

CAN PRAYER CHANGE THE FATE

Commentary by Swami Paramarthananda

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NOTE: Swami Paramarthananda has not verified the transcription of talks. The transcriptions have been done with Swamiji's blessings by his disciple.



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Can Prayer Change the Fate?

*sadāsiva samārambhām sankarāchārya madhyamām
asmad āchārya paryantām vande guru paramparām*

One of the questions often asked by people is whether fate can be changed by prayer. It is an eternally debated question and there are people who are given for and against. There are some people who say fate cannot be changed at all. They have got enough scriptural support to say that.

*harināpi harēnāpi brahmanāpi surairapi
lalāta likhitā rekhā parimārshtum nashakyate*

Whatever is written on your forehead (*lalāta likhitā rekhā*), can never be erased at all (*parimārshtum nashakyate*) by Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva, Lord Brahma and even by Gods (*harināpi harēnāpi brahmanāpi surairapi*). Which means fate cannot be changed.

*avashya manubhōktavyam krutam karma shubhāshubham
nābhuktam kshīyate karma kalpa kōti shatairapi*

Whatever we have to suffer or experience, we have to necessarily experience. Even if we escape now, we will have to face it later. Therefore, the conclusion is that fate cannot be changed. *Then, what is the purpose of all the prayers?*

According to this category of people, they say prayer is not to change the fate but the prayer is only to get the strength to suffer or to go through the phase. You don't escape buy you get the strength to withstand. This is one group of the *Pattimandram* (debate). So the fate cannot be changed, cannot be changed, cannot be changed. This is one set.

Now comes the other set of *Pattimandram* (debate). They say it is not so. Fate can be changed. We have got any number of Purānic stories to indicate how even the worst fate of death had been changed by the Lord. Among many stories, the most popular one is associated with the devotee of Lord Shiva himself.

You must be knowing the story of *Mārkandēyaha*. Mārkandēya who was to die within 16 years, had a special prayer and Lord came and destroyed Yama himself. Thereafter, Mārkandēya lived long and even now he is supposed to live. Because of that Lord Shiva has got a special name Chandrashēkharaha, the one who is the Lord of *Chandraha*.

Chandra means the Moon and Moon represents time principle. The Lord who is the master of time, Lord who is the master of death itself. And Mārkandēya is supposed to have written a special prayer on Lord Shiva known as *Chandrashēkharāshatakam*. In that, one verse goes like this –

*bhēshajam bhavarōginām akhilāpadā mapahārinam
daksha yagna vināshanam trigunātmakam trivilōchanam
bhukti mukti phalapradam sakalāghasangha nibarhanam
chandrashēkhara māshrayē mama kim karishyati vayyamaha*

What can even Lord Yama do? The last verse goes like this –

*mrutyu bhīta mrukandu sūnukruta stavam shiva sannidhau
yatra kutracha yah patēnnahi tasya mrutyu bhayam bhavēt
pūrna māyu rarōgatā makhilārtha sampada mādarāt
chandrashēkhara ēva tasya dadāti mukti mayatnataha*

Lord Shiva destroys all the fate and the example is Sākshāt Mārkandēya himself. We also have the story of Satyavān-Sāvitrī etc. Therefore, this group of *Pattimandram* say - *vidiyai madiyāl, vidiyai ēshwara prārthanayāl vellalām vellalām vellalām*.

At the, last judge has to come and say which party is correct. *Can Vidhi (fate) be changed by prayer or not?* One group says it can be changed and one group says it cannot be changed. *Who is right?* And what is the verdict of the judge? The verdict is that both are correct.

Now the question is how can both be correct? If one is correct the other should be wrong because the other is saying the opposite of first one. So we say the problem because we use the word Vidhi in a very loose sense of the term and therefore, there is a communication gap.

Often people quarrel because of communication gap. It seems one father asked his son, Tagore has beard or not. Then, the son said no. Then again the father asked if Tagore has beard or not. Again the son was so firm and sure that he said no. *Then father asked the question, tell me who Tagore is?*

Then his son who is biggest cinema buff said that Tagore is a cinema actress. There is one cinema actress; I don't want to tell the full name on Shivarātri day. Those people who are used to cinema will know that. Therefore, the name Tagore is a generic word. I can keep somebody in mind and you can keep somebody in mind.

Shivaji belongs to which state? One set of people say Tamilnadu because they are cinema buffs. Another set of people say he is the Maratha King and he belongs to Maharashtra. So before answering any question, first understand what the question is.

Remember that Vidhi is a general word used but the meaning of the word Vidhi is *Karma Phalam*. Vidhi is not something written by Brahmāji according to his whim and fancy. Not that Brahmāji wanted to create all of us. If the Lord is going to write whatever he wants to on the head of anyone, that Lord will have *vaishamyā, nairghrinyā dōshaha*. The Lord will be a partial Lord.

Therefore, remember fate means Karma Phalam. It is a result of our own past action. Remember that Karma Phalam is never uniform because Karma is never uniform. Karma means action and action varies both qualitatively and quantitatively.

If we chant Rudram one time, it has got an effect. If we chant 11 times, the effect is quantitatively more. If we chant 121 times, the effect is quantitatively more. If we chant Rudram 1321 times (Atirudram, Mahārudram); the quantity of that Karma (the action) increases. Similarly qualitatively also the action varies.

Similarly whether it is religious action or ordinary action, the action varies both in quality and quantity. Therefore, Karma Phalam also varies qualitatively and quantitatively. Which means Vidhi also varies from time to time. At this particular time (8.20 p.m.) what Vidhi (Karma Phalam) comes and attacks me is different from Karma Phalam that comes at 9 p.m., 11.00 p.m. or tomorrow or day after or next Janma.

Since the Vidhi cannot be uniform we broadly classify our entire Karma Phalam into two types. One is called *Durbala Vidhihi*, weaker Karma Phalam. Weaker means not that powerful called *Durbala Prārabdham* or *Durbala Vidhihi*. We have got another type which is the result of powerful action which is called *Prabala Vidhi* or *Prabala Prārabdha*.

Therefore, never ask a general question whether Vidhi can be changed or not. Before asking the question, you have to qualify the Vidhi. Before asking, to which state Shivāji belongs, clearly tell which Shivāji you mean. If you are asking about Durbala Vidhi, we have one answer. If you are asking about Prabala Vidhi we have got another answer.

Prabalam means strong and Durbala means weak. Our answer is that Durbala Vidhi can be changed by prayer. Durbala Vidhi can be weakened, Durbala Vidhi can be altered, Durbala Vidhi can be managed, and Durbala Vidhi can be even eradicated totally.

Therefore, when people say Vidhi can be changed, they are right but you only have to add an adjective *Durbala Vidhi*. When there are some other people who say Vidhi cannot be changed, they are also right. We have to add an adjective (for Vidhi) *Prabala Vidhi*.

Since Prabala Vidhi cannot be changed and Durbala Vidhi can be changed our prayers will work in two fold ways. *What are the two fold ways?* In the case of Prabala Vidhi (powerful fate), our prayer will not go waste. Our prayer will help in giving me the immunity, the strength to go through that. In the case of *Durbala Vidhi*, prayer will destroy, change, alter and mitigate the Vidhi.

Therefore, prayers are useful both in the case of Durbala Vidhi and Prabala Vidhi. Therefore, prayers form a part of our tradition. Among many prayers, one of the most powerful prayers is Shata Rudriyam or Rudram. In Kaivalya Upanishad it is said that when a person chants Rudram all the Vidhi's will be washed off.

yasshata rudriyam adhītē, sahā agni pūtō bhavati, surāpānāt pūtō bhavati, suvarna stēyāt pūtō bhavati, krutyākrutyāt pūtō bhavati, tasmād avimuktam āshritō bhavati

So Rudram chanting is supposed to be a powerful *Prāyashchitta* which can do two jobs. It will erase the Durbala Vidhi and in the case of Prabala Vidhi, it will give us the strength to face it. Therefore, regular chanting of Rudram is supposed to be extremely good. If it is done on Shivarātri day, it is supposed to be much more powerful.

Suppose a person does not know how to chant Rudram and one has not traditionally studied Rudram, it is better not to chant it because when we chant wrongly, instead of Pāpam going away, we get one more Pāpam for wrong chanting. Those who do not know Rudram need not chant. In-fact they should not chant.

But the scriptures give you a shortcut. *What is that?* In the entire Rudram, there is a Mantra in the middle which is the essence of Rudram. The Mantra is - *namah shivāya cha shivatarāya cha namah tirthyaya cha...*

Thus Namah Shivāya, Om Namah Shivāya is equivalent to Rudram which can remove and which can handle both Durbala Vidhi and Prabala Vidhi. By removing the negative Vidhi's, negative Karma Phalam, a person will become purer and purer which will lead to two types of peace of mind.

One is called *Āpēkshika Shāntihi*, relative peace and finally *Ātyantika Shāntihi* in the form of *Mōksha*. Therefore, on the auspicious day today, we chanted Rudram and whole day is auspicious. And people keep away also. Whether you keep awake or not, if you chant the Mantra '*Om Namashivāya*' today it is very good.

Therefore, let us remember the Lords name and let us purify our mind and let us give peace of mind. Those who are special students of Vedānta, let us gain *Ātma Gnyānam* also.

anēna gnyāna māpnōti samsārārṇava nāshanam tasmādēvam viditvainam kaivalyam padamashnute kaivalyam padamashnuta iti

Therefore, on this auspicious day, I invoke the grace of Lord Shiva on all of us so that we can be pure and we can get Shānti or peace of mind both in the relative as well as the absolute sense of the term.

*Poornamadah Poornamidam Poornaath Poornam Udachyathe
Poornasya Poornamaadaaya Poornameva Vasishyathe*

Om shanti shanti shantihi



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