

# SIVARATRI MESSAGE

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by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society  
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: [swami-krishnananda.org](http://swami-krishnananda.org)

[Swamiji Maharaj leads the audience in kirtan for the first three minutes.]

This is the eve of the holy celebration called Sivaratri, which is observed everywhere as a specially sanctified occasion for concentration and for *japa sadhana*, together with worship. The trinity of the Supreme Being is described as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, and the great facet of Lord Siva in this trinity has a special function to perform.

The creative Brahma is assigned the work of producing newer and newer species of entities in the various categories of life that one can conceive of. Eighty-four *lakhs* of specialisations, known as *yonis*, are supposed to be the mould into which living beings are cast during this continuous process of what is known as creation.

There is also a necessity to see that what is created endures. Otherwise, it will be a lopsided manufacture of entities with no purpose whatsoever behind their coming into being. Birth is coming into being. The word 'being' implies endurance, but this endurance is of a very strange character. It is not a stable or a solid fixity of existence, as we may imagine what stability is, because this character of the endurance of created beings should cope with the simultaneous creation of beings. And, more than that, there is a necessity to see that nothing endures in a permanent

manner. Brahma's function is to create, to produce newer and newer types of living beings. A peculiar, unintelligible character of endurance that is granted to these created beings is associated with Vishnu—the stabilising force, the *sattvika* element among the trinity, which balances the two other sides of existence, which are creativity and transformation. Rudra, or Siva, is the transforming power in this created world.

The simultaneity that is involved in creativity, endurance and transformation gives the entire picture a strange tinge of endurance in the form of a continuity of process. There is no true endurance of anything in this world. The fixity of a moving body is perhaps a good example of the way in which anything and everything in the world survives. Survival is only in terms of a particular pattern introduced into a limited area of the process of transformation. It is not that this process of endurance, which is at the same time a movement, can be made an object of one's consciousness right from the beginning till the end. Just as we can see the Ganga flowing here in front of the Ashram—it appears to start near Lakshmanjhula or so, and ends somewhere further on, near Purana Jhari, and we cannot see the prior or the posterior sides of the river's movement on account of the limitation of the faculty of perception—our life in this world is a long, long movement like the movement of a long river, the Ganga or any other river, but as we can be conscious of or perceive only a limited length of the flowing process, we can be conscious of only a few years of our life, which we call life in this world.

Life in this world is a small segment of the longer process of life in the universe, which is endless and beginningless, as it were. The endlessness and beginninglessness of the three processes of creation, preservation and destruction suggest the cyclic character of all things in space and in time. Only a cycle can be without a beginning and an end. It is not a linear movement like a beaten track on a paved road leading to some particular destination.

The three divinities—Brahma, Vishnu and Siva—are actually not three different divinities. A single intention of the Universal Being is made to manifest in a threefold manner. As we see in our own bodily individuality, for instance, the three processes are seen to be going on every day. The constituents of our body are not eternally alive. They are destroyed in the process of the body's growth. They are also renewed, and this renewal of a new life in this organism of the body calls for a transformation of the preceding conditions, which is practically the death of the preceding conditions. But the connection of the element of Vishnu between the creative and the transforming forces prevents our consciousness from being aware that there are three such activities going on in the body. We do not know what is happening at all. As if nothing is happening in the body, we feel very secure. There is a continuous upsurge of the movement of the cells of the body in all its organic parts for the purpose of creating and recreating themselves, in which process they also destroy themselves. There is, therefore, a transcendent element present in this transforming process, or what we call the dying process of one condition for the sake of giving birth to another condition.

When religions become too socially bound, ritual bound, tradition bound, they begin to focus on the supreme object of religion. The basic features of human thinking make us perceive our gods mostly as cosmically pictured counterparts of the inner psychological processes. We are unable to imagine that one single entity can behave as a threefold performer of action as creator, as redeemer, and as transformer.

*Namo visvarije purvam visvam tadanubibhrate, atha vishvasya samhartre tubhyam tredhasthitatmane* (Raghuvamsa X.16) is the famous prayer which the gods offered to the Supreme Being in the Ksheera Sagara, as recorded in the Raghuvamsa of Kalidasa: "Prostration to the

Creator, and prostration to Him who sustains after having created beings; prostration to Him who withdraws everything into Himself after having created and sustained them, and prostration to That which appears in these three forms of creation, preservation and transformation.”

But the mind of the human being is a composite structure. It is constituted of tiny ingredients of function and, therefore, it cannot easily visualise the indivisibility that is behind the threefold functions of creation, preservation and destruction. We see as many gods as there are inner constituents in the mind; and as many are our needs, so also are the number of gods. The religions of the world are, therefore, a social and theological reaction set up in the outer world, or in the cosmos, in response to the needs felt by the inner constituents of the mind. Our mind is not an indivisible solidity. Therefore, indivisibility cannot be thought by the mind. Even if we stretch our imagination and begin to concentrate on an indivisible total, we will find that we create a distinction of some sort or the other—a distinction between that which is thought and the thinking process on the one hand, and it being very, very necessary to picture the god, even the highest god, as being spatially and temporally located.

From this point of view of the psychological background of the religious requirements of man, the concept of the trinity has been highlighted in our religion as an object of worship. When we are able to visualise these divinities as three phases of a single entity, the gods of religion become one God. But if we see something taking place as birth and coming into existence, surviving for a time, and then dying some time afterwards—if these three are visualised by us as three different occurrences, and not actually three streams of a single undercurrent of performance—then we have three gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, and we attribute to these gods those characters which are associated with their functions.

In religion, Lord Siva is pictured in manifold ways. On the one hand, Lord Siva is adored as a most easily accessible god—one who is immediately pleased—on account of which, Lord Siva is called Ashutosh. The goodness of Lord Siva and the quickness of his benedictions oftentimes make religious propounders imagine that he grants things without thought, and so he is also called Bhole Baba—one who can be easily duped by devotees. But, Lord Siva is not so easily duped. The Bhole Baba attribute should not be taken as being childish in behaviour or ignorant of the pros and cons of action, as that is not the meaning of Bhole Baba. It means utter simplicity. Utter goodness goes with utter simplicity.

Stories in the Puranas that bring forward into highlight this particular character of Lord Siva as goodness, simplicity, and being quickly pleased are abundant. Most of these stories are in the Siva Purana, and some of them seem very humorous and make us laugh. But, at whom are we laughing? Are we laughing at Lord Siva himself? It looks that way. When certain behaviours which are incongruous in the ordinary sense are attributed to Lord Siva, we smile and laugh in a gentlemanly manner, imagining thereby that we would not behave in that way. We attribute a sense of wisdom to our own selves which cannot be granted to Lord Siva. These stories are analogies, and analogies and examples should not be stretched to the breaking point. Every example has a specific limitation, and should be taken as valid within that limitation only.

For instance, in Vedanta terminology this world is compared to a snake appearing in the rope which is Brahman. This is an analogy; it has a limited scope, and it should not be stretched beyond that limited scope of meaning. The idea is that as in twilight the illusion of a snake-like feature can be seen while it is actually a rope, this world looks like a diversified multifarious reservoir of objects of sense while it is actually eternal Consciousness scintillating in the form of these so-called objects. It does not mean that Brahman is long like a rope or has a tail like a snake. That is not a permissible way of using the analogy.

Immensely good is God. Sometimes this immense goodness of God may look like breaking the law that He Himself has created. Many times it is said that God made the law, and He cannot break the law which He Himself has made. Karma binds, and so on and so forth, is told to us. But there is some super-departmental executive power which God has that cannot be bound by departmental laws, which of course are created by His own sanction—under His signature, perhaps. Under special conditions, He can suddenly set at naught everything. Normally He does not interfere in things, and the law of the universe works. Karma operates as it ought to operate. But it does not operate in the case of certain specific aspirations emanating from exceptionally great devotees whose hearts have been united in such intimacy with God's existence that the intimacy breaks the distinction between the devotee and the Supreme Being. When this distinction is no more to be seen, all legal enactments cease to operate. When intense love pours itself forth, legal mandates cease to operate. But, intense love is not seen in this world. Therefore, laws very strictly bind us.

Intense love is a love that seeks nothing in return for the expression of that love. A give-and-take policy in love—if you do this, I do this; if you do not do this, I do not do this—is called Gauna Bhakti, the secondary devotion that ritualistic devotees entertain in their hearts, and the long train of law operates in their case. But unconditional affection—which is not seen and cannot be seen in this world because of the very nature of the world, and therefore transcends the world in many ways—makes God run to the devotee without sending any attendants, messengers, clerks, etc., to ask what the devotee wants.

Narayana Himself ran without even taking weapons in his hand when Gajendra cried, "*Narayana, akhila guro bhagavan namaste!*" It appears that when Birbal told this story to Akbar, Akbar ridiculed this god who himself runs for the sake of saving a devotee when he has immense powers in the form of angels and lesser gods. He has an army of divine forces; one of them could have gone and taken care of this

tragedy of Gajendra. Why should he himself run—that also, without weapon in hand? Narayana forgot to take even the Sudarshana Chakra; it had to follow him because it knew that he had forgotten to take it. When Akbar made this sarcastic remark, Birbal said, “No! It is not like that. God himself will run. I shall show you how it is possible, and how it is not otherwise.”

It appears that Akbar’s small child was under Birbal’s care and protection, and he would take the child for a walk on the lawns. One day Birbal connived with some friends to prepare an exact image of this child, and had it placed on the precipice of a deep well which was just near the lawn where they would walk and where Akbar also reclined in the evenings. It was twilight, and things could not be seen properly. That small image looked like Akbar’s child.

“Oh, my child is there!” cried Akbar.

“Yes, Your Highness. Your child is there,” replied Birbal

Birbal had also arranged for someone to suddenly push that image into the well; and it was done. The image of Akbar’s child was pushed into the well.

“Oh, my child is in the well!” cried Akbar, and he immediately ran towards it.

“No, Your Highness. You have attendants; you have police; you have an army; you have secretaries. Why are *you* running?” asked Birbal.

“Eh, fool! Don’t talk. It is *my* child,” said Akbar.

Then Birbal said, “Your child is very safe. I have only answered your interesting query that God need not Himself run when He has attendants. Now, why did you run for the sake of a small child when you have attendants? You could have told your assistant or the marshal near you to go instead. But the love that you have for your child is such that no attendant will do. Can you jump into the well, Your Highness? You know you cannot, but even then you ran as if you would jump into the well!”

That is the power of unconditioned love. It cannot be seen in this world because everything is conditioned by everything else. If there is something called 'A', it is there because there is another thing called 'B'. If 'B' is not there, we cannot see a thing called 'A'. And 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D'—there are millions of things. Our consciousness is involved in all these 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D'; and even if it appears that we are immensely fond of one particular 'A', 'B' or 'C', it is false, because as long as 'X', 'Y' or 'Z' exist, they will condition the affection which the mind appears to pour forth on certain things—even if it appears that the affection is almost one hundred percent. There is no such thing as one-hundred-percent concentration or affection on anything in this world. We can only have this kind of affection in a total existence outside of which there is no 'A', 'B' or 'X', 'Y'.

This also explains why it is difficult to concentrate the mind on an Ishta Devata. The Ishta Devata is a beloved object of concentration to which we have resorted. But it is an Ishta only conditionally; it is not really an Ishta. The dear object of meditation which we have chosen under the instruction of a Guru is only tentatively so, because there are other things in the world which are certainly equally Ishta, or desirable, and the mind knows that. Sometimes these objects are perhaps more desirable than the spirit.

Solid, concrete objects are more attractive than abstract imaginations. To the beginner in meditation, the object of meditation appears like an abstraction. The mind knows that it is a thought and that God Himself is not physically or concretely contacted. When God's thought actually solidifies itself into a concrete existence, the world will appear like a chimera—just the opposite of what happens in ordinary circumstances. The world is a very solid object. We can hit our head against the wall as it is so hard and solid, but this God whom we are contemplating is not so solid. It is a vision that is projected by the mind. This peculiarity of it not being possible for the mind to accept the concrete reality of the object of meditation, and a simultaneously acquiescing in the

reality of the world outside as a solid object, prevents any successful meditation and drawing in the grace of God.

Thus, Lord Siva is Bhole Baba, Ashutosh, immediately granting boons, but only to those whose love is not hypocritical, whose love is not double-dealing, whose love is not make-believe, whose love is not to get something ulterior, because God is not an ulterior object or an ulterior motive. The simplicity of God is due to the immensity of God's existence and the nearness of this immensity to the soul of the devotee. That is why it looks so simple. Otherwise, it is not so simple. No one can be as hard as God, if even a little distance is created between the lover and the beloved.

God is the beloved. In this world, the lover and the beloved are not identical things. They are two, and therefore they shall ever remain two, and remain subject to bereavement and destruction. The lover cannot merge into the beloved, and vice versa. And, until this is done, love is not complete; until this is done, devotion is not complete. It is when the devotion is really complete that the great Lord manifests himself as the child who can sweep our floor, bring the meal that we require, wash our clothes. We hear instances of this kind in the lives of saints of Maharashtra such as Eknath, Namdev, etc. Lord Sri Krishna came as a little boy called Kandiya Krishna; he washed their clothes, swept their floor, and did other menial work for Eknath and Namdev. When it was discovered that he had come in this form, he vanished.

Our hearts are hard like granite. Whatever be the religiosity and the traditional aspiration for religious life that many manifest, it is actually a dying to live for the sake of God. The destruction that is associated with Lord Siva—he is called the Lord of Death as he destroys everything, swallows everything in the end of time—is actually the destruction of that element in every one of us, whose presence prevents him from coming near us. What that element is, each one of us has to ransack within one's own heart and see that it is

taken out so that the flood from outside unites itself with the flood that is arising from inside. This is God-union.

Sivaratri Vrata is a disciplinary occasion that is instituted in religion for the purpose of an occasional gathering of our spirits for the sake of that which is great and glorious, and the ideal of our lives.

*Hari Om Tat Sat!*

*Om purnam adah, purnam idam, purnat purnam udacyate;  
purnasya purnam adaya puram evavasisyate.  
Om shantih shantih shantih.*