

Śrī Rudram¹

Introduction by
Swami Dayananda Saraswati²

Among the various Vedic hymns, recited daily by a *vaidika*, the *Ṣaṭa Rudrīya* occupies the prime place. Popularly known as *Śrī Rudram*, this hymn of praise of, and prayer to the Lord is a part of the *Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda*. Perhaps this hymn is the source of inspiration for the *nāmāvalis* consisting of one thousand and eight names revealing and praising the Lord invoked in a certain form. In the epic *Mahābhārata*, Bhīṣma gives the thousand names of Lord Viṣṇu, known as *Viṣṇu Sahasranāma*. There are similar *nāmāvalis* mentioned in the various *Purāṇas*. In both form and content, all of them are not different from the *Rudram*. Even in the *Vedas*, one does not see a section like this hymn consisting of so many names of the Lord along with the word, *namaḥ*, salutation. The famous five syllabic mantra, *Namaḥ Śivāya*, is from this great hymn.

Nāma-japa is perhaps one invariable element in the religious life of a *vaidika*. One can see even today, religious people from

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² Excerpt from the Introduction to a new book, *Talks on Śrī Rudram*, by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, transcribed and edited by Swamini Pramananda Saraswati. An audio cassette of the *Ṣaṭa Rudrīya* chanted by the students of the Sanskrit College, Madras, accompanies the book. Swamini Pramananda (formerly Bri. Sunita) completed the resident Vedanta course conducted by

different parts of India doing mental or oral *japa* daily. The *kīrtan* groups singing *Hare Rāma Hare Kṛṣṇa* are in fact doing *japa*. This mode of repeating the different names of the Lord has even crossed geographical and cultural borders. A devout Muslim repeats the ninety-nine names of Allah. This repetition is *japa*. A faithful Christian tells the rosary beads repeating a sentence seeking mercy from the Lord. This, too, is *japa*. I feel this mode of prayer comes from the *Ṣaṭa Rudrīya*.

This hymn is also called *Namaka* because it has the word *namaḥ* added to a word or words in the dative case, depicting the Lord. The verses of the *Viṣṇu Sahasranāma* have words only in the nominative, and therefore, the word *namaḥ* has no place. But in a ritual of offering flowers unto the altar of Viṣṇu, *namaḥ* is added to every name converted to the dative, which gives the sense, ‘unto’.

There are three types of prayer based upon the predominant means of accomplishing the act of prayer: *kāyika*, *vācika*, and *mānasa*.

Kāyika - A Vedic fire ritual is *kāyika*, because one’s physical limbs and materials are involved in this ritualistic prayer. This Vedic ritual is substituted by the more popular form of worship of the Lord at an altar, as is done in a temple. This form of worship either at home

or in a public place of worship is also *kāyika*. Even though this form of prayer is called *kāyika*,³ it implies the use of speech and the mind.

Vācika - This form of prayer is oral, and is popular in all religious traditions. In this form, the organ of speech, *vāk*, as well as the mind are involved. Any form of recitation, including a choir in a church comes under this category.

Mānasa - This is an act of prayer which is done purely by the mind, *manaḥ*. Therefore it is called *mānasa*, meaning mental. This is also called *dhyāna*, meditation. When the physical act of worship, *kāyika*, is mentally done, it is meditation. Only the mind is involved here. The *Ṣaṭa Rudrīya* is used in all three forms of prayer. The whole hymn is used in a *kāyika* ritual, implying either an altar of Śiva or of fire. It is also used for oral *japa*, which is *vācika*. Either a part or the whole of the hymn is repeated mentally, which is *mānasa*.

Besides it being a hymn of prayer, the *Ṣaṭa Rudrīya* is like an Upaniṣad revealing the truth of the *jīva*, the individual, *jagat*, the world and Īśvara, the Lord. It also provides the means for gaining the eligibility for the knowledge unfolded by the Upaniṣad. With the help of the different names of the Lord, one can understand the Lord, not only as an altar of prayer, but also as the one who is not separate from the devotee. This is the vision of the Upaniṣad. Therefore it is rightly called *Rudropaniṣad*. Thus, the implied meaning of the words of the

³ *Kāya* refers to the physical body.

Lord serves as Upaniṣad, and the simple meaning of the words in the hymn becomes a means to gain the eligibility for knowledge. It is said that there is nothing as purifying as the *Ṣaṭa Rudrīya*. Every human being is subject to *puṇya* and *pāpa*. The difficulties people go through in their lives are often the *pāpas* actualised. They can pose as obstructions for a person who is in the pursuit of spiritual knowledge.

To gain the grace of Īśvara and to remove the obstacles in one's spiritual life, the *Ṣaṭa Rudrīya* is efficacious. Even *for cittanaiścalya*, the freedom from emotional upheavals in one's life, the *Ṣaṭa Rudrīya* is highly recommended by people who know the Vedic tradition very well. In one of the Upaniṣads⁴ it is said, "The one who repeats the the *Ṣaṭa Rudrīya* is freed from the sin incurred by hurting a *brāhmaṇa*, robbing somebody's wealth . . ."

This Vedic *japa* is reverentially talked about even in the Purāṇas. In the *Kūrma Purāṇa*, there is a story of a king called Vasumanas. The king did *gāyatrī upāsanā* for many years. As a result of his prayer, the Lord appeared to him in the same form as the one the king prayed to. Being requested by the king for the means for *mokṣa* from *saṃsāra*, a life of becoming, the Lord told him, "Listen to these secret names of mine given to you together, even though they are mentioned individually in the different parts of the Vedas. Add the word, *namaḥ*, to each word and do *namaskāra*, living a life of

⁴ *Kaivalyopaniṣad mantra 24 - yaḥ ṣaṭa-rudrīyam adhīte saḥ ... brahmahatyāyāḥ pūto bhavati suvarṇasteyāt pūto bhavati...*

dharma. You will free yourself from *samsāra*.” What is the logic here? I think this needs to be discussed.

There is a group of devotees who believe that the name, the *nāma* of the Lord is greater than the person, the *nāmī*. The name Rāma is greater than Lord Rāma. There is a certain truth in this attitude. There is no name without a *nāmī*. The name Gandhi stands for the person, the *nāmī* who gave a certain content to the name. The name Vivekānanda has gained a sacred status only because of the *nāmī*, the person. It is clear, therefore, that *nāma* has no meaning without the *nāmī*. Then what is the basis for this concept that the name is greater than the *nāmī*? It is true that the name gains a content and status because of the *nāmī*. But is it not true that the *nāmī* having departed with all the biographical non-details, has left behind the *nāma*, the name, whose content survives the levelling hands of time?

That Rāma was in Ayodhyā, in Kiṣkindhā, in Citrakūṭa, that he vanquished Rāvaṇa and brought back Sītā, wore the crown and so on, was history. In and through this history, Rāma, the *nāmī*, had given a content to the word Rāma. That content survives even in the absence of the historical Rāma. It is said of Hanumān that he used to do *japa* of the name of Rāma even when Rāma was around. Why? Because Rāma the person, cannot be put in the mind and revolved in *japa*. *Japa* being an act of repetition, *nāmī* has no place there. Therefore, I feel that the devotees have a basis to praise the *nāma*.

What they have is the *nāma* and in the *nāma* they see the source of inspiration, the *nāmī*.

Furthermore, this entire world of forms, *rūpa*, is **Brahman**, like the whole world of earthenware is but clay. This is what is unfolded in the Vedānta Śāstra by sentences like, “*sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ brahma* - All that is here is **Brahman**.” What does this word, ‘all’ mean? The ‘all’ should mean the various forms like those made of clay. The world of earthenware is anything born of clay, like a pot, jar, cup, saucer, and so on; none of them is separate from clay. Therefore, the words, ‘pot’, ‘cup’, and so on are only used to refer to the form of the clay. So too, every object like the sun, moon, earth, space and time, is not separate from **Brahman**, even though each object has its own referent and it is that which is referred to by the words sun, moon, earth, space and time. Therefore any form, *rūpa*, is the meaning of the word, *nāma*. Can anyone think of a *nāma* without the *rūpa*? Can you repeat a known word without seeing its meaning, the object? Can you repeat a word like apple, without seeing its object, the fruit? Between a word, *vācaka*, and its meaning, *vācya*, there is an invariable relationship. Even if you don’t have a name for a form of clay, can you even imagine the form without imagining the substance? This is the non-separate relationship between name and form. If all forms are **Brahman**, Īśvara, then all names are of Īśvara. And therefore, in one name which includes all names, I can see the entire *jagat* being non-separate from Īśvara. Therefore when you say **Rāma** is the Lord, the word **Rāma** includes every other word whose

form I cannot revolve in my mind. But the word Rāma I can repeat as a mode of prayer.

The the *Ṣaṭa Rudrīya* consists of eleven sections, *anuvākas*. Each *anuvāka* has a number of hymns in different Vedic meters. Every hymn has a seer, *ṛṣi*, and a *devatā*. There are also places where more than one hymn is attributed to a given *ṛṣi*. In the first *anuvāka*, the prayer to Lord Rudra is asking him to be kind and giving. From the second to the ninth *anuvāka*, the Lord is saluted as *sarvātmā*, all forms constituting the world, as *sarvāntaryāmī*, the order sustaining everything, and also as *sarveśvara*, the Lord of everything. The tenth *anuvāka* consists of prayers to the Lord and in the eleventh *anuvāka*, the Lord is prayed to in the form of many *devatās* sustaining different spheres of experience. In the first nine sections of the *Rudram*, the word *namaḥ* occurs three hundred times. And, therefore, *the Ṣaṭa Rudrīya* is also popular as *Namakam* in the south of India. This hymn is invariably followed by another hymn where the syllables, *ca* and *me* occur in every sentence, and therefore, that hymn is called *camaka*. Recitation of *Rudram* is a part of the daily prayer for many *vaidikas* in this country. Even a renunciate, *sannyāsī*, is advised to recite this hymn daily⁵ with an understanding of the meaning of the mantras.

⁵ *Kaivalyopaniṣad mantra 24 - atyāśramī sarvadā sakṛdvā japet - A sannyāsī should repeat Rudram all the time or at least once a day.*