

# Sri Rudra Japam-Reliever of all Sins

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The goal of every seeker of God is to attain *Brahma Vidya* which is described as “*mayyeva sakalam jaatam; mayi sarvam pratishthitam; mayi sarvam layam yaati; tad brahma advayam asmy aham*” [In me alone, everything arises. In me, everything is sustained. Into me, everything resolves. I am the non-dual Brahman]. Vedas show us the way to Brahma Vidya “*Vedaischa Sarvai Ahameva Vedyah*” [I am known through all the Vedas] says Krishna in Bhagavad Geeta and so Adi Sankara ordained everyone to “*Vedo nityam adheeyataam*” [study the scriptures everyday].

The Vedas prescribe perseverance in prayers to God by repeatedly reciting (persevere) His mantras and seeking His blessings as a panacea (*Prayaschittam*) to counteract these ill effects in one's life. “*Swashakhaopnishad Gita Vishnornama Sabasrakam, Rudram cha Pourusham Suktam Nityam Avartayet Bhudaba*” [One should repeatedly recite the Upanishads from one's own Veda *Shakha*, Gita, Vishnu Sahasranamam, Sri Rudram and Pursha Suktam]. As stated in **Koorma Purana**, “*Varnaashrama Achaaravataam Pumsaam Devo Maheshwarah, Jnaanena Bhaktiyogena Pujaniyo na cha anyathaa*” [Persons engaged in the Varnaashrama and Ashrama Dharmas should follow the Principles of Bhakti and Jnana and worship Bhagavan and there would indeed be no other means of *Sadhana*]. As Lord Krishna describes in Srimad Bhagavat Gita, if one performs continuous and unattached “*Karma*” it leads to “*Jnana*”. Similarly, if one perceives recitation of mantras as “*Karma*”, the process of repetition of the same leads to “*Jnana*”. Thus repetition of Ishta Devata mantras helps one to improve the mental alacrity towards ‘*Atma Vicharam*’ (inquiry of the Self). The prayer to Lord Shiva is one such method and **Kaivalya Upanishad** tells us that “*umā-sahāyaṃ parameśvaraṃ prabhuṃ, trilochanaṃ nīlakaṇṭhaṃ praśāntam, dhyātvā munir gacchati bhūta-yoniṃ, samasta-sākṣiṃ tamasah parastāt*. [Meditating on Lord Shiva, accompanied by Parvati, with three eyes and blue throat, peaceful, one reaches the source of all, the witness of all, beyond darkness].

Sri Rudram is the holiest of all prayers dedicated to Lord Shiva. It appears in the fourth “*Kanda*” within the seven ‘*Kandas*’ of Yajur Veda Samhita. In the “heart” (center) of Sri Rudram is the powerful mantra known as “*Panchakshari*” – the core essence describing the eternal truth in Godhood (“*Paramatma Swarupam*”). In Yajur Veda, Sri Rudram is considered as the most important, as it is in the middle of the Veda like the core of a fruit. “*Vidyani Srutir utkerishta Rudraaikadashini Srutau, Tatra Panchakshari Tasyam Siva Ityakshara Divyam*”. [Among the sources of learning the Vedas are supreme; in the Vedas Sri Rudram is supreme; in the Sri Rudram “*Panchakshari*” mantra “*NamaSivaya*” is supreme; in the Panchakshari mantra the two letters “*Siva*” are supreme]. Because of this Sri Rudram is used in daily prayers and special religious functions (poojas and homas). It is considered as one of the primary instruments for attaining “*Mukti*”.

Sri Rudram is also called “*Rudropanishad*”. It is also said that “*Sarvopaniśhadam Saraba Rudraadhyayaha*” (Sri Rudram contains the essential meanings of all Upanishads). Sri Rudram is also called “*Shatarudriyam*”. As inferred from the comment of Sri Bhatta Bhaskara, a celebrated commentator of Sri Rudram, the name “*Shatarudriyam*” is associated with the fact that the Upasana Moorthy of Sri Rudram is praised in all the 101 branches (Shakas) of Yajur Veda. Sri Rudram contains 169 mantras organized in eleven Anuvakaas or chapters. Besides Sri Bhatta Bhaskara, Sri Sayana and Sri Abhinava Sankara have written commentaries on Sri Rudram. The Abhinava Sankara's Bhasyam includes the listing of appropriate Rishis (Sages), Chandas (Meters) and Devathaas (Godheads) and dhyana slokas for each of the 169 mantras as required for meditation. Each mantra is replete with deep spiritual significance and is a great help for meditation.

As the name implies, Sri Rudram mitigates the obstacles one faces. The word Rudram is derived from “*Ru*” – to sound, “*Rud*” – to shed tears as caused by obstacles in one's life, and “*Dru*” to flow [“*Rum Dravayati iti*”



*Rudra*”]. If one understands the oneness with God, then that individual is responsible for all his actions and consequently also his bad actions. God as a chastiser corrects the person – that is symbolically represented by Him making us “cry”. It is said that all the Gods are pleased when one recites Sri Rudram and several repetitions will tantamount to a “*Prayaschittam*” (penance) against various sins committed by us. **Sootha Samhita** explains that “*Vrikshasya Moolasaakena Shakhaha Pushyanthi Vai Sada, Siva Rudrajapat Preeta, Preeta EvasyaDevataba*” [Just like watering the roots of a tree helps the growth of the branches of the tree, similarly praying to Sri Rudra pleases all Gods]. Several other scriptures expound these benefits of Sri Rudram and “*Shatarudriyam*”. **Lalita Upaakyanam** says “*Dhyaatva hridi Mahesaanaam Shatarudram Japeth; Brahmahatya muchyate paapai ashtottara sabasratha:*” [Fixing your mind on him, you should devoutly chant the Shatarudriya Mahamantra. By chanting this Mahamantra a thousand and eight times, even the sin of Brahmahatya will be destroyed]. **Kaivalya Upanishad** proclaims that “*yah śata-rūdrīyam adbīte so 'gnipīto bhavati, sa brahma-hatyāt pūto bhavati, sa suvarṇa-steyāt pūto bhavati*”. [One who studies the Shata Rudriya is purified by fire. He is purified from the sin of killing a brahmana. He is purified from the sin of stealing gold]. **Atri Smriti** says “*Ekadasa Gunaanvapi Rudraam Aavartya sudhyati, Maha Paataka Upa paatakebyo malinikaranebyo Muchyate*”.

All things in this world, that one visualizes, are nothing but a manifestation of His majestic “*Roopam*”. In Sri Rudram, Rudra who is omnipresent (“*Aameevatkebyaha*”) manifests himself in myriads of forms and poses for the diverse spiritual aspirants Sri Rudra (Siva – the Auspicious One) to cite a few: as a runner, sleeping, awake, as an old person, as a young person, as a tree, as grass, as a thief, as a tall person, as a dwarf etc. etc. This Vedic homage to Sri Rudra (Sri Siva) through recitation of Sri Rudram, is remarkable not only for its phonetic grandeur but also for its universality of approach to the Divine.

Sri Rudram is known as “*Namakam*” because of the mantras carry the word “*Namaha*” or the words “*Namo Namaha*” appear in front of them (appears 183 times in the Sri Rudram text). The word “*Namaha*” construes a total surrender to the Lord and thus saluting the Lord with the obeisance “*Namaha*” fulfills all of one’s aspirations. Sri Rudram is followed by Chamakam and is so referred because of the appearance of the words “*Cha me*” (and for me). The Namakam and Chamakam are recited together to accrue various benefits and go by the name “*Rudra Adhyaya*”.

The *Sutrakar*s such as Bodhayana, Apasthamba, and others have prescribed a five-fold methodology or path called “*Panchanga Rudriya*” for the performance of “*Japa, Homa and Archana*”. They are called (1) Rupam, (2) Ekadasa Rudram, (3) Rudriyam, (4) Maharudram and (5) Athi Rudram. The recitation of Sri Rudram and Chamakam together once is called “*Rupam*” (or “*Swarupam*” – shape) of “*Sri Rudra Adhyaya*” (Reading Sri Rudram). The recitation of Sri Rudram with one “*Anuvakam* (paragraph)” of Chamakam, and thus repeating eleven times to correspond to the eleven “*Anuvakas*” of the Chamakam is called “*Rudra Ekadasini*” or “*Ekadasa Rudram*”. Repeating this eleven times is “*Laghu Rudram*” or “*Rudriyam*”. Eleven times of this is “*Maha Rudram*” and eleven times the last one is called “*Athi Rudram*”.

Veda mantras are to be understood properly and the implied meaning is more important than the literary meaning. The recitation of Sri Rudram, while understanding its meaning and significance, leads one to experience “*Easwara Bhavam*”. The Veda mantras have to be recited with the proper phonetic intonations (“*Swarams*”). With proper intonations, the sound synchronizes and tunes up with the body’s nervous system and this benefits the physical, mental and intellectual aspirations of the devotee. The essential message of the Vedas is to remind the human beings of their divinity and help them realize their true nature. With that in mind let us participate in this wonderful event (Maha Rudram) and seek the blessings of the Lord.

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# Maha Rudra Yajnam

August 12-14, 2016

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