

SIVARATRI—THE MYSTIC NIGHT

by

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We conceive God as glory, as creativity and as austerity. Vishnu is glory and magnificence, Brahma is creativity force, and Siva is austerity and renunciation. You might have heard it said that God is the embodiment of six attributes of which renunciation is one. You will be wondering how God can renounce things. He is not a Sannyasin. He is not an ascetic like a Vairagin or a Sadhu. What is He going to renounce? How do you conceive Siva as an austere Yogin or a renunciate? What does He renounce? The all-pervading Almighty, what has He to give or abandon? Here is the secret of what renunciation is! It is not renunciation of anything, because there is nothing outside Him; renunciation does not mean abandonment of object. If that had been the definition of renunciation, that cannot apply to God. God does not renounce or abandon any object, because all objects are a part of His Cosmic Body. Then how do you represent God as an embodiment of Vairagya (dispassion)? Bhagavan, who is endowed with 'Bhaga' or glories of a sixfold nature, is also embodiment of Vairagya. Do you identify Him with a Sannyasin, possessing nothing? No, never. God is the possessor of all things. Then, how can you call Him a renunciate, a Sannyasin or a Vairagin? The secret behind the concept or the consciousness of Vairagya, renunciation is here, in the identification of this attribute with God. It is only when we interpret things in terms of God that things become clear. Otherwise, we get confused. We cannot know what

goodness is, we cannot know what evil is, we cannot know what virtue is, unless we refer all these values of life to the concept of God in His Perfection. The only standard of reference for us in all matters of life's values, is the existence of God. So, the concept of renunciation, which has been very much misused, also gets rectified, clarified and purified when it is understood with reference to the existence of God whose special manifestation, in this context, is known as Lord Siva.

God does not renounce anything. Then, in that case what is renunciation in this context? It is the freedom from the consciousness of externality. This is called Vairagya. How can you abandon things? All things are there in front of you, like trees in a forest or stones in the jungle. There is nothing like abandonment of things, because they are internally related to you. Nobody can renounce anything, because everything in this world is connected to everything else. Then what is Vairagya? Vairagya is not renunciation of any object; it is impossible. Everything clings to you. But the idea that things are outside you, makes you get attached to them. This false attachment is Raga, and its absence is Vi-raga. The condition of Vi-raga is Vairagya. As God has no consciousness of externality, because everything is embodied in Him, there cannot be a greater renunciate than God. And in as much as this Consciousness of God is the highest form of Wisdom, He is the repository of Jnana.

In our religious tradition, Lord Siva is represented as an aspect of God, the Almighty. He presents before us the ideal of supreme renunciation born of Divine Realisation - not born of frustration, not born of an escapist attitude, not born of defeatism, but born of an insight into the nature of things, a clear understanding of the nature of life and the wisdom of existence in its completeness. This is the source of Vairagya, or renunciation. You do not want anything, not because you cannot get things, but because you have realised the interconnectedness of things and the unity of all purpose in consciousness. All desires get hushed, sublimated and boiled down to the divine Being only when this realisation comes. God does not possess things. Possession is a relationship of

one thing with another thing. But, God is super-relative. That is why we call Him the Absolute - He is not relative. Anything that is related to something else comes under the category of relative. God is not related to anything else, because He is All-comprehensive. And, thus, in His all-comprehensive Absoluteness, which is height of wisdom conceivable, there is also the concomitant character of freedom from the consciousness of externality, and therefore, as a corollary, freedom from attachment to anything. Thus Lord Siva is the height of austerity, Master Yogin, portrayed as seated in a lotus pose, as the king of all ascetics; not that He has the desire for self-control, but He is what self-control is itself. He does not practise self-control. Self-control itself is symbolised in the personality of Lord Siva. Such a wondrous concept of a glorious majestic picture of the Almighty, as Lord Siva, is before us for adoration during Mahasivaratri.

We observe fast during the day and vigil during the night. The idea is that we control the senses, which represent the outgoing tendency of our mind, symbolised in fasting, and we also control the Tamasic inert condition of sleep to which we are subject every day. When these two tendencies in us are overcome, we transcend the conscious and the unconscious levels of our personality and reach the superconscious level. While the waking condition is the conscious level, sleep is the unconscious level. Both are obstacles to God-realisation. We are shifted from one condition to another. We are shunted, as it were, from waking to sleep and from sleep to waking, every day. But the super-conscious is not known to us. The symbology of fast and vigil on Sivaratri is significant of self-control; Rajas and Tamas are subdued, and God is glorified. The glorification of God and the control of the senses mean one and the same thing, because it is only in God-consciousness that all senses can be controlled. When you see God, the senses melt like butter melting before fire. They cannot exist any more. All the ornaments become the solid mass of gold when they are heated to the boiling point. Likewise, in the furnace of God-consciousness, the sense-energies melt into a continuum of universality.

In the famous Rudra-Adhyaya or the Satarudriya of the Yajur Veda, we have a majestic, universalised description of Lord Siva, a chant which we are accustomed to every day in the temple. Only those who know what Sanskrit is, what the Vedas are and what worship is, can appreciate what this Satarudriya chant also is. It is one of the most powerful prayers ever conceived by the human mind. It is filled with a threefold meaning. According to the culture of this country, everything is threefold - objective, subjective and universal. Everything in the world, from the smallest to the biggest, has an objective character, a subjective character and an universal character. Objectively you are something, subjectively you are another thing and universally you are a third thing. It all depends upon the point of view from which you interpret a particular thing, person or object. When you objectively interpret a thing, it looks like one thing; when you subjectively analyse it, it is another thing; and from the universal point of view, it is a third something altogether.

Likewise, this Mantra, the Satarudriya of the Yajurveda, a hymn to Lord Siva, has an objective meaning, a subjective meaning and a divine, supreme, supra-mental, universal meaning. Objectively, it is a prayer for the control of the forces of nature. Subjectively, it is a prayer for self-control and the rousing of the spiritual consciousness. Universally, it is a surge of the soul towards Godrealisation. It has an Adhiyajnika, Adhibhautika, Adhidaivika and Adhyatmika meaning, as we usually put it. It has a tremendous meaning. The Vedas, the Mantras of the Vedas, are filled with such threefold or fourfold meaning. Hence it is difficult to understand the full meaning of any Mantra of the Veda. "*Ananta vai vedah*": Infinite is the meaning of the Vedas. The meaning of the Vedas is infinite. It has no end at all. It is mathematics; it is chemistry; it is physics; it is Ayurveda; it is psychology; it is metaphysics; it is philosophy; it is spirituality; it is meditation; it is love; it is ecstasy. You will find everything in every Mantra of the Veda. All depends upon how you look upon it, how you feel it. A person may be a father, he may be a brother, he may be a son, he may be a

friend, but all the while he is one and the same person. Attitudes are different on account of the various relationships. So the Rudra Adhyaya before us is a majestic prayer for world peace, international peace, subjective peace, universal peace and God-consciousness.

It is difficult to chant this Veda Mantra called the Satarudriya, because it requires a training - as in music, for example. Everybody cannot sing. It requires tremendous training for years together. Likewise, the chanting of the Mantras of the Veda requires training for years together, and not for a few days only. Just as one who does not know how to sing will make a jarring noise and you will like to get up and go away rather than listen to it, so also when you chant the Mantra wrongly, the gods will get up and go away. They will not bear it any more. Hence, it requires training. But once it is properly learnt, it becomes a protection for you from catastrophes of every kind - physical, psychological and what not. So, those who know may chant it, recite it and take part in the recitation of it every day in the temple, at least during the worship on Mahasivaratri.

Those who cannot do this because it is difficult, can chant the Mantra 'Om Namah Sivaya', the Panchakshara Mantra of Lord Siva with Om preceding it. It is a Kavacha, a kind of armour that you put on. This armour will protect you from danger of every kind. It will protect you and also all those whom you want to be protected. It will protect your family; it will protect your country; it will protect the whole world. It can cease wars and tensions of every kind, provided you offer the prayers wholeheartedly from the bottom of your heart. Collective prayer is very effective. If a hundred persons join together and pray, it will have a greater effect than one person praying. Of course, if that single person is very powerful, even one person's prayer is all right. But where personalities have their own weaknesses and foibles, it is better that people have congregational prayer. When all the minds are put together they form a great energy. It surges forth into God.

So, during this period preceding Sivaratri, prayer is to be offered to Lord Siva as the Master of Yogin, as the incarnation of all virtues and powers, as a facet of the Almighty Lord. The glory of Lord Siva is sung in the Siva Purana, in the Yajur Veda Rudra Adhyaya, as I mentioned, and in the Mahabharata. You will be wonderstruck at the force with which Vyasa and other sages sing the glories of God - of Vishnu, of Narayana, of Siva, of Devi in the various Puranas and epics - because these masterpieces have been written by those who had the vision of God. Only one who has the vision of God can express with a soulful force. Otherwise, it will be an empty sound without much significance and thought. So, chant the Mantra 'Om Namah Sivaya' as many times as possible every day, mentally or even verbally as is convenient, with selfcontrol - which means to say, without any thought of sense-object. If you chant the Mantra together with the thought of sense-objects, then there is divided devotion. It is like dividing the course of a river in two different directions so that the force of the waters gets lessened. Suppose you have five sense-objects, and towards all of them your senses are running, and you are thinking of God also at the same time - then energy is divided, concentration becomes weak and meditation is not successful. No meditation will become successful if the senses are active, because the senses oppose the effort at meditation. While meditation is the collective force of the mind concentrating itself on God-consciousness, the senses, when they are active, do the opposite of meditation and you become a tremendous extrovert. You are connected to the objects of sense rather than the universal concept which is God. God is unity, whereas sense objects are multiplicity. They are the opposite of what you are aiming at in your spiritual life.

With moderate behaviour in every manner in your spiritual life, you will attain success. As the Bhagavadgita beautifully puts it, "Moderate in your eating, moderate in your activity, moderate in your speech, moderate in your sleep" - form the golden mean, the via-media, the golden

path. God is the harmony of all powers in the universe. Harmony means the middle course - neither this extreme nor that extreme. You cannot say whether it is or it is not. We do not know what it is. As Buddha said, "'Nothing is', is one extreme; 'everything is', is another extreme. God is in the middle. Truth is in the middle." So, the middle path is the best path, which is the path of austerity with understanding. This is the characteristic of the middle path. When there is understanding without austerity, it is useless. When there is austerity without understanding, that is also useless. There must be austerity with understanding and understanding with austerity, knowledge with self-control and self-control with knowledge; that is wisdom. Knowledge with self-control is called wisdom, whereas knowledge without self-control is mere dry intellectuality. That is of no use. And austerity without understanding is a kind of foolishness. It will have no proper result.

Lord Siva is not merely an austere Being but also a repository of Knowledge. All worshippers of knowledge also worship Lord Siva, as He is the God of all students, scholars and seekers of wisdom and knowledge. Thus, Mahasivaratri is a very blessed God-sent opportunity for us. So on this day, pray to Lord Siva with all your heart, with all your soul, fully trusting on the might of God, wanting nothing from the objects of sense, and delighted within that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. God is bound to come. The powers of the cosmos are everywhere and they can be invoked at any time by us, provided we are strong enough in our will and in the method of invocation. We are blessed because we live in the Kingdom of God. We are blessed because we are seekers of Truth. We are blessed because we are disciples of a great Master. We are blessed, thrice blessed, four-times, five-times blessed because we are seeking God who also seeks everything in this creation. God seeks the world and the world seeks God. This is the mystery of creation, the subtlety of the spiritual path and the glory of the meditative life. Jnana and Vairagya combined is Lord Siva, who is worshipped on Mahasivaratri day.

Lord Siva is easily pleased. He is called Asutosh. Asutosh means 'easily pleased'. He is not a difficult Person. You can quickly please Lord Siva. If you call Him, He will come. Sometimes He is also called 'Bhole Baba' - a very simple, not complicated Person. He comes to help you, even unasked. He helped the Pandavas. The Pandava brothers were in war with the Kauravas in the Mahabharata battle, and Lord Siva helped them without their knowing that the help was being offered. Lord Siva helped the Pandavas invisibly - and why would He not help us? He helps all those who tread the righteous path. So let us tread the path of righteousness and be recipients of Divine Grace.

We may look at the whole thing from another angle of vision. The Sanskrit word 'Sivaratri' means 'the night of Siva'. On this holy day we are to fast during the day and keep vigil during the night. You may be wondering why Siva is connected with the night and not with the day - otherwise we could observe vigil during daytime and fast during the night. Instead of that, why has the whole thing been put topsy-turvy? Siva being connected with night has a highly spiritual and mystical connotation. It is not that divinity as manifest in the form of Lord Siva has any special connection with the period we call night. If you study deeply the Upanishads and such mystical texts of high spiritual significance, you will realise that the Supreme Being, the Absolute, is designated in its primordial condition as a Supreme Darkness due to excess of light. This adjective or qualification 'due to excess of light' must be added. It is darkness because of the excess of light. When you look at the sun directly for a few minutes and then look elsewhere, you will see only darkness. The sun has dazzled you to such an extent that all else appears as darkness. It is said in the Mahabharata that when Lord Sri Krishna showed the Cosmic Form in the court of the Kauravas, everything was dark, as it were. The intensity of the light was such that it looked like darkness to the eyes of man. In one of the famous creation-hymns of the Rigveda we have a similar reference made to the original condition of creation. There is the hymn of the Veda called the Nasadiya

Sukta, wherein it is said, "*Tama asit tamasa gudhamagre*": Darkness there was; at first concealed in darkness. According to us, light is perception of objects, and therefore non-perception of objects is regarded by us as night, because knowledge or consciousness unrelated to the perceptual process is unknown to the human mind.

Generally, to know is to know an object; and if it is not to know an object, it is not to know anything at all. For example, take the state of deep sleep. Why do we fall asleep? Do you know the reason? What is the cause for our going to sleep every night? Where is the necessity? The necessity is psychological and, to some extent, highly metaphysical. The senses cannot always continue perceiving objects, because perception is a fatiguing process. The whole body, the whole nervous system, the entire psychological apparatus becomes active in the process of the perception of objects. And without our knowing what is happening, the senses get tired. They cannot go on contemplating things all twenty-four hours of the day. Why should they not be contemplating objects of sense throughout the day, all twenty-four hours of the day? The reason is that perception is an unnatural process from the point of view of consciousness as such. Perception of an object is the alienation of an aspect of our personality through the avenue of a particular sense in respect of its object. All this is difficult for many to grasp. This is a highly psychological secret. Consciousness is indivisible. This is a simple fact. Many of you would have heard about it. Consciousness is undivided; it is incapable of division into parts. So it cannot be cut into two sections - subject and object. On the basis of this fact there cannot be a division between the seer and the seen in the process of perception. To make this clear, let us see what happens in dream.

In dream we see objects like mountains, rivers, persons, etc. But they are not there. Things which are not there become visible in dream. Now, did the mountain you saw in dream exist? It did not. But did you see it? Yes, you saw it. How did you see, when it was not there? Is it possible to see a

non-existent object? How can non-existent things be seen? It is contradictory statement to say that non-existent things can be seen. What do you see when things are not there? You will be wonderstruck! What happens in dream is that there is an alienation of the mind into the objects of perception; and the mind itself becomes the mountain there. There is tension created due to the separation of a part of the mind into the object and a part of it existing as the perceiving subject. That is why we are restless in dream. We cannot be happy. It is neither waking nor it is sleep. It is very difficult to be happy in this condition because a tense situation of consciousness is created. What happened in dream, the same happens to us in the waking condition also. Just as the mind in dream divided itself into two sections - the perceiving subject and the object that was seen - in the waking state also, it divides itself into the subject and object. It is like a divided personality. It is as if your own personality has been cut into two halves, of which one half is the 'seer' and the other half is the 'seen'. It is as if one part of your personality gazes at another part of your own personality. You are looking at your own self as if you are a different person. You are objectifying yourself; you alienate yourself. What can be more false and undesirable than this situation? It is a mental sickness.

Now you are able to understand this situation in dream on account of the comparison that you make between waking and dream. When you wake up, you do not see the dream objects, and then you begin to analyse the condition in which you were when you were dreaming. You say, when you are awake, that you are in a world of reality, whereas in dream you were in a world of unreality. How do you know that the world of dream was a world of unreality? It is merely because you compare it with the waking condition which you consider as real. How do you know that the world of waking is real? You cannot say anything about this, because there is nothing with which you can compare it, as you did in the case of the dream. If you can know another standard of reference, higher than the waking condition, you would have been able to make a judgement of it - whether the waking condition is

real or unreal, good or bad and so on. When you are dreaming, you do not know that the objects are unreal. You consider them as real and you take it for granted. The comparison between the dream and the waking world is responsible for our judgement of the unreality of the dream world. But with what will you compare the waking world? There is at present nothing to compare it with, and therefore you are in a condition which is self-sufficient, self-complacent and incapable of rectification.

When you feel that you are perfectly right, nobody can teach you. Nobody can set you right, because you think that you are right. The question of teaching arises only when you feel that you are ignorant and you need teaching. The waking world is only an indication as to what could be happening or what is perhaps happening. You cannot know what is happening actually, unless you transcend this condition, which you have not done yet. But, by the conclusion that you can draw from an analysis of the dream condition, you can conclude to some extent that in the waking state also you are in a fool's paradise. What is the guarantee that you will not wake up again from this waking world, into something else? Just as in dream you did not know that you were dreaming, in this waking also you do not know that you are in a state similar to dream. You think that this world in waking is a hard fact and a solid reality, just as you believed the world of dream also to be real. To the senses an absence of perception is equal to darkness - the darkness that we experience in deep sleep.

Let us come back to the subject of Sivaratri, the night of Siva. When you perceive an object, you call it waking. When you do not perceive it, it is darkness. Now in the waking condition - the so-called waking world - you see present before you a world of objects, as you are intelligent. In dream also there is a sort of intelligence. But in deep sleep there is no intelligence. What happens? The senses and the intellect withdraw themselves into their source. There is no perceptual activity, and so the absence of perception is equated to the presence of darkness. The cosmic Primeval

condition of the creative will of God, before creation - a state appearing like darkness, or night - is what we call the condition of Siva. It is very important to remember that the state of Siva is the primordial condition of the creative will of God, where there is no externality of perception, there being nothing outside God; and so, for us, it is like darkness or night. It is Siva's night - Sivaratri. For Him it is not night. It is all Light. Siva is not sitting in darkness. The Creative Will of God is Omniscience, Omnipotence, Omnipresence - all combined. Sometimes we designate this condition as Isvara.

The Supreme Absolute, which is indeterminable, when it is associated with the Creative Will with a tendency to create the Cosmos, is Isvara in Vedantic parlance, and Siva in Puranic terminology. This is the very precise condition described in the Nasadiya Sukta of the Veda as Tamas or darkness. This is, to repeat again, darkness due to the excess of the Light of the divine Absolute. If you look at God, what will you see? You will see nothing. The eyes cannot see Him because He is such dazzling light. When the frequency of light gets intensified to a very high level, light will not be seen by the eyes. When the frequency is lowered and comes down to the level of the structure of the retina of the eye, only then you can see light. There are various kinds of lights, various intensities or frequencies, and the higher frequencies are incapable of cognisance by the senses on account of their structural deformity. So if you see God, you will see nothing.

As a matter of fact, we are seeing God even now. But we are not able to recognise Him. The world that we see before us is God Himself. There is no such thing as the world. The world does not exist. It is only a name that we have given to the Supreme Being. Call the dog a bad name and then hang it. Who asked you to call it a world? Why do you give such a name? You yourself have given it a name and say, "Oh, this is the world!" You can call it by another name. You are free to give any name to it. Really there is no such thing as a world. It does not exist. The world is only a name that you give to a distortion created in the perception of your consciousness due to its isolation into the subject and the object.

To come back to the analogy of dream again, the mountain that you saw in dream was not a mountain; it was only consciousness. There was no mountain. But it looked like a hard something in front of you, against which you could hit your dream head. You see buildings in dream. It was consciousness that projected itself into the hard substance of bricks and buildings, mountains and rivers, persons and animals, etc., in dream. The world of dream does not exist. You know it very well, and yet it appears. What is it that appears? The consciousness itself projects itself outwardly, in space and time created by itself, and then you call it a world. Likewise, in the waking state also the Cosmic Consciousness has projected itself into this world. The world is Cosmic Consciousness. The Supreme Divinity Himself is revealed here in the form of this world. As the dream world is nothing but consciousness, the waking world also is nothing but consciousness, God. This is the essence of the whole matter. So you are seeing God. I am right in saying that. What you see in front of you is God only. It is not a building. There is no such thing as a building. But you call it a building due to an error of perception, due to ignorance and due to not being able to analyse the situation in which you are involved. We are caught up in a mess, in a paradox, in a confusion; and the confusion has entered us, entered into the bones, as it were, into the very fibre of our being and made us the fools that we are today. It is to awaken ourselves from this ignorance and to come to a state of that supreme blessedness of the recognition of God in this very world, that we practise Sadhana. The highest of Sadhanas is meditation on God.

On Sivaratri, therefore, you are supposed to contemplate God as the creator of the world, as the Supreme Being unknown to the Creative Will, in that primordial condition of non-objectivity which is the darkness of Siva. In the Bhagavadgita there is a similar verse which has some sort of a resemblance to this situation. "*Ya nisa sarvabhutanam tasyam jagarti samyami; yasyam jagrati bhutani sa nisa pasyato muneh*": That which is night to the ignorant, is day to

the wise; and that which is day to the wise, is night to the ignorant. The ignorant feel the world as daylight and a brightly illumined objective something; and that does not exist for a wise person. The wise see God in all His effulgence; and that does not exist for the ignorant. While the wise see God, the ignorant do not see Him; and while the ignorant see the world, the wise do not see it. That is the meaning of this verse in the second chapter of the Gita. When we see sunlight, the owl does not see it. That is the difference. The owl cannot see the sun, but we can. So, we are owls, because we do not see the self-effulgent sun - the Pure Consciousness. And he who sees this sun - the Pure Consciousness, God - is the sage, the illumined adept in Yoga.

Sivaratri is a blessed occasion for all to practise self-restraint, self-control, contemplation, Svadhyaya, Japa and meditation, as much as possible within our capacity. We have the whole of the night at our disposal. We can do Japa or we can do the chanting of the Mantra, 'Om Namah Sivaya'. We can also meditate. It is a period of Sadhana. Functions like Mahasivaratri, Ramanavami, Janmashtami, Navaratri are not functions in the sense of festoons and celebrations for the satisfaction of the human mind. They are functions of the Spirit; they are celebrations of the Spirit. In as much as we are unable to think of God throughout the day, for all the 365 days of the year, such occasions are created so that at least periodically we may recall to our memory our original destiny, our Divine Abode. The glory of God is displayed before us in the form of these spiritual occasions.