

# HINDU GODS

**Lecture by Swami Paramarthananda**

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NOTE: Swami Paramarthananda has not verified the transcription of talks.  
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## Hindu Gods

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

In our tradition we have several functions, several festivals and Pūjas occurring throughout the year. And in each function or Pūja we worship different deities like Rama on Rāmanavami Day, Krishna on Krishnāshtami Day, Lord Shiva on Shivarātri Day, Devi on Navarātri Day etc.

When we worship several deities like this, we may get a doubt as to how many Gods are there in our religion. *Are there many Gods or is there only one God?* Once we accept many Gods, there afterwards, further problems will come as to who is superior and who is inferior.

You will find several groups coming into being, each group claiming his God is superior to all others. A Vaishnava comes and says Vishnu alone is the ultimate God and all others are inferior. Ofcourse, Shaivites will not be behind. They will say Shiva alone is superior. Another will say Devi is superior.

Thus, it will lead to lot of groupisms, superiority complex, quarrel and all kinds of problems. So we should be very clear about the basic principle of Pūja. In our religion, in our Vaidika Dharma, we do not accept many Gods at all because by definition, God is infinite and all pervading - *Anantam Brahma*.

If God is infinite and all pervading, God can be only one. So first we should understand that there is no question of many Gods at all. And if many Gods are not there, there is no question of comparison also. The comparison as to which God is inferior or superior is out of question.

*If God is only one then the question comes as to why we worship so many deities or so many idols on so many festivals or during so many*

*festivals?* For that, we say that the infinite and one God does not have any form at all.

Since the infinite Lord does not have any form, a beginner cannot conceive or imagine the formless God. A beginner cannot conceive of anything abstract. A beginner requires something concrete. Just as a child cannot think of the abstract numbers, the child has to use symbols to indicate each number.

As children you have used all the symbols for one, two, three, four, five, six, seven and when we go to numbers more than 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, it will be child's play for us to think of numbers in abstract form. But a child requires something concrete.

Therefore, our religion recognized that a beginner requires something concrete to represent the abstract, subtle, infinite, formless, attribute-less Ēshwara. Therefore, the scriptures themselves provided concrete symbols to represent the abstract Ēshwara.

Ēshwara is abstract, but the symbol representing Ēshwara is not abstract but concrete. There afterwards, the scriptures felt that everybody does not have the same type of mind. Different people have got different tastes and different inclinations.

Therefore, if one and the same symbol is used to represent the Lord, some people may like that particular form and some other people may not have a taste for that particular form - because the rule is *Bhinna Ruchihi Lokaha*. That is why we have different types of lunch or dinner. We know that all the people do not like the same dish.

One person comes and takes Puri another person comes and takes only Dosa, and another person comes and takes something else. Since the tastes differ from individual to individual, our scriptures provided different types of forms to represent one and the same formless, attribute-less, infinite God.

Therefore, we have got many male forms because some people naturally like male form and some people like female forms. Therefore, we have got varieties of female forms like Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswathi etc. In one Lakshmi itself we have Dhana Lakshmi, Dhanya lakshmi, Veera Lakshmi, Vijaya Lakshmi, Gaja Lakshmi, Santana Lakshmi, Aishvarya Lakshmi varieties.

There are some people who don't like human form at all because they faced lot of problems from human beings. Therefore, if you don't want human form, you have a nice elephant form. So you can have bird form, you can have cow form. If you want semi, semi faces are there everywhere - we have got Narasimha form.

There are some people who do not want any form of a living at all. Then we have got trees, we have got mountains, we have got rivers, we have got even flame to invoke the Lord. Therefore, what is important is not the form. Therefore, our scriptures suggested us to choose any particular form.

But in that limited form, concrete form, you invoke the abstract limitless, infinite Ēshwara. And for this purpose, we have got endless Purānās. In fact, all the Purānās are teaching only one thing and that is invoking one and the same infinite God in different finite forms.

If you take Shiva Purānam, you will find that Shiva will represent infinite God and then all other Devatas will indicate only finite powers of that infinite God or finite aspects of that infinite God. If you take Devi Bhagavatham, Devi will represent the infinite God or infinite Goddess principle and other deities will represent various finite aspects of that infinite.

Similarly, if you go to Skānda Purānam, Subrahmanya will be supreme. Therefore, there is no question of who is inferior or who is superior. It depends upon what you invoke. *In a text book, is the first leaf of the text*

*superior or second leaf of the text book superior?* All leaves are same, superiority and inferiority depends upon what you are writing on the leaf.

If you are going to write 10000 on the first leaf, naturally that is superior to the second leaf on which you write 10 rupees. Similarly, if you take Shiva form and invoke infinite in that Shiva form, he is the ultimate God. Then Vishnu, Brahma all the other deities will be finite.

If you take Vishnu Purānam, you will find that on Vishnu we will be invoking the infinite and therefore, Shiva will become a part of Vishnu and Brahma will become part. If you take Vināyaka Purānam, you will find Vināyaka is the ultimate and everybody else is inferior.

Therefore, there is no question of quarrelling. It depends upon what we invoke. In the Purānās, we get a story in which Shiva is considered to be the ultimate and infinite deity. According to the story, Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma want to find out the dimensions or the limits of Lord Shiva.

Brahmāji goes up taking a bird form and Vishnu goes down taking a boar form. One is trying to find the feet and another is trying to find out head of Lord Shiva and both of them miserably failed. When they were not able to find the feet or the head, they were wondering.

At that time, it is said that Lord Shiva appeared in the form of a Linga and upon the Linga, Lord Shiva appeared in human form called Linga Udbhava mūrthy. Appearing in the form of Lingōdbhavamūrthy, Lord pointed out that you will not be able to find out my limits because *aham anantaha astu ādi madhyanta ananta veeryam ananta bāhum sasisurya netram*

Or as we say in the Dhyana Sloka, *brahmānanda vyāpta dehā bhāsita hima rucha bhasā mānā bhujangaihi*. Therefore, Lord Shiva appeared out of Linga and revealed his *Ananta Swarūpam* to Brahma and Vishnu

and that day of appearance of Lingōdbhavamūrthy is considered to be a sacred day. According to one version, this day is celebrated as the Shivarātri day.

That is the day when out of Linga, Lord Shiva appears and points out that I am the infinite God. Therefore, this day is supposed to be an auspicious day. In Sanskrit, the word Shiva has got two meanings. One is the Lord Shiva himself and another is something auspicious.

Therefore, Shivarātri means a night on which Lord Shiva is worshipped, or you can say Shivarātri is an auspicious night because we are worshipping Lord Shiva on this night. *What do we do by worshipping Lord Shiva on this day or to be precise on this night?*

If you see, throughout the Pūja one expression was repeatedly appearing and that expression was “Namaha”. That is why Rudram itself is called Namakam. Chamakam is called Chamakam. Namakam and Chamakam; Namakam means a mantra in which the word “Namaha” repeatedly occurs. Therefore, the Pooja is nothing but Namaskāraha.

*What do you mean by Namaskāraha?*

*Namaskāraha* means surrender.

*Surrender of what?*

Surrender of my will or my individuality or my ego is called *Namaha*.

*How do you surrender your ego or how do you surrender your individuality or free will?*

The surrender has to take place in two stages. The first stage of surrender is accepting to follow the teachings of the Lord in our life. The first surrender is accepting to follow the teachings of the Lord in our day to day life.

## *What is the teaching of the Lord?*

The teaching of the Lord is available to us in the form of the Vedas, in the form of *Dharma Shāstra*. And our Dharma Shāstras clearly prescribe what all should be done (the do's) and what all should not be done (the don'ts) with respect to our actions. The do's and don'ts are prescribed.

*satyam vada, dharmam chara, swādhyāyān mā pramadaha, āchāryāya priyam, dhanamāhritya, prajātantum mā vyavachchetsihi, satyanna pramaditavyam ...*

We find a set of do's and a set of don'ts; A set of Kāryam and a set of Akāryam. By offering prostrations to the Lord or by uttering the word Namaha, I am promising the Lord that here afterwards my life will be governed by the *Shāstra Kāryam* and *Akāryam*, *Vāchyam* and *Avāchyam*, *Chintyam* and *Achintyam*.

Do's and don'ts are at three levels. At the physical level, there are certain do's and certain don'ts and at the verbal level, certain words should be uttered - *anudwegakaram vāchyam satyam priyam hitam cha yat. Swādhyāya abhyasanam chaiva vāngmayam tapa uchyate*

So at the verbal level, what should be done and what should not be done. Similarly, at the mental level what thoughts are allowed - *amānitvam, adambhitvam ahimsa shāntirārjavam. And what are the thoughts that are not allowed? - dambhō darpōti manasya krōdha parushya me vacha.*

Thus, at the physical, verbal and mental levels, Lord has prescribed certain do's and certain don'ts called *Vidhi* and *Nishēdaha*. Before surrendering to the Lord, my life was not governed by *Vidhi* and *Nishēdha*; my life was governed by *Rāga* and *Dvēsha* - my likes and my dislikes.



I did whatever I felt like doing, I uttered whatever I felt like uttering and I thought whatever I felt like thinking. Therefore, by Namaskāra, I am taking my ego, I am taking individuality, I am taking my free will away from my Rāga - Dvēsha, and I am giving a word to the Lord –

O Lord, hereafter wards, my life will be governed not by my will but it will be governed by your will.

*What is Bhagawān's will?*

Bhagawān's will is nothing but the *Shāstram*.

*What is Shāstram?*

The do's and don'ts prescribed in the Shāstram. And this is the first stage of surrender - changing the direction of my life from *Rāga - Dvēsha* to *Vidhi - Nishēdha*.

Thereafter wards, comes the second stage of surrender which is the surrender of the very free will itself. Where I go beyond both *Rāga - Dvēsha* as well as *Vidhi - Nishēdha*, where I go beyond the *Kartrutvam*, very individuality, the very ego and there afterwards, I myself do not exist but Lord Shiva alone exists.

*shāntam shivam advaitam chaturtham manyante sa ātma sa vigrayaha idam sarvam yadayamātma*

That ātma alone is there. There is no question of *Aham*, there is no question of *Idam*, there is no question of *Tvam*, there is no question of *Saha* neither first person, nor second person, nor third person.

In the second surrender, I myself disappear. In the first surrender, I live. I don't disappear but I live according to the will of God. That is what we find *nimittamātram bhavatavya sachem*.

So if I follow these two Namaskāra, I attain, I merge into or I disappear leaving behind the Lord alone which is called *Brahma Prāptihi*,



*Ēshwara Prāpti* or *Mōksha Prāpti*. Keeping this aim alone all the seekers worship Lord Shiva on this Shivarātri day for the sake of attaining *Mōksha*.

*Poornamadah Poornamidam Poornaath Poornam Udachyathe  
Poornasya Poornamaadaaya Poornameva Vasishyathe*

*Om shanti shanti shanti*



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