

Maha Rudra Yagnam

A Prayer for the Community by the Community

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Sri Gurubhyo Nama:

Prayer as means to Liberation

Our Hindu culture is mainly based on Sanatana Dharma, which includes the eternal absolute set of duties or religiously ordained practices and rules of life (ethic) which generally can be called Dharma. Vedas form the foundation of Hindu Religion and root of Hindu Culture. All knowledge and wisdom are enshrined in Vedas. Vedas ordain us to follow the path of Dharma. ("धर्मम् चर्")

Vedas teach us that there is only one Supreme Almighty (Para Brahman) and that is the ultimate truth.

Taitreeya Upanishad- (Brahmanandavalli) tells us that "ब्रह्मविदाप्नोति परम्; सत्यम् ज्ञानम् अनन्तम् परम्-; यो वेद निहितम् गुहायाम् परमे व्योमन्- सोश्रुते सर्वान् कामान्सह"

(The knower of Brahman attains the Supreme; Brahman is Truth, Knowledge and infinity; He who knows it as existing in the cave of heart in transcendent akasa realizes all his desires)

And so, Adi Shankara instructed us all through Viveka Choodamani,

"पठन्तु शास्त्राणि यजन्तु देवान्; कुर्वन्तु कर्माणि बजन्तु देवता:- आत्मैक्य बोधेन विना विमुक्तिः"

("Study the scriptures; Propitiate the devas through vedic rituals; Do (prescribed altruistic) activities; worship the gods; without the knowledge of the oneness of the self (with the Brahman) moksha is not accomplished)

So, the purpose of the prayers, as contemplated by our scriptures was not so much to seek benefits for achievement of worldly pleasures which are considered "मिथ्यम्" (False), but to focus on our efforts to seek oneness with God.

Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman

We view Brahman as having two aspects: Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman. **Nirguna Brahman** has no attributes and, as such, is not an object of prayer, but of meditation and knowledge. This aspect of Brahman is beyond conception, beyond reasoning and beyond thought. Saguna Brahman, is the representation of Brahman through forms with various attributes such as the creator, sustainer and controller of the universe. As the male aspect, **Saguna Brahman** is called by various names as, *Ishvara*, *Parameshvara*, *paramatma*, *Maheshvara*, and *Purusha*. As the female aspect, Saguna Brahman is referred by various names, such as *Divine Mother*, *Durga* and *Kali*.

Sri Rudram- Prayer to Siva

Sri Rudram, also known as Sri Rudraprasnam, is a hymn offered to the Para Brahman, visualized as Rudra-Siva.

The greatness of Sri Rudram is beautifully explained in the following verse:

विद्यासु श्रुतिरुत्कृष्टा रुद्रैकादशिनीश्रुतौ
तत्र पञ्चाक्षरी तस्यां शिव इत्यक्षरद्वयम्
vidyāsu śruutirtkrushtā rudraikādaśinī śrutau
tatra pañcāksharī tasyam śivaityaksharadvayam

(Among the sources of learning, the Vedas are supreme; in the Vedas, Rudra Ekādaśī is supreme; in the Rudra Ekadasi the Pañcāksharī mantra Namaśivaya is supreme; in the Namaśivaya mantra the two letters Śiva stand Supreme.)

The power of the “Nama: Shivaaya” mantra was expounded by the famous Tamil saint Sri Tirunavukkarasar in “NamaSivaaya Tiruppathigam” as

சொற்றுணை வேதியன் சோதி வானவன்

பொற்றுணைத் திருந்தடி பொருந்தக் கைதொழக்
கற்றுணைப் பூட்டியோர் கடலிற் பாய்ச்சினும்

நற்றுணை யாவது நமச்சி வாயவே.

(When you surrender yourself at the lotus feet of Parameswara through devotion and prayers, you will be saved even if you are thrown into the middle of the sea with a stone tied to your back)

And, Thiru Gnanasambhandar sang in “Thevaram” as

காதலாகிக் கசிந்து கண்ணீர் மல்கி

ஓதுவார் தமை நன்னெறிக்குய்ப்பது

வேதம் நான்கினும் மெய்ப்பொருள் ஆவது

நாதன் நாமம் நமச்சிவாயமே

(The name “Namashivaya” is the only true essence of all the four Vedas and it liberates all those who utter this name with intense and sincere devotion.)

What do we ask of Siva in Sri Rudram

In Sri Rudram, we pray to Parameswara in his Ghora (Full of Anger) and Aghora (Benevolent-Siva) forms.

We start our prayers with “रुद्र मन्यवे” (Rudra Manyave) and request Rudra to put away his anger. Why? As can be seen in Mantra 2, He can forgive our sins and grant us our request “रुद्र, नः म्रुदय (Rudra, Na; Mrudaya) –Please make us happy. Now that we have asked for happiness, we ask for something better in Mantra 3-

या ते रुद्र शिवा तनूरघोरापापकाशिनी ।

तया नस्तनुवा शन्तमया गिरिशन्ताभिचाकशीहि ॥

Since He is अपापकाशिनी-(Apaapakaasini) and अभिचाकशीहि (Abhichaakaseehi), we ask for granting Atmagnana, the cause of the happiness of Liberation.

Put in other words, as can be seen in the tenth Anuvaka, the Aghora form is described as “विश्वाहभेषजी” (Viswaaha Bheshaji) and the Ghora form is described as “रुद्रस्य भेषजी” (Rudrasya Bheshaji).

या ते रुद्र शिवा तनूः शिवा विश्वाहभेषजी ।

शिवा रुद्रस्य भेषजी तया नो मृड जीवसे ॥

In his first form as Viswaaha Bheshaji, He removes all diseases and miseries like poverty of all people at all times and bestows comforts; As Rudrasya Bheshaji, He grants Atmagnana, destroys the misery of samsara like birth, death etc. and grants the bliss of Moksha.

Thus, Sri Rudram bestows the benefits of happiness in this life while leading us also to Liberation.

Praying for Community than praying for oneself

Lord Krishna tells us in Bhagavad Gita,

देवान् भावयतानेन ते देवा भावयन्तु नः

परस्परम् भावयन्तः श्रेयः परम् अवाप्स्यथ

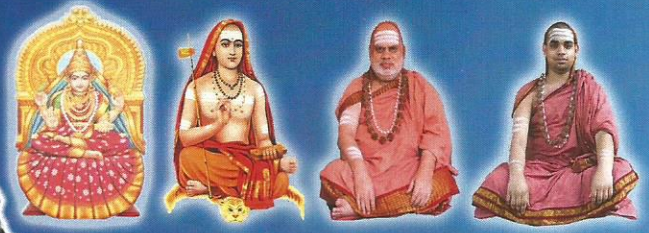
(By your sacrifices the gods will be pleased, and by cooperation between humans and the gods, prosperity will reign for all).

But, He also warned thus:

भुञ्जते ते तु अघम् पापाः ये पचन्ति आत्म कारनात्

(Those who cook food for their own enjoyment, verily eat only sin)

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