itself. The holy is found in the chanting of and listening to the Maha Mantra.

In his profound work on *The Nectarean Ocean of the Holy Name*, Sacinandana Swami highlights precisely this fundamental idea of Gaudiya Vaishnavas by letting the *Adi-lila* of Shri Caitanya-caritamrita speak out:

*"Simply by chanting¹⁹ the holy names,
one is directly together with the Lord²⁰."*

Although Shri Krishna Caitanya made it very easy to perceive Krishna's presence in the chanting of the holy names, he nevertheless notes that this possibility does not appeal to him internally:

*"You enable us to easily approach You
by chanting Your holy names,
but I am so unfortunate
that I have no attraction for them."²¹*

Because of his lack of devotion to Krishna, his inability to shed tears of love in the chanting of the holy names and to break out in ecstasy, Shri Krishna Caitanya asks his Lord desperately²²:

*"O my Lord,
when will my eyes be decorated
with tears of love flowing constantly
when I chant Your holy name?
When will my voice choke up,
and when will the hairs of my body
stand on end at the recitation of Your holy name?"²³*

But in view of this unfortunate self-awareness that even his chanting of the holy names does not trigger any enthusiasm for Krishna in him, Shri Krishna Caitanya knows at the same time that the power of the chanting of the holy names is independent of the singer's subjective attitude and perception, the inner attraction to Krishna's name, therefore, it is not a *conditio sine qua non* for being in the paradise of grace.

No matter how much a person may think, act and feel karmistically and self-dependently inside without acknowledging it and therefore think that in order to be a true admirer of Krishna, he or she must produce the emotional work of the "*attraction to the holy names*", he can still be certain to be directly and uncondition-

ally in paradise, in relation with the absolute, holy, God, Krishna, finally at home, in the eternal home and beyond all desires trying to justify existence, even without "attraction" – but filled with gifted *bhakti*²⁴, by simply being exposed to the sound of the holy names.

In relation to the creatures, attraction is only a characteristic of Krishna: he is *all-attractive*. No one can escape him. Therefore, the Creator does not need the attraction of his creatures. Otherwise, it would be in the hands of the creatures in a karmistic manner to decide and manage whether or not a relationship of the creature with Krishna comes about; then this basic existential relationship would depend on the will and work of the doer and not only on the grace of Krishna.

But this also proves that even the noblest and most beautiful and best existential creation, the most grandiose cultural work man is able to create, that even the most gruesome martyrdom, which people may suffer for their self-respect or for the sake of their loved one's protection, can neither reduce nor replace the given fundament of existence. All human work and suffering is - in terms of the *fundament* of existence - not only not necessary but also absurd / illogical in terms of the matter itself.

In this regard the Bhagavata Purana XI.12 (1-2) states:

*"The Supreme Lord said: 'One does not ascend to Me by mysticism or analysis, common piety or the study of the scriptures, by penances, renunciation, pious works or charity, by respecting vows, ceremonies, Vedic hymns, pilgrimage, by general discipline or the basic rules. One rather closes Me in one's heart by the sat-sanga with My devotees.'"*²⁵

With all the above-mentioned pious works, aesthetic feelings, moral actions and philosophical thoughts, one can never and never gain access to the holy, to the very essence of existence, to Krishna. There is no such access because Krishna has always lived in the heart of man.

The chanting of the holy name does not serve any purpose other than its own, such as the gathering of good karmic fruits or other forms of self-confirmation, for which it is thought to be necessary to gain access to a paradise on the other side or in this world. The song 'serves' only Krishna, the holy, the absolute, the fundament of existence; since Krishna is identical with the holy name, it is an end in itself and never a means for anything.

If the chanting of the holy names of Krishna brings joy to Krishna - as they say - it means enjoying the fundament of existence, the indeterminability and the freedom

of one's own being. This joy allows us to endure the self-caused agony of unattainable existence, caused by self-determination tied to work and suffering.

The chanting of the holy names, which is the form of joy, is not a pre-paradise wage labor, by means of which one could earn paradise, but rather

the chanting of holy names is nothing
but a free paradisiacal activity.

What sense is there for a posterity such as heaven or hell, which is earned by works and suffering and forced by the karmistic logic, and which lies in the future? They and all kinds of posterity based on human labor and suffering are nothing more than constructions of abused Maya.²⁶

Maya, originally the power to shape existence, i.e. works and sufferings as a means for the establishment of a paradise or its opposite, conceals in consciousness the paradise, which has always been given for free and is always present, and revealed in the chanting of the holy names.

In this song bhakti awakens. In the Gaudiya Vaishnava religion this means the essential affiliation²⁷ to Krishna. However, the chanting, which envisions the always present bhakti, does not bring about this affiliation. For the bhakti or Krishna affiliation awakening in the chanting is not a goal that man must work towards with work and suffering, but an eternal and unchangeable state. It is the

the end station of all longing.

Therefore, *bhakti* does not require a special feeling, i.e. a form of work and suffering, which the human being would still have to produce from himself, but a transcendent, i.e. not manufacturable *summum bonum*, which one can be sure of in the chanting of the holy names, independent of one's own emotions.

Mental reactions to this certainty, however deep and powerful they may be, are nevertheless coincidental and have nothing to do with the substance of the *bhakti* itself which cannot be manipulated.

This “belonging to Krishna”, this “*being in bhakti*”, therefore does not require in any way an appropriate subjective mood, a subjective conviction or any other subjective behavior on the part of the participants in the chanting of the holy names. Otherwise Shri Krishna Caitanya would have had to despair completely, because he could not *feel* any *bhakti*.

Inner sensitivities are inscrutable and, if you rely on them as a condition of the efficacy of the chanting of the holy name, they only lead to self-delusion. The inner doubt as to whether God's love for God can actually be brought forward as a feeling then suppresses/replaces the certainty of the unconditional existence of paradise in the chanting of the holy names, and necessarily transforms the freely given *bhakti* into hypocrisy.

Religious dogmatism, moralism and emotionalism are nothing but weapons of the abused *Maya* against Krishna's grace.

By Krishna's unconditional grace, all human beings exposed to the chanting of the holy names are objectively to be seen as *bhaktas*, who can also become subjectively aware of finding themselves directly in paradise. This goes for men or women who are burdened with their everyday worries, children who do not understand what they are singing, dementia sufferers who can only chant confusedly, people who do not belong to the external community of devotees, people who are despised and rejected in the world for whatever reason, successful and content persons or secularly uneducated and religiously disinterested ones. That's what they say about the cowherd girls of Braj:

*"The gopīs in Vraja, the wives of the brahmins and others: (7) Not having studied the sacred scriptures, nor having worshiped the great saints, they, without vows and not having undergone austerities, attained Me by association with My devotees. (8-9) Only by unalloyed love indeed the gopīs, just as others of a limited intelligence like the cows, the immobile creatures, the snakes [like Kâliya] and more animals, managed to achieve perfection and quite easily attained Me, I who cannot even be reached by greatly endeavoring in yoga, analysis, charity, vows, penances, ritualistic sacrifices, exegesis, personal study or taking to the renounced order."*²⁸

Thus it becomes clear that works and sufferings can only be useful as means to form existence, but they are not at all suitable to reach Krishna, the fundament of existence. It is almost absurd to want to reach Krishna through one's own works and sufferings, since he is always inextricably present in the nature of a human being and can simply be heard by the mere chanting of the holy names.

Despite all the immersion in the ocean of misuse of his own works and suffering, the participant in the chanting of the holy names can have the confidence to be directly in paradise, in the association of Krishna himself.

Therefore, in order to be aware of paradise, there is no need for religious and other cultural excellence; they are of no use to the followers of the community of Shri

Krishna Caitanya, just as they are of any other human being, for Krishna, the fundament of existence, the absolute and the holy, is directly and unblendedly given to every human being a priori as an indelible nature. Therefore all people are *bhaktas*, whether they are aware of it or not. As the caring “protector” of all *bhaktas* that are part of himself, he makes no distinction between them.

Krishna does not have any doctrinal, moral or emotional reservations about any of his creatures. He does not look into the abysses of the soul in Maya and does not look at whatever kind of spiritual and secular works and sufferings which he may be involved in, but listens only to the chanting of his holy name, which he himself is.

For grace, the fundament of existence, it is intrinsic not to demand anything for its effectiveness. Demanding is a matter of the divine *dharma* responsible for the *formation* of existence, but not of the free and generous *fundament* of existence.

The law that governs life, the forms of existence, has nothing to say to the fundament of existence. How could the law, which is a free product of Krishna, be able to control or even govern its Creator and Lord?

This is exactly what Karmism tries - albeit in vain - by submitting Krishna to the divine *dharma*, to degrade him into the servant of an allegedly omnipotent law.

However, Shri Krishna Caitanya grasped the independence of the fundament of existence from all *dharma*, from all work, from all suffering, when he admitted that - despite the friendliness of Krishna he had made it extremely easy for him to find his way to him - he nevertheless did not feel any attraction to him, the holy names:

*"O my Lord,
out of kindness You enable us
to easily approach Your holy names,
but I am so unfortunate
that I have no attraction to them."*²⁹

Krishna can neither be determined nor controlled by achievements, whether they are "attraction" or the opposite; and yet he does not deny his unconditional kindness to his creatures. He remains absolutely free in the face of any demands of behaviour or of any calculated justice.

This freedom allows Krishna to keep Shri Krishna Caitanya birth after birth under his protection in order to demonstrate his power that he cannot be controlled by works or suffering of all kinds and purposes, but that he remains the Lord of grace.

This means, however, that Krishna's only function in the illusory consciousness caused by misconception, consists in judging the works and sufferings on the basis of the rules of *dharma*, and beyond that, even as executioner, i.e. as enforcer of following penalties resulting from the judgment, i.e. heavenly heaven or hellish hell, can never ever force Krishna to dismiss a karmistic devout person of any provenance of his care and to deprive him of unconditional grace.

Pious and unrighteous people should know that not even Karmism, which aims at the self-production of the fundament of existence, is a work of its own, but that it is also rooted in Krishna's freedom. This means that even the radical negation of the omnipotent grace of Krishna lives from this grace, from the freedom of the fundament of existence. Unbelief in the grace of Krishna also results from the fundament of existence; no more and no less.

If, however, the false consciousness about the fundament of existence is Krishna's work alone, then Shri Krishna Caitanya succeeded in enduring the existential basic tension between the *fundament* of existence and the *formation* of existence by this existential experience.

On the one hand, he doesn't feel any *bhakti*:

"... but I am so unfortunate that I have no attraction to them" (the holy names).³⁰

On the other hand, however, he is certain that Krishna, the fundament of existence, does not exclude him from the domain of his grace.

Shri Krishna Caitanya humbly and joyfully confesses that Krishna, although absolutely free of all works and suffering and not to be manipulated by anything, is and remains his adorable Lord.

*"He is completely free to do anything and everything
for He is always my worshipful Lord unconditionally."³¹*

Therefore, Shri Krishna Caitanya is certain that even if he feels no *bhakti*, "no attraction", Krishna does not judge the meaning and value of existence according to the norms of the *dharma*, but only by grace.

The resulting fundamental freedom of existence also applies unconditionally and unrestrictedly to Shri Krishna Caitanya, although he has fallen into the ocean of death and rebirth:

*"O son of Maharaja Nanda
I am Your eternal servitor, yet somehow or another*

I have fallen into the ocean of birth and death."³²

But in spite of the fact that he has fallen into the ocean of his own works and sufferings termed as formation of existence, Krishna remains – by Krishna's grace – his “*eternal servitor*”. As this position is eternal, it cannot be destroyed by anything, not even by the most intelligent karmistic thinking.

Shri Krishna Caitanya knows that he cannot free himself from the karmistic ocean. This can only be done by Krishna. That is why he asks:

*"Please pick me up from this ocean of death
and place me as one of the atoms at Yours lotus feet."*³³

He does not ask for better religious or secular works for Krishna's sake, or for being able to change his form of existence in order to please his Lord: he only asks that he may take refuge in him.

Shri Krishna Caitanya is certain that if Krishna does not grant him such a thing, if he even oppresses him and withdraws from him, which means to be imprisoned in the ocean of birth and death, he is and remains his eternal protector.

*"I know no one but Krishna as my Lord,
and He shall remain
even if he handles me roughly by His embrace
or makes me brokenhearted by not being present before me."*³⁴

*"My dear friend, just hear the decision of My mind.
Kṛṣṇa is the Lord of My life in all conditions, whether He shows Me affection or
kills Me by giving Me unhappiness."*³⁵

Shri Krishna Caitanya is certain that although he cannot feel any *bhakti*, Krishna remains his eternal guardian and Lord and never deprives him of protection and care. He is certain that even his own faith in works, his delusion to give meaning and value to his own existence, cannot separate him from his Lord, his fundament of grace.

Krishna does not part with his karma believers, i.e. the creatures denying his grace, even if they have sunk into the ocean of works and suffering.

Krishna alone is and remains the fundament, meaning and value of existence. This has the effect that he never turns away from his creatures. But this also means that even the most *dharma*-hostile crimes cannot suppress Krishna as the Lord and guardian of all his creatures. That is why Krishna, who in his relationship

to his creatures does not depend on their works and suffering, is also the only true consolation in life and dying, as is characterized by his absolute grace, free from all conditions.

Whatever happens can never make the final judgment about existence whatsoever. Neither good nor evil works are alternatives to the freedom and independence of grace. In truth, there is no alternative to grace as the fundament of existence.

Since Krishna Caitanya assumes that he will suffer birth and death again and again, that he will be stuck in the *samsara*, but that Krishna holds him in his unconditional grace, he still desires, even though he is trapped in the ocean of birth and death, to insistently worship his faithful master without any reason, i.e. without any karmistic ulterior motives:

*"I only want Your causeless devotional service birth after birth."*³⁶

Krishna's grace does not mean the end of *samsara*, nor does it mean that the "eternal servitor" can worship his master without reason and free from all karmic ulterior thoughts. Shri Krishna Caitanya expresses an impossible wish, knowing that he cannot worship his master for no reason. But he is certain that in all the rebirths that lie ahead of him, he can nevertheless rest assured to stand in the grace of Krishna.

This notion of the inability of Shri Krishna Caitanya to create, manage and produce *bhakti* within himself results from the karmistic thinking, according to which *bhakti* must be subjectively considered true, experienced and felt in order to be a *bhakta*.

In Shri Krishna Caitanya the holy reveals itself, the fundament of existence, as pure grace. This alone is the essence of existence.

Therefore, the message of Shri Krishna Caitanya goes as follows: Do not rely on your creations of existence, but only on the bountiful fundament of existence which does not demand anything. Being in the grace of Krishna, being in paradise, is in no way affected by or even dependent on religious conversions, the end of rebirths, dogmatic orthodoxy, moral correctness and ecstatic emotions.

Krishna's grace does not end at the shores of the ocean of birth and death, but also reigns over the sea of having fallen for one's own works and sufferings as supposed creator and guarantors of the value and meaning of existence in general.

Even though one might live in the above mentioned ocean, Shri Krishna Caittanya knows: "In the - not through/by – mere chanting of the holy names the association with the Lord, in grace, the truth of the fundament of existence, the absoluteness, the freedom of consciousness from one's own works, becomes a simple sensual certainty.

The fact that this song cannot be a work of merit, which is supposed to create the fundament of existence, follows from the fact that it *articulates* grace as the fundament of existence, expresses itself in sound, reveals it, but not that it causes or even effects it. The act of speaking and revealing grace does not require an inner or outer sacrifice, nor does it imply any kind of condition, work, suffering, confession, will or feeling. Ultimately, pure chanting suffices, which is not a meritorious work, but as Krishna's gift of grace is a free act, which has no intention of making a profit.

Whoever can chant the song is not alone in the grace of Krishna. This is for anyone. However, the participant in the chanting of the holy names may enjoy the certainty of grace as the fundament of his existence, despite all the doubts that are peculiar to him, especially as a modern human being.

To know or not to know that the fundament of existence, the absolute and holy, Krishna himself, is nothing but grace, and that every existence rests solely on this grace, can therefore not be a criterion for whether one is in grace or not - just as moral achievements or emotive experiences cannot.

The fundament of existence is not works and suffering, and this includes the knowledge of truth, the doing of good and the experience of beauty, but freedom from oneself as a worker and sufferer, the essential independence from all one's own creations of existence, from all dependence on oneself.

But when man, in his *essence*, in his *nature*, is not determined by his works, his thoughts, actions and feelings, he is already perfect without them. This indeterminable perfection eludes any finite destiny; it therefore does not give any positive or negative purpose in life and does not provide any sense of life. A human being is perfect because of his ultimate indeterminability.

If the spirit looks into itself, it finds nothing else but freedom, nothing that could definitively determine it; this indeterminable freedom reveals itself to the Vaishnavas as Krishna, the 'dark', who appears to the cowherd girls of Braj to be terrifying and fascinating at the same time.

Whatever ultimate judgement is made about man, whatever basic purpose, whatever sense is assigned to him, he is unable to determine his essence. It is this indeterminability, this infinity, this unavailability that constitutes the fundament of existence, it is the absolute, the holy, it is Krishna who draws and rejects all the determinations from his freedom.

The mere chanting of the holy names as the opening of the final paradise can and should prevent man from determining his own nature through his own works and sufferings, by means of his life and death, from making the final judgement about himself on the basis of his works and sufferings, from wanting to gain an illusionary paradise or an illusionary hell by means of his works and sufferings. Such a thing is pointless, because the resting of existence on the indeterminate and therefore uncontrollable grace of Krishna leads such illusionary self-manipulation *ad absurdum* and destroys it.

Replacing this primal fundament of all existence with formations of existence is the evil itself. Sin in the real, i.e. religious sense is therefore not the crime, the violation of moral law, but its misuse for the purpose of failing self-constitution.

It is the *asuras* who are obsessed with the delusion of extinguishing Krishna's grace as the fundament of existence, in order to replace it with their own transient and random creation of existence.

Krishna himself has determined that being together with him, being in paradise, is a result of his grace alone, and in this regard he has discarded all the works and all the sufferings, no matter how pious, however necessary they may be for the formation of existence, as a negation of his being, the unlimited grace.

Bhakti cannot be realized in highly concentrated meditations or intense ascetic exercises or successful philanthropic actions; all these are works and sufferings that may contribute to a successful formation of existence, but can never form the fundament of existence. *Bhakti* is a free gift from Krishna and therefore not manipulable. The fact that the conscious experience of *bhakti* can neither be forced nor prevented is shown by the Krishnalila³⁷ '*The Theft of the Flute*', in which the cowherd girls tried in vain to subordinate Krishna's flute playing to their creation of existence. ³⁸

If the absolute and holy bears the name Krishna, meaning 'the black one', his essence is revealed in it: he is all-attractive and all-consuming like an astronomical black hole; it is the power of the black, the absolute and the holy that irresistibly captivates consciousness.

In the face of the irresistible power of the 'black one', works and suffering as paths to the absolute, to the holy, to the fundament of existence, turn out as senseless actionism, emotionalism and dogmatism, as existential delusion, as unnatural blasphemy.

Shri Krishna Caitanya belongs to the realistic existential thinkers who have recognized that man, even if he clings to the idea that only his work and suffering could be the fundament of existence, can still be certain that his almost ineradicable dependence is overruled and transcended by Krishna's existential freedom, the true fundament of existence, the absolute and the holy, by Krishna's grace.

This frightening and at the same time inspiring essential power of self-transcendence, this ability to transcend oneself in one's self-imposed determinations, his works and sufferings, constitutes the foundation of existence, the actual nature of man. And he can only disguise this transcendental nature in an illusory way by the abuse of Maya; however, he cannot escape from her revelation, which is reflected in spiritual upheavals.

By proclaiming the mere chanting of the holy names as the ultimate paradise, Shri Krishna Caitanya contributes to making the human mind becoming aware of its original essence and rejecting all attempts of theistic or atheist ideology that rely on work and suffering, i.e. on culture, as the fundament of existence.

The focus of the ultimate paradise on the chanting of the holy names evolving in the here and now, this so extremely simple way to be certain of the perfection of one's existence, is strange, offensive and nonsensical for the karmistic way of thinking of any cultural origin. It is precisely because of its cultural insignificance, however, that the chanting of the holy names makes the freedom to and from forming one's existence as an unavailable fundament of existence literally undeniably erupt in one's consciousness, and the totalitarianism of self-dependence, the cultural fetishism, literally perish.

The constant attempts to replace the grace in the name Krishna by the existential enthronement of his own works and sufferings, i.e. the establishment of the rule of self-dependence, deprives man of the consciousness of his being, the transcendence of himself, the freedom of existence based on grace.

But since grace is not a mere existential option, which one could choose from alternatives, but the fundament of existence, i.e. an existential necessity, religious revolts of the existential transcendence against self-enslavement, subservience to one's own forms of existence, repeatedly break out in the history of mankind and

lead the consciousness back to its origin, the fundament of existence characterized by freedom.

Work and suffering may indeed be necessary moments of any *form* of existence, i.e. of culture, however they do not possess any power over existence which is solely due to the free and indeterminable fundament. The Vaishnava tradition of fundamental existential work, and in particular of Shri Krishna Caitanya, the religious revolutionary of freedom of existence, reminds us of this with the revelation of *kṛipā*, the omnipotent grace of Krishna and its visualization in the *nāma-sankīrtana*, the chanting of the holy names.

Particularly in the modern world, most people are less convinced of overly manipulative doctrines and tired of opportunistic morals. Therefore, we are more and more looking for the way to the fundament of existence, the holy, the absolute, in the original and most profound way, in art, but especially in music. This, especially in its simplest form – the chanting and singing – proves to be the strongest force of the innermost of existence, the holy, in the consciousness that got exhausted in the anxiety of creating its existence, in becoming what is its nature:

The End of All Longing.

Notes

- 1 Taking into account the Bhagavata Purana, Shri Krishna Caitanya's Śikṣāṣṭakam and its interpretation by Shri Bhaktivedanta Swami.
- 2 Nāman, n. (skrt.) means 'substance', 'essence', 'characteristic mark', 'nature', usw. – We generally follow the translation of the Sanskrit terms by Monier-Williams, Monier: Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Delhi 1981 (Second reprint) 1981.
- 3 Nāma-saṁkīrtana, n. (skrt.) 'the glorification or incessant repetition of the name of a God'. The literal translation means 'the collective chanting of the ,essence', of nāman. Saṁkīrtana derives from the root kīrt, which means 'mentioning', 'make mention of', 'to call', i.e. 'to bring to mind nāman or to call it' (Monier-Williams, p. 536b). The so-called Sankirtana Movement of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas nurtures and spreads the collective chanting of the nāman, i.e. the 'essence' and 'substance' of Krishna. This is done by small groups called nāma haṭṭa, m. (skrt.). Haṭṭa, m. (skrt.) means 'market, fair' (Monier-Williams, p. 1287a). Nāma haṭṭa refers to these small groups which spread Krishna's holy name in market places, i.e. in front of everyone. Just like in almost all other religious cultures envisioning the nāman of the holy and absolute is mainly done by chanting the holy name also in the Sankirtana Movement.

- 4 Authentic religion refers to the constitutional examination of the human mind of the dialectic relation between cause and formation of existence. In religious culture, on the other hand, the basic decision of the authentic religion is reflected in cultural form. This basic decision can consist in the realistic recognition of the independence of the fundament of existence from its formation or in the illusory opinion that the fundament of existence must be established only by the formation of existence. Whether the respective religious culture is formulated mythologically, traditionally, atheistically, rationally, scientistically, materialistically, humanistically etc. is irrelevant in the matter.
- 5 Radha is Krishna's favorite and the queen of the Braj, the holy land of Krishna. By the idea that in Shri Krishna Caitanya both Krishna, the fundament of existence, the holy and absolute as well as Radha, the queen and thus the epitome of existential form are united, the spirit of dualism which is also widespread in India has been superseded by the recognition of the dialectical structure of the mind, so that here too the insoluble relationship of the infinite and the finite, the absolute and the relative, the eternal and the transient has been revealed.
- 6 Skrt. sikṣāṣṭakam
- 7 <http://www.harekrsna.de/Siksastaka/Siksastakam-E.htm> - Verse 1
- 8 Karmism is to be understood as a religious culture based on the primal religious decision according to which every form of existence has been and will be acquired through any kind of works and suffering, and the doer has to bear the consequences for it, namely his new form of existence in a reincarnation. According to this religious culture, the soul is completely at the mercy of its self-dependence. It knows only its own work and suffering, but no grace independent of work and suffering as a fundament of its own existence. The use of works and sufferings, which belong to the existential dimension of the dharma as media of existential formation and therefore have no meaning whatsoever for the fundament of existence, is thus abusive and therefore only produces the hybrid illusion of fundamental self-determination.
- 9 Kṛipā, f. (skrt.) Noun of kṛi 'to do',' to make',' to perform',' to prepare' to cause' etc. Early on it was given the variant of meaning 'to procure for another',' to bestow',' to grant'. The content of this action is kṛipā 'mercy',' compassion',' tenderness' and so on. (Monier-Williams, p. 305a). This is the characteristic of Krishna and is therefore not a mere means of salvation. Salvation is kṛipā, the grace of Krishna himself. It does not require any means, because it is innate to man, his nature. The divine dharma and the works and sufferings resulting from it, on the other hand, serve solely for the formation of existence, but not the fundament of existence that is fulfilled by kṛipā. The divine dharma initiates, guides, promotes and controls the formation of life and death as the epitome of reason.
- 10 Human existence is defined by the dialectical relationship between the indeterminable but infinite fundament of existence, the holy and the absolute, and the determining but finite forma-

tion of existence, culture. Authentic religion is the inescapable confrontation of the mind with this fundamental relationship of existence. The objectification of the debate takes place in the controversial diversity of religious culture. It reflects the basic decision of authentic religion. This decision can temporarily obscure the inner relationship of the human mind, determined by dialectical dynamics, through rigid orthodoxism or reveal the truth of the relationship in spiritual revolts against orthodoxism. Orthodoxism is the normal case in the history of ideas, but its historical phenomena are repeatedly shattered by the violence of the freedom of existence.

- 11 E.g. in the announcement of the birth of Jesus by Archangel Gabriel, the so-called 'Ave Maria - Hail Mary'. In the Catholic religion, man receives the sanctifying grace through baptism and the Eucharist, but he can lose it again through evil deeds, only to regain it after repentance, confession, absolution and the Eucharist. Grace can be lost and is conditioned by sacrament and works.
- 12 Dr. Martin Luther's works (Weimar Edition), Vol. 56,117,1. For Luther, grace is given from the very beginning independent of human events and this is revealed to the consciousness in faith. But also faith as a human work does not bring about grace or its allocation.
- 13 Darśana, mfn. (skrt.) 'showing', 'seeing', 'looking at', 'observing' (Monier-Williams, p.476c) . Besides chanting, the darshan is a visually designed encounter with the holy, the fundament of existence.
- 14 Krishna, mfn. (skrt.) 'black', 'dark', 'dark-blue' (Monier-Williams, p.306b).
- 15 Bhakta, n. (skrt.) 'forming part of', 'belonging to', but also 'share' and 'portion'. Here, it means being a part of Krishna's grace. (Monier-Williams, p. 743a).
- 16 Vaikuṅṭha, m. (skrt.) 'Vishṇu's heaven'; Vishnu's paradise, which is not a place that can be explored in the natural sciences, but rather the utopia, the home of the human spirit. This can be experienced, among other things, in the chanting of the holy names. Vaikuṅṭhā, f. (skrt.) 'Vaikuṅṭhā's (Vishṇu's) Śakti', Vishnu's power, i.e. grace.
- 17 <http://www.harekrsna.de/Siksastaka/Siksastakam-E.Śhtm> - Verse 2
- 18 Śrī Caitanya-caritmāmṛta Ādi-līlā, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1979, Ch. 17, Verse 22a.
- 19 The word 'chant' derives from the Latin 'cantus' or 'canticum' or, more directly, from the corresponding verb 'cantare' and means 'formula magica', 'spell' or 'conjure', which means the unfolding of an energy that exceeds all normal possibilities for action. Perhaps the word originally meant the early morning song of the rooster ('Frühsänger'), which sets off the rising of the sun. 'Hahn' [rooster] derives from the Indo-Germanic root *kan- ('singing'). The chanting of the holy names is not an aesthetic fostering of mind, but a spiritual encounter with the fundament of existence.

- 20 Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi-līlā, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1979, Ch. 17, Verse 22b.
Cf. : Śacīnandana Swami: The Nectarean Ocean of the Holy Name. Sarangati Publishing.
2006, p. 41 = Journal of Religious Culture No. 224 (2017).
- 21 <http://www.harekrsna.de/Siksastaka/Siksastakam-E.htm> - Verse 2
- 22 Nātha, m. (skrt.) 'refuge', 'help'; 'protector', 'owner'; the verb nāth means 'to have power, to be master' and in the causative 'to grant a request'. Nathita, mfn. (skrt.) 'one who needs help' (Monier-Williams, p. 534c). The German word 'Gnade' has the same root of meaning.
- 23 <http://www.harekrsna.de/Siksastaka/Siksastakam-E.htm> - Verse 6
- 24 Bhakti, f. (skrt.) 'the being a part of', 'portion', 'share', 'that which belongs to or is contained in anything else' (Monier-Williams, p. 743ab). Here bhakti means the a priori and essential affiliation to Krishna, the indeterminable fundament of existence.
- 25 <http://bhagavata.org/downloads/bhagavatam-canto11.html#12>
- 26 Māyā, f. (skrt.) originally 'art', 'wisdom', 'extraordinary or supernatural power' (Monier-Williams, p. 811a), the power and ability of the formation of existence. But as Māyā was abused for the fundament of existence only, the word got the narrow meaning of 'illusion', 'unreality', 'deception' (Monier-Williams, p. 811a).
- 27 Bhakti, f. (skrt.) 'distribution', 'portion', 'share' 'belonging to', 'being part of', 'that which belongs to or is contained in anything else' (Monier-Williams, p. 743ab). Bhakti then means here 'being part of Krishna' or 'being contained in Krishna'.
- 28 <http://bhagavata.org/downloads/bhagavatam-canto11.html#12>
- 29 <http://www.harekrsna.de/Siksastaka/Siksastakam-E.htm> - Vers 2
- 30 <http://www.harekrsna.de/Siksastaka/Siksastakam-E.htm> - Vers 2
- 31 <http://www.harekrsna.de/Siksastaka/Siksastakam-E.htm> - Vers 8
- 32 <http://www.harekrsna.de/Siksastaka/Siksastakam-E.htm> - Vers 5
- 33 <http://www.harekrsna.de/Siksastaka/Siksastakam-E.htm> - Vers 5
- 34 <http://www.harekrsna.de/Siksastaka/Siksastakam-E.htm> - Vers 8
- 35 Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta. Antya-Līlā, Vol. 2, Ch.. 20.49, p. 651, Vaduz 1982.
- 36 <http://www.harekrsna.de/Siksastaka/Siksastakam-E.htm> - Verse 4
- 37 Līlā, f. (skrt.) 'play', here: the free games or pastimes or Krishna on earth.
- 38 The sensual, but by no means merely 'symbolic' visualization of Krishna, the fundament of existence, the absolute, i.e. the communion with him, the being in paradise in the here and now, can be experienced not only merely vocally-acoustically in the chanting of the holy names, but also visually in the darshana of the murti, i.e. by looking at the eyes of Krishna's consecrated deity in an infinite number of temples and houses, as well as through participation in the lilas, Krishna's pastimes on earth and on an infinite number of other occasions. But in all these contacts with the holy the nāman is present, i.e. the substance of Krishna, and this is

nothing but *kṛipā*, his infinite grace. The Brijbhasis, the inhabitants of Brajbhumi, the holy land of Krishna, located between Delhi and Agra, recall their experience of the free fundament of existence with their existential formations, especially in the *lilas*, the annual representations of the holy in a sensual and playful form. Participating in the *lilas*, as the Brijbhasis know, takes them to paradise. The simple cowherd girls in Braj were Krishna's beloved ones. He was Radha Raman, the lover of Radha and the other cowherd girls. That these women or 'gopis' [*gopī*, f. (skrt.) 'cowherdess, milkmaid' (Monier-Williams, p. 368a)] were so much loved by Krishna, cannot be attributed to any pious, i.e. ascetic works and sufferings aimed at heavenly gain. They rather loved their everyday way of life and their earthly homeland. They gave birth to their children, fed their husbands, fed and milked the cows, beat the butter and rejoiced in their lives. Krishna shared this fulfilling life with them. But he also showed them that the fundament of their existence did not end up in it, but that there was an even greater joy: the immersion in the fundament of existence, the *raslila*, the round dance on the night of the full moon, in which the cowherd girls were directly united with Krishna. But as in the *lila* on the theft of the flute (Cf. John Stratton Hawley in association with Shrivatsa Goswami: *The Theft of the Flute*. In: *At Play with Krishna. Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan*. Delhi 1992, c. III) Krishna had to rip them out of their beloved everyday life against their will. Even though the cowherd girls did not like being torn out of their beloved world occasionally by Krishna playing his flute, and even though they therefore tried to prevent it, they nevertheless experienced an absolute joy, senseless in the eyes of the Karmist understanding of existence, when Krishna seduced them into the wild forest of Braj to the nightly circle dance which had no karmic consequences at all – because it was an end in itself and utmost bliss. The cowherd girls experienced the relative joy of their everyday life with their works and sufferings, and at the same time they learned that this joy shared by Krishna is carried by an absolute joy that does not come from self-realization. But this absolute joy is not a negation of works and the world of the contented cowherd girls. Krishna does not deny the joy in the world of *dharma*, the formation of existence, culture, nor does he deny an ascetic retreat from the world. But the dharmic way of life of the cowherd girls and the joy associated with it are saved by the experience of absolute joy from being misused as a means for an ever void meaning of existence. Nevertheless: the experience of Krishna's association, the paradise on earth in the *lilas*, is by no means a matter of metaphysical motionlessness, a *unio mystica*, a *requies aeterna*, but a never-ending argument between a provocative and fascinating Krishna and the self-confident, quite unruly cowherd girls who are nevertheless drawn to him, between the fundament and the formation of existence. *Lila*, the dramatic visualization of the holy, the play of God, is not a spectacle where only players act and the others are just watching. In the religious game, as in social rituals, there are only co-actors. This holds also true for those who understand themselves as mere

spectators, who are only interested in the exoticism and aesthetics of the lila performances: they are in paradise without being able to admit it. The murti darshan, the lila participation and especially the chanting of the holy names are suitable to illustrate that man is indeterminate in his essence, free of his works and determinations and thus has to look into the eyes of the inextricable possibility of the otherness of his existence, which necessarily has to be determined.