

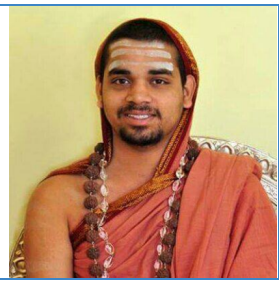


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CHODANAA

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Navratri special & 35th Aradhana of 35th Peedathipathi of Śrī Sringeri Sharada Peetham Jagadguru Śankarācārya His Holiness Śrī Abhinava Vidyatirtha Mahāswāmiji (24th September 2024)

31st Oct 2024 107th Jayanthi Mahotsava of 35th Peedathipathi of Śrī Sringeri Sharada Peetham Jagadguru Śankarācārya His Holiness Śrī Abhinava Vidya Teertha Mahaswamigal (1917-1989)

WORSHIP OF ISVARA

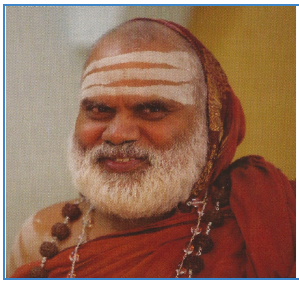
(From Sorrows to Bliss)

(Jagadguru Śankarācārya His Holiness Śrī Abhinava vidyatirtha Mahāswamiji)

People desire to escape death. But experience shows that this desire is not fulfilled. The Lord has said: "For anyone who is born, death is definite and for the one who dies, rebirth is certain. Hence, with regard to what is unavoidable, you ought not to grieve."

We have been born now. The Lord speaks of rebirth. If there is to be a rebirth in future, death must occur first. The exit of the prāṇas (life- breaths) from the body is said to be death. While we do not want our pranas to leave the body, in whose case will there actually be no departure of the prāṇas from the present body and entry into another body? The Bṛhadāranyaka-upaniṣad says: "The enlightened one's prāṇas do not depart from the body," and, "They dissolve into him alone."

In the case of a jñānin, the one who has realized the Supreme, the subtle body comprising the mind, organs and the prāṇas does not depart from the gross body and proceed to another body. Instead, the earth, water, fire, air and ākāśa that constitute the body dissolve into their respective universal forms. The Veda asserts that there is no death for a jñānin: "It is only on knowing Him that one transcends death. He who is without death cannot have any rebirth. Statements such as, "Birth, death and dwelling in the mother's womb occur again and again," are not applicable to a jñānin. So if people are to fulfil their desire for freedom from death, it is imperative that they acquire jñāna, the realization of the Truth. For this, it is necessary that they secure the means for the dawn of realization.

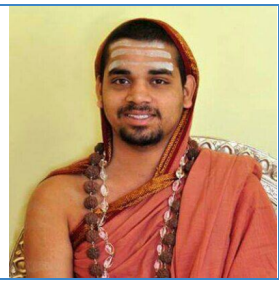


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The Bṛhadaraṇyaka-upaniṣad teaches: "The Ātman, my dear, should be realized, heard of, reflected on and firmly meditated upon. Thus, the proximate means to realize the Ātman, which is none other than Brahman are śravaṇa, the hearing of the Truth from the Guru and the scripture, manana, reasoning in accordance with what has been taught to resolve all doubts, and nididhyāsana, steadfast, one-pointed concentration of the mind on the Ātman. A tetrad of qualifications is needed for one to engage in śravaṇa, manana and nididhyāsana. These are viveka, (discrimination) vairāgya, (dispassion), śamādi-ṣaṭka-sampatti, (possession in abundance of the set of six qualities beginning with mind control), and mumukṣutva, (the desire for freedom from transmigratory existence). The set of six referred to comprises śama, (the control of the mind), dama, (the control of the senses), uparati (withdrawal from activities), titikṣā (forbearance), śraddhā (faith), and samādhāna, focus. If the four qualifications are not

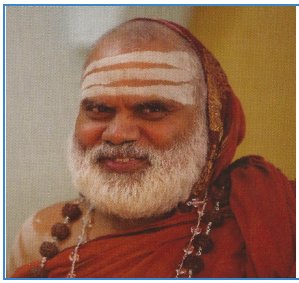


present in a person, his attempt at śravaṇa, manana and nididhyāsana will not bear fruit in the form of the dawn of the realization of the Supreme. Just as upanayana (investiture with the sacred thread) is a prerequisite for a person to perform a Vedic yāga, these four qualifications are needed here. However, they are uncommon.

What is one who is not yet qualified to engage in śravaṇa, manana and nididhyāsana to do? It is said: "Since our mind has not withdrawn from the world in its entirety, we cannot practise śravaṇa and manana. However, the anguish caused by sense-objects is unbearable. To end it, we practise the worship of God's feet." Bhakti is what should be resorted to

The nature of devotion

By nature, we are emotionally involved with something or the other. It is said: "A child is engrossed with play. A lad dotes on a maiden. An aged one is given to worrying. But none is attached to the Supreme Brahman." It is patent that we are not free from attachments at any time and that it would be well-nigh impossible for

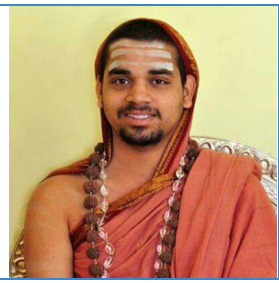


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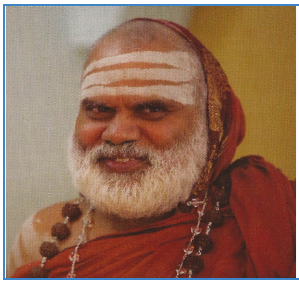
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us to give up fondness altogether. However, what we can do is to turn our fondness towards the Lord; if we do so, we will benefit greatly. Fondness is a *vṛtti* of the mind, it needs an object and cannot subsist without one. The emotional pull towards children is called '*vātsalya*', that towards the wife is named '*rati*' and that towards the revered is termed '*bhakti*'. Nārada has defined *bhakti* thus in his *Bhakti-sūtras*: "Bhakti is of the nature of supreme love for God" A devotee with this *parama-prema*, supreme love' just cannot exist without God; he who can manage for even a moment without love for God does not have this *parama-prema*. Such is the characteristic of consummate *bhakti*. A devotee with this *bhakti* attains God and transcends dotage and death.

According to the *Taittirīya-upaniṣad*, the intrinsic nature of God is as follows: "Brahman is absolute existence, pure consciousness and infinite (unlimited by space, time and objects). The Supreme is, thus, *nirguṇa*, bereft of qualities. The good qualities of an entity engender fondness for that entity. As God is without qualities, how is one to love Him? The Supreme, though intrinsically devoid of qualities, appears with wonderful qualities that thoroughly facilitate devotion. The Lord has said: "Though I am without birth, have, by nature, a power of knowledge that never wanes and am the Lord of beings, by subjugating My *Prakṛti*, I take birth by My own *Māya*." The Veda teaches, "He that is unborn manifests in many ways." Thus, it must be accepted that God incarnates. His incarnations are His captivating sports. Why does the Lord incarnate? He does so for the sake of benefitting beings. It is said: "Having compared the weights of helpfulness to others and abidance in absoluteness and concluded that helping others is the weightier of the two, the Lord incarnated ten times. It is also said, "Fie upon the life of one who helps none. May animals live; even their skins are useful." The life of the person who helps none is a sheer waste; an animal is much better than him, for it is useful even after its death. As for the Lord, He is the embodiment of kindness.

Here is an example from the *Mahābhārata* of His kindness. Kṛṣṇa was in His palace at Dvārakā. At that time, in Hastināpura, in keeping with Duryodhana's instruction, Duśśāsana dragged Draupadī from her private quarters to the hall and started disrobing her to shame her. Being greatly devoted to Kṛṣṇa, she cried out to Him for succour: "Alas! O Kṛṣṇa! O Resident of Dvārakā! O Delighter of the Yādavas! Where are You? Why are You ignoring me, who have attained this state, with nobody to protect me?" The Lord's heart melted. He did not give thought to any possible inconvenience. He did not wait to inform anybody. He immediately went to Draupadi and saved her honour in an extraordinary manner. Yet, such was His compassion that He was not satisfied with what He did for her and later stated, "Sobbing, O Govinda', Draupadī invoked Me, who was afar. So My debt to her is great and does not leave My heart."

Referring to the captivating qualities of the Lord, the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* points out, "Even sages who revel only in the *Ātman* and are free from all bonds (or, have given up even the study

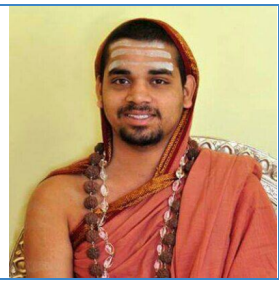


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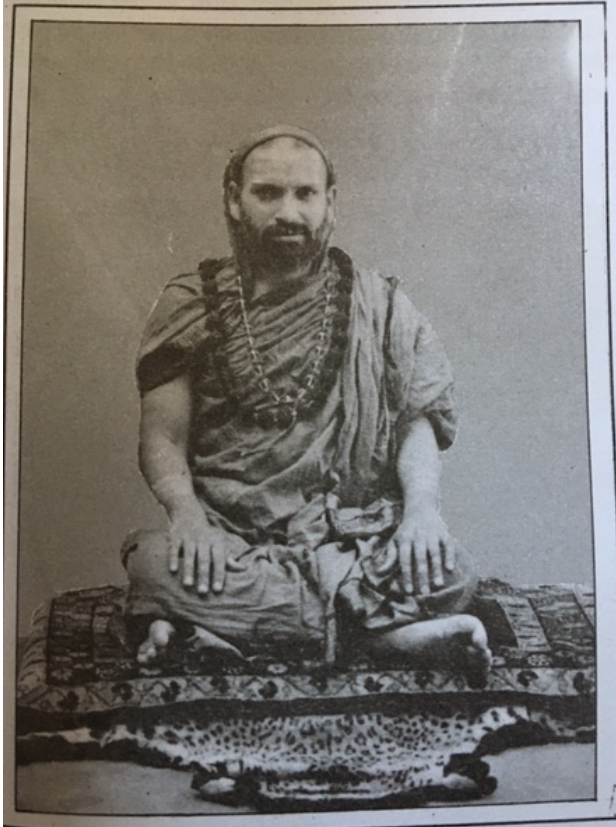


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of texts) are devoted to God without any expectation whatsoever. Such are the excellent qualities of God

A prayer of Bhagavatpāda is, "What am I to make known to You, who are skilled in giving devotees with what they lack and preserving what they have, who are intent on bestowing all good on devotees, who impart Knowledge about the means to desired seen and unseen ends, who pervade are O Śambhu ! I constantly bear in mind that You are my inmost self." The Lord's lovely nature is indeed of the kind depicted in the verses.

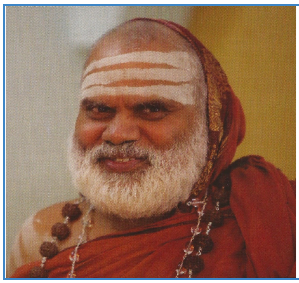
Intense, steady love for God is the bhakti specified earlier. The name for it is 'sādhya bhakti, accomplished devotion. There are nine devotional practices that lead to it. We call even these as bhakti; this term is used in the scripture to refer to accomplished devotion and, secondarily, to the means to it.

Prahlada said, notes the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, "Hearing about the greatness of the Lord, praising Him, thinking

of Him, waiting upon Him, worshipping Him, paying obeisance to Him, being His servant, looking upon oneself as His friend and dedicating oneself to Him - if devotion to God, which has these nine forms, is practised by a person without any expectation right from the moment he is taught about it, that I deem to be the best learning. "

Faithfully listening to the exposition of works, such as the Bhāgavata- purāṇa, that highlight the greatness of God is called 'śravaṇa' (the first of the nine means). Such hearing engenders affection towards God. We, however, squander our precious time now on worthless matters. By doing so, we are not going to attain any good in this world or the next. On the contrary, if we turn to works about God such as the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, we would not only develop devotion to the Lord but also learn about how to lead our lives meaningfully and about the actual insipidity of worldly pleasures.

Various spiritual practices have been specified in the scriptures for us to attain what is truly good. While it is difficult in the kali-yuga, the present age, for people to duly resort to these, one of them, 'kīrtana' (the second of the nine means), is indeed easy and effective. Chanting the

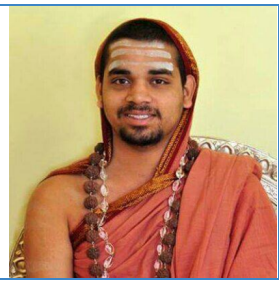


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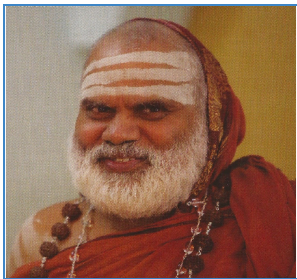
names of the Lord is included in this. The Viṣṇu-purāṇa points out, "What a person attains in the kṛta-yuga by meditation, in the tretā-yuga by the performance of sacrifices and in the dvāpara-yuga by worship, he attains in the kali- yuga by chanting the names of the Lord." As the yugas passed, human ability kept decreasing and, hence, people resorted to simpler and simpler means. However, what has to be finally achieved has not changed and we must never lose sight of it.

'Kīrtana' refers not only to the singing of bhajans but also to the performance of the japa of a mantra into which one has been initiated. According to the Manu-smṛti, "A brāhmaṇa attains perfection through japa itself. There is no doubt regarding this. He may or may not engage in rites and such else. He who is the friend of beings (as japa does not involve causing injury to anyone) is said to be connected with the Supreme." It is said in the Bhagavata-purāṇa, "There is. O king, a great merit in the kali-yuga, a storehouse of defects. One gets freed from attachment and reaches the Supreme just by praising God." From this it is apparent that if we keep engaging in kīrtana, we will become freed from worldly bonds. Though engaging in kīrtana, we should never neglect our scripturally-ordained duties. If we do not do our duties, our chanting of the Lord's names and mantra-japa will not duly fructify.

Dereliction of duties is regarded as a 'nāmāparādha', an offence relating to the chanting of the Lord's names. It is said: "Finding fault with noble persons (i); preaching the greatness of God's name to the wicked (ii); regarding Śiva and Viṣṇu as distinct from one another (iii); lack of faith in the words of the Vedas, śāstras and the Guru (iv, v, vi); having the delusion that what has been taught about the greatness of God is not factual (vii); indulging in what is forbidden and giving up what is prescribed as obligatory by the scriptures under the belief that as the divine name is there, these acts of commission and omission do not matter (viii, ix); and equating the chanting of the names of Śiva and Viṣṇu with other dharmas (x)-These are the ten nāmāparādhas, offences relating to the chanting of the Lord's names. "3 It is said, "The Lord should be constantly praised (by the chanting of His names) by one who is humbler than a blade of grass, is more patient than a tree, gives respect to others and is free from egoism."

The third means spoken of is 'smaraṇa, keeping God in mind'. A teaching of the Yogasūtras is, "Repetition of Om (the name of God) and meditation on what it signifies (result in the practitioner's mind becoming one-pointed)." Lord Kṛṣṇa says, "To those persons who are ever attached to Me and who, becoming non-different from Me and meditative, worship Me everywhere, I provide what they lack and preserve what they have."

It is said in the Bhāgavata-purāṇa: "With peacock feathers as a diadem and karṇikāra flowers behind his ears, wearing a yellow vestment and dancer, whose praises were sung by the gopis and who was filling the stops of His flute with the nectar of His lips, entered Vrndāvana, rendering stopvely with His footprints. One could contemplate thus on Išvara; the term, 'smaraṇa' encompasses contemplation on God.

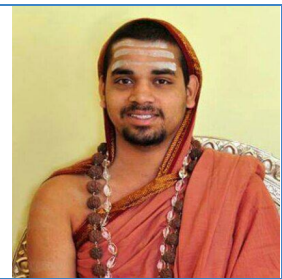


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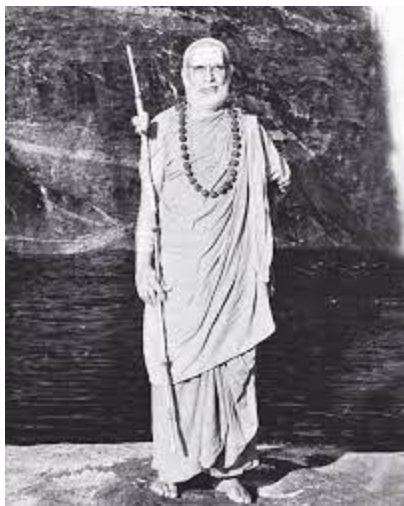
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The next form of bhakti that is spoken of is 'pāda-sevana, serving the lotus feet of the Lord'.



Waiting upon the Lord's manifestations and bathing in holy rivers such as the Gaṅgā, which is said to have come from the feet of God, and the Yamunā, in which Kṛṣṇa sported, are included in this form of devotion.

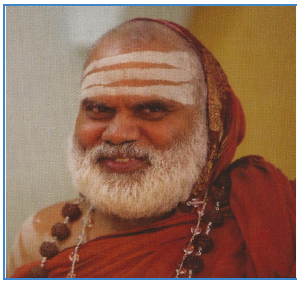
Arcana, worship' is the next form of bhakti. Íśvara's idols should be worshipped as specified in the scriptures. Pūjā ought not to be performed to those idols in which 'prāṇa-pratisthā, the invocation of the presence of God has not been done. It is said, "Idols in which prāṇa-pratisthā has not been performed remain without sanctity. There is no godhood in just gold and the like." A person readily associates himself with his picture. God is particularly present in an idol of His in which prāṇa-pratisthā has been performed.

A question may arise: Why should pūjā be done to an idol even though God is omnipresent? A veterinarian may prescribe that something be mixed with ghee and given to an ailing cow. It will not do if it is given to the cow unmixed with ghee on the ground that ghee is only a product of milk and plentiful milk is already present within the cow. Likewise, though God is present everywhere, He confers special blessings when He is worshipped in a duly consecrated idol. What is to be done if there is no idol with us or we lack the capacity to do idol-worship ourselves? My Guru (Jagadguru Śrī Candrasekhara Bhāratī Mahāsvāmin) has said that one could well go to a temple and worship God there.

Worshipping the Lord is actually very easy. The Lord has said, "Whoever offers a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water to Me with devotion - that devout offering made by the pure-minded person, I accept." The Mrutyunjaya- mānasa-pūjā-stotra (Hymn on the Mental Worship of Śiva), Devi- manasa-pūjā-stotra (Hymn on the Mental Worship of Devī), etc., have been composed to bless us with guidance on worshipping God mentally, even without any physical item of worship.

Vandana, prostration' is spoken of next. It does form a part of pūjā. Nonetheless, noting that Íśvara is present everywhere, prostrations can be submitted to Him at any time, physically, verbally or mentally. This is admitted as 'vandana' in devotional literature. Seeing the cosmic form of the Lord, Arjuna offered his prostrations to God, saying, "Prostration to You in the eastern direction and in the western direction. O All! Prostrations to You on all sides."

The next form of bhakti is 'dāśya, viewing oneself as God's servant'. The Lord has declared, "The Veda and the smṛti are My commands." Hence, we should treat the śruti and the smṛti as His commands and carry out with faith what is prescribed for us. Further, we should dedicate

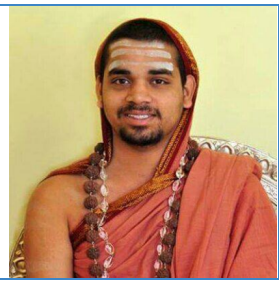


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everything to God in keeping with His instruction, "O son of Kunti! Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give and whatever tapas you perform - do all that as an offering to Me. "



A prayer for dāsya is, "O Parama-śiva! You may roam about in the crematorium or in a place beyond the world or in Kailāsa or on the peak of the Meru Mountain. But please keep Me near You and make me a servant of Your servitors."

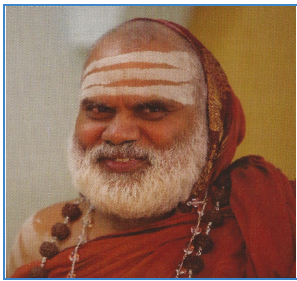
The next form of bhakti that has been spoken of is 'sakhya, viewing oneself as God's friend'. When we persevere with such devotion, our attachment to Išvara becomes stronger and stronger. We do not fear a close friend; for his part, he wants and helps us to be happy. This is seen even in the relationship of friendship between a devotee and God.

Lastly, we have 'ātma-nivedana, the complete offering up of oneself to God'; it culminates in the knowledge that we are not separate entities but are none other than the Supreme. After a river merges with the ocean, it has no distinct identity of its own; that which was the river becomes the ocean and the ocean alone remains. One who attains absolute merger with the Supreme thereafter remains as just the Supreme.

The Lord has averred in the Bhagavadgītā, "O scion of the Bharata dynasty! Seek refuge in Him with all your being. By His grace you will attain supreme peace and the eternal abode." Moreover, the view of sages is: "Always thinking about It (the Supreme), talking about It, teaching each other about It, and being completely intent upon It - the wise regard this as the practice of the knowledge of the Supreme."

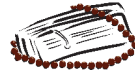
We should dedicate everything to God and be without any worry. If we do so, the Lord Himself will fully take care of us; He will provide us what we lack and preserve what we have. He will give the realization of the Supreme too. The deathlessness that we desire would then be ours. Attaining God is alone the ultimate attainment and the highest good.



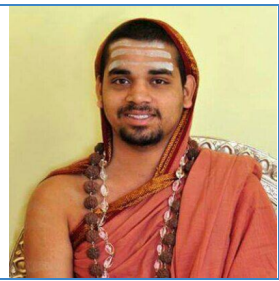


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