

Discourses/Articles
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SIVARATRI MESSAGE

[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. The great facet which is 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 - 84 lakhs [8,400,000] 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 in our minds what stability is, because this character of endurance of created beings should cope with the simultaneous creation of beings going on at the same time; and, more than that, there is a necessity to see that nothing really endures in a permanent manner. Brahma's function is to create, to produce newer and newer types of living beings; and 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 - 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. The 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 - somewhere it appears to be starting near Lakshman Jhula or so and ending somewhere further near Purana Jhari, and we cannot see the prior or the posterior side of this movement of the river 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 have a consciousness or a perception of a limited length only of the flowing process, we can have consciousness of only a few years of our life, which we call life in this world.

Life in this world is a little bit 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 get destroyed in the process of the growth of the body. They are also renewed, and this renewal of a new life in this organism of the body calls for a transformation of the conditions preceding, which is practically the death of the preceding condition. But the connection of an element which is 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 the organic parts inside - for the purpose of creating and recreating themselves, in which process they destroy themselves also. 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.

Religions, when they become too much socially bound, ritual bound, tradition bound, begin to focus on the supreme object of religion. The basic features of human thinking makes us perceive our gods mostly as a cosmically picturised counterpart 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 or as transformer.

*Namo visvarije purvam visvam tadanubibhrate
atha vishvasya samhartre tubhyam tredhasthitatmane* (Raghuvamsa X.16)

This is the prayer which the gods offered to the Supreme Being in the Kshira-sagara, as recorded in the Raghuvamsa of Kalidasa. “Prostrations 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; prostration to That which appears in these three forms of creation, preservation and transformation” - is a famous prayer. But the mind of the human being is a composite structure. It is constituted of little-little 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 are also the number of the 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 mind in its inner constituents. Our mind is not an indivisible solidity. Therefore, an indivisibility cannot be thought by the mind.

Even if we stretch our imagination and begin to concentrate on 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 one, 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. But when we are able to visualise them as three phases of a single entity, the god of religion becomes one God. But if we are able to see that there is something taking place as birth and coming into existence, survival 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. We attribute to these gods those characters which are associated with their functions.

Lord Siva is pictured in religion 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 character of his, Lord Siva is called Ashutosh. The goodness of Lord Siva and the quickness of his benedictions many times make religious propounders to imagine that he grants things without thought. So he is also called Bhole Baba - one who is capable of being easily duped by the devotees. But, Lord Siva is not so easily capable of being duped. The Bhole Baba attribute should not be taken as a person who is childish in behavior or ignorant of the pros and cons of action; that is not the meaning of Bhole Baba. It means utter simplicity. Utter goodness goes with utter simplicity.

Stories in the Puranas which bring forward into highlight this particular character of Lord Siva as goodness, simplicity and being quickly pleased are abundant. In the Siva Purana, we have most of these stories. Some of the stories look very humorous, which make us laugh; but, at whom are we laughing? Are we laughing at Lord Siva himself? It looks like that. When certain behaviors which are incongruous in the ordinary sense are attributed to Lord Siva, we laugh and smile 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 within the limitation only that example should be taken as valid.

For instance, in Vedanta terminology there is the comparison of this world to a snake appearing in the rope which is Brahman. This is an analogy, and it has a limited scope, and it should not be stretched beyond that limited scope of meaning. The idea is that as an illusion of a snake-like feature can be seen in twilight when actually we see a rope, this world looks like a diversified multifarious reservoir of objects of sense, while actually it is eternal consciousness scintillating in the form of these so-called objects; but it does not mean that Brahman is long like a rope, or there is a tail as the snake has. That is not a permissible way of using an 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, are the things told to us. But there is some super-departmental executive power which God has which cannot be bound by departmental laws, which of course are created by His own sanction - under His signature, perhaps. He can suddenly set at naught everything, under special conditions. Normally, He will not interfere in things.

Normally, the law of the universe will work. Karma also will operate as it ought to operate. But it does not operate in the case of certain specific aspirations emanating from exceptionally great devotees whose heart has been united to such intimacy with God's existence that the intimacy breaks the distinction between the devotee and the Supreme Being; and when this distinction is no more to be seen, all legal enactments also 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 - this kind of affection or love is Gauna Bhakti, as they call it, the secondary devotion that ritualistic devotees entertain in their hearts, and the long train of law will operate in their case; but unconditional affection, which is not seen in this world, which cannot be seen in this world because of the very nature of the world, which 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!*” This story, it appears, was told by Birbal to Akbar. Akbar ridiculed this god who wants to run himself for the sake of saving a devotee while 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? He forgot to take even the Sudarshan-chakra. It had to follow him because it knew that he had forgotten to take it. When Akbar made a 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 the little child of Akbar was under the care and protection of Birbal. He used to take the little child along the lawns for walking, etc. Always the child was with him, the little child. One day Birbal had connived, with the assistance of some friends, to prepare an exact image of this little child, and had it placed just on the precipice of a deep well which was just near the lawn where they used to walk and where Akbar also used to recline sometimes in the evenings. It was twilight and one could not see things properly. That little image looked like the child itself.

“Oh, my child is there!”

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

He had also arranged, with the help of somebody, to suddenly push that image into the well; and it was done. It was pushed.

“Oh, the child is in the well!” cried Birbal, and he ran immediately.

Akbar said, “No! Your Highness. You have got attendants; you have got police; you have got an army; you have got secretaries. Why are *you* running?”

“Eh, fool! Don't talk. It is *my* child.”

“Now please, your child is very safe. I have only given answer to your interesting query that God need not himself run when he has an attendant. Now, why did you run for the sake of a little child when you have attendants? You could have told the assistant or the marshal near you to go and find out. But the love that you have for the child is such that no attendant can do that work. Can you jump into the well, Your Highness? You know you cannot do that. Even then you ran as if you will go into the well!”

That is the power of love which is unconditioned. That 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, you cannot see a thing called ‘A’. And ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’, ‘D’ - there are millions of things like that. Our consciousness is involved in all this ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’, ‘D’; and even if it appears that we are immensely fond of one particular ‘A’ or ‘B’ or ‘C’, it is false, because as long as ‘X’, ‘Y’, ‘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 100%. There is no such thing as 100% concentration or affection on anything in this world. You can only have this kind of affection in a total existence outside in which there is no ‘A’, ‘B’ or ‘X’, ‘Y’ - and 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 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 they 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 and it is so hard and solid, as we know, 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.

So, Lord Siva is Bhole Baba, Ashutosh, immediately granting boons, but only to those whose love is not hypocritical, whose love is not a double dealing, whose love is not a make-believe, whose love is not to get something ulterior, because God is not an ulterior object or 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 so hard as God is, 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 in to the beloved, and vice versa. And, until this is done, love is not complete; until that is done, devotion is not complete. It is at that time

when the devotion is really complete that the great Lord manifests himself as the child who can sweep your floor, get you the meal that you require, wash your clothes. We hear instances of this kind in the lives of saints of Maharashtra - like Ekanath, Namdev, etc. Lord Sri Krishna came as a little boy called Sri Kandiya, washed the clothes, swept the floor, and did such menial work for Ekanath 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 our own hearts 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.*