

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Svāhā and Namaḥ

Question

What does 'svāhā' mean?

Answer

Svāhā is an utterance. It is one of the utterances that is used in the sense of offering, "May this offering be unto you!" Typically, whenever we make an offering to a *devatā* in a fire ritual, we say, *svāhā*. For example, when we make an offering to Lord Indra, we say '*Indrāya svāhā.*' It is said that *Svāhā* is the name of the wife of Agni, Lord of Fire.

Svāhā is also used when there is a spirit of offering, e.g., *Om namo bhagavate dakṣiṇāmūrtaye mahyaṁ medhāṁ prajñāṁ prayacca svāhā*, 'Oh Lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti, please grant me *medhā*, intelligence and the purity of mind, and *prajñā*, the wisdom.' Here, *svāhā* is the offering of my own self, my own ego. What comes in the way of a pure mind and wisdom is my ego in the form of my own likes and dislikes. Therefore, I offer them to you, oh lord, and you in turn offer me *medhā* and *prajñā*. Thus it is a trading with Lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti. I offer you something and you give me something back. What do I offer you? My ego, likes and dislikes. You give me intelligence and wisdom. That is a good bargain. But only the lord can afford that bargain. He can receive all the garbage, but can give us everything that is divine. It is this garbage in the form of 'I' and 'mine' notions, the likes and dislikes that is in fact veiling our intelligence and wisdom. Therefore these obstacles are dumped or offered to the lord.

Svāhā is also used in the sense of a prayer. In the Taittirya Upaniṣad [1-4-2], for example, there is a prayer, *ā mā yantu brahmacāriṇaḥ svāhā*, 'may the *brahmacāriṇaḥ* come from all the directions.' In this context, *svāhā* means please fulfill my desire.

Question

What does 'namaḥ' mean?

Answer

Śivaya namaḥ, my salutations to Lord Śiva. *Namaḥ* means *aham namami*, I salute. I bow down, I prostrate to Lord Śiva, I offer my salutations to Lord Śiva. The word *namaḥ* is an indeclinable word which is secondarily interpreted as 'na mama.' There is a style of interpreting words which is not in the sense of grammatic derivation. They take the elements of a word and each element is interpreted in a certain way. For example, in the word, 'guru,' the syllable 'gu' stands for that which veils and the syllable 'ru' stands for that which removes that veiling. Similarly, there are two letters 'na' and 'ma' in *namaḥ*. So they interpret it as 'na mama.' This secondary interpretation is not grammatical. *Namaḥ* primarily means salutation. But *na mama* also conveys the sense of salutation. When we say *Indrāya svāhā*, usually the priest will ask us to say, 'Indrāya svāhā indraya idam na mama.' *Indraya svāhā* is offering to Indra. It now belongs to Indra, and it does not belong to me. So after *svāhā* they ask you to say, *na mama*. When we offer something, we are in fact, transferring ownership. Till the offering was made, I was the owner and now the ownership has been transferred¹.

¹ Transcribed and edited by Chaya Raj and KK Davey