

Talk on Sivarathri by Swami Paramarthanandaji on February 26, 2014

Today is a very auspicious day. A day of worship of Lord Śiva is not only during the day but in the night also. It is called Śivarātri because Śiva in Sanskrit means auspiciousness and Śivarātri means an auspicious day, in which we are supposed to worship the Lord and remove the night (of darkness). Darkness is nothing but samskara. According to Vedanta, we are supposed to be in the night – ajñāna nidrā. We are supposed to be sleeping in ajñānam of sleep and by worshipping Śiva we are supposed to get knowledge and really wake up. It is the night in which ajñānam is destroyed. So, on Śivarātri day we worship Lord Śiva.

In Purāṇik literature there are many stories – one of which is when both Brahma and Viṣṇu wanted to find the limits of Śiva. And both of them could not find out. They were both tired and frustrated and Śiva appeared to them as Liṅgamūrti – a form coming from Liṅgam on Śivarātri day.

Śiva is represented as an infinite God and not a small figure with a nāma and rūpa or in the form of an idol. The Lord is anantam. Unlike other days, this day is for tapas. There are two kinds of festivals – some are celebratory and for rejoicing while the other is for practising tapas.

Deepavali is for rejoicing and merry making. Festivals like Śivarātri are service-oriented in nature--vrata pradhāna. That is

why Śivarātri is not an occasion for rejoicing. We do not buy new clothes or sweets but it is an upāsana. Upāsana means staying nearby. Staying nearby means not near foods but avoid cooking and spending that time in pārāyaṇa or pūjā. All these are necessary for gaining ātma jñāna. Like in all festivals, in this also, there is idol worship. Idol worship is an important part of the scriptures and it will give maximum benefits when certain conditions are fulfilled.

The worship of the Lord as an idol is graded in to three levels according to Bhāgavatam.

Lowest level (tāmasik level). Here a person wants to do harm to other people – black magic or worshipping for pomp and show. That I have a lot of money and I spend on God just for the sake of competition. If my neighbour spends Rs. 1000 on a pūjā, I spend Rs. 2000 and make sure it is videotaped.

Or a person who does pūjā and gets angry. A pūjā involves a lot of strain. Camphor may not be available and one has to do many namaskarams. He sees the Lord as different from himself. Such a pūjā is tāmasik. That tāmasik pūjā sees the Lord only in the idol thereby confining the Lord to a small entity. He is a short sighted person as he does not see the Lord in other devotees. If reverence to life and other

beings is not there, even if he is the greatest bhaktahā, it is only a lowest type of Bhakti

If a person disrespects, insults other people, plants, animals, insects (the Lord is present in all idols and all beings and objects) does pūjā, it is only a fake or fraud worship (deceptive worship). He scolds all the beggars, the auto drivers with the foulest of words and goes to a temple with a forehead smeared with vibhūti and rudraksham! Lord Krishna says that it like doing yagna with ashes. How fruitless and futile that yagna will be. So when you worship the Lord in a temple respect other people. Otherwise it is not meaningful. Suppose there is a starving person and you offer naivedyam and do not share it with others, then the Lord says that He is not happy at all with that Bhaktahā.

This does not mean abolish all temples and do only social welfare. That is also not correct. Temple worship is required and so is naivedyam (honey, ghee, milk etc.) but don't neglect people in front of your eyes who are suffering. They need some medicines and some food. Neglecting them is adharmic type of worship. The Lord is not happy at all with such a worship.

Madhyama or rājasik worship: these devotees have devotion to the Lord and have compassion to the mūḍās – those who are not well educated. He does not laugh at them. Even to those who are inimical or hostile to him, the bhaktā must not have hatred. There can be no tit for tat or tooth for tooth attitude. Even when the other party is wrong, we must not stoop to their level. I ignore them. Such a bhakta is only madhyama. He does not harm or hurt

others. But this person has a problem. All his pūjās are done only for materialistic pursuits – for progeny, house, wealth, promotion, long life, for the sake of wife and children. 'O! Lord satisfy my desires as well as all the desires of my family'//. He wants fame, wealth, prosperity and dominance over others. With such an attitude he does pūjā. Do this for me and I will perform the Lord's wedding! Or I will donate Rs.10,000 in the hundi. Or I will offer my hair. All vows are this kind of devotion alone. There is not motiveless devotion. This is rajasik devotion. But at least he is better off as he does not harm others. The second problem with madhyama devotion is that the bhaktā sees the Lord and himself as separated. Not advaita bhakta. He will have fear (bhayam) and death (mrutya) stares him in the face. Because as long as differences are there, there will be finitude and mortality. bheda budhi is madhyama.

Uttama bhakta . For a full benefit of a pūjā adopt this attitude. I want to remove my impurities (rāga-dveṣa kāma-krodha), my ignorance and short sightedness. I am doing a pūjā to remove all these doṣās. I remember this fact all the time while doing pūjā. I offer naivedyam to the Lord for all that HE has provided me. I am not interested in any wordly things. According to scriptures, we are supposed to do this pūjā until we die. Pūjā is nitya karma. It must be done daily and can be stopped only at the time of death or while taking sanyāsa. Otherwise pūjā must not be stopped at all.

The Lord has commanded us to do pūjā and I am servant of the Lord and therefore I do pūjā. Do daily pūjā and on Śivarātri

day do special puja. Something simple everyday- like lighting a lamp, or doing some parayanam, or by offering flowers and doing namaskarams.

Doing this pūjā is not enough. One must also remember that every being is an abode of the Lord. Not only the Lord in the temple but in every living being is a temple of the Lord. Therefore, whenever you see a person (that is why, we put vibhūti and candanam to remind others that is an abode of the Lord), you do a namaste. I will be friendly with everyone.

Some people complain that Hindus do not do social service but instead lend money on litres of milk, ornaments etc. it is not the defect of scriptures but a lopsided attitude of the worshippers. It is not the limitation of the religion but the limitations of the followers. Along with pūjā have love for all is what the Lord wants us to do. Universal love and charity are very important values. Friendship and Advaita budhi (I am You and You are Me). Even a beggar has consciousness in him. Mentally worship all the people with respect. Īśvara in the form of jīvātma in everyone.

The uttama bhakta is one who sees the Lord in everyone and everyone in the Lord. One who has this vision is a sāttvik bhaktaḥ. A person must do pūjā (in the form of pārayānam or namaskāra) to the Lord on a daily basis and he must also ask this question – Do I respect my servant or car driver or even my wife, elderly people, children etc.? Do I have respect for everyone? If such a bhakta is there, it will help a person to go beyond trigunam. It

leads a person to mokṣa which is nirguṇa brahman

Thus the three grades of bhaktas is talked off in the Bhāgavatam. The highest bhakta will not come in the beginning itself. And if that attitude does not come it does not mean that you should stop worshipping. Start with the lowest type of bhakta. Lowest mechanical pūjā is better than no pūjā at all. Thus there are four grades of bhaktas.

- No pūjā
- Tāmasik pūjā
- Rajasic pūjā
- Sattvic pūjā

Between no pūjā and tāmasik bhakta, tāmasik is better. Slowly it will become rajasic bhakta. And later to Sattvic. Until a person sees the Lord in everyone or until one reaches the highest state of Brahman, he should confine to lower levels of bhakta. Some people ask, “ If the Lord is everywhere, why should one go to temples?” Then you ask, “ Do you see the Lord everywhere?” If that is the case, then pūjā can be dropped. But since a person has not reached that state, he should start with the lowest type of bhakta.

So on this auspicious Śivarātri day, all these values are equally important. Whenever we are doing any pūjā one should ask – Is it changing my character and my attitude to other people. If we are not already doing any pūjā, then start doing pūjā. And if you are already doing pūjā, let Lord Śiva bless us to grow from lower level of pūjā to a higher level of pūjā.

Posted by: Ram Mohan Anantha Pai