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What the Avatars mean

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4. What the *Avatars* mean

EMBODIMENTS of the Divine Atma! The *Atma* is the basis for the Divine life. The body enshrines the *Atma*. Worldly life should be in consonance with spiritual aspirations. Because man today is identified with physical existence as the only reality, he has to be taught the knowledge of the Spirit.

The Divine Will is the determinant of the destiny of the individual or of society. Society itself is a reflection of the Divine Will. It is only when man conducts himself on this basis that he will be able to discharge his duties free from ego. Hence man's supreme duty is to act according to the Divine Will.

Dharma (duty) is the spiritual expression of the Divine Will in relation to society. The term *Aiswarya* is derived from the word *Easwara* (The Supreme Lord). The terms Siva or Sankara mean "Auspicious." *Sam* means *Chitananda* (Blissful Awareness). *Kara* means "the one who causes it." "Sankara" means the One who causes blissful awareness. Sankara is the One who confers *Chitananda* on those who take refuge in Him or adore Him.

Symbolism of the Siva form

The secret of Creation is evident from the description of the form of Siva. The crescent moon on Siva's head symbolises the consciousness in human beings, the Ganga symbolises the Life-Force and the snakes on Siva's body represent the myriads of living beings. He resides on a silver mountain. His dearest friend is Kubera, the Lord of Wealth. Despite being endowed with all these, why was He obliged to carry the begging bowl? To demonstrate to the world that every kind of wealth is a hindrance to spiritual advancement, Siva renounced everything. It is through renunciation Siva became the eternal embodiment of supreme bliss.

The Lord has another name. It is only when the love principle underlying this name is rightly understood, the real form of the Cosmos can be recognised. That name is "Sambasiva". *Saa* means divinity. *Aruba* refers to the cosmos. *Siva* means *Purusha* (the Supreme Person).

Easwara has yet another name' *Yogasikha*. The sky is His blue form. The *Dik* (directions) are His garments. Hence He is known as Digambara. He is also known as *Panchaanana--the* Five headed One. The five are' Earth, water, fire, air and space. His five heads represent the *panchabhutas* (five basic elements).

Siva is also described as *Bhuthanaatha--the* Lord of all created beings. *Bhutha* refers to creation. *Easwara* is the Lord of every creature in the universe. Hence, the entire cosmos is reflected as an image in the Lord.

Siva is the source of all prosperity

Siva is known as *Subhankara--the* one who is ever good (*Subham*). In the world, whoever takes a bodily form--whether it be humans, deities or *avatars* sometime or other the body *becomes* *Asubham* (tainted). The prefix "Sri" is affixed to the names of such persons to indicate that without the prefix they are tainted by their bodies. That is why "Sri" is added to the names of Krishna, Rama, Venkateswara and so on to confer beatitude on them. With regard to *Easwara*, however, the epithet "Sri" is not applied because *Easwara* is ever in a state of beatitude. "Sankara" remains "Sankara" without a "Sri." Siva is not called "Sri Siva." *Easwara* is not

referred to as "Sri Easwara." He is the embodiment of all auspiciousness and holiness. Hence he needs no other appellation. He is the source of *Sakala Aiswarya* (all prosperity and well-being).

Man is the product of interaction of *Purusha* (the Supreme) and *Prakriti* (Nature). Consequently man should have the perennial bliss of the Divine and remain perpetually blessed. Man is made in the image of Nature. Man can divinise himself only by contemplating on the attributes of the Easwara (Divine). The three eyes of Siva represent the three *lokas* (worlds). Siva's trident is symbolic of the Past, the Present and the Future the three aspects of Time. The three *gunas* (*Satwa*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*) are images of the Trinity-Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The three worlds, the triune aspect of Time, the three *gunas* (qualities) are thus manifestations of the Easwara Principle. When the Divine is installed in the heart in this manner, man can raise himself to the level of the Divine.

It is for the well-being of the world that Siva swallowed the *Halahala* poison. Again, it is for the sake of the world's good that Siva contained the Ganga in His matted locks. Siva bears the moon on His head to confer peace of mind on mankind. When man moulds himself on the pattern of Easwara, he will get rid of all his evil tendencies and offer to the world what is good in him. This is the meaning of the worship of Siva. It is only when man gives up utterly his bad thoughts, evil desires and wicked deeds, he will be able to transform himself into divinity.

The process of Self-realisation

The spiritual process may be compared to the conversion of milk into butter. The body is like a house. The heart is the vessel in which the milk of consciousness is boiled over the stove of devotion. The vessel is covered by the lid of *sraddha* (earnestness). When the fire of *Viveka* (discrimination) is lit, the cream of understanding comes up from the boiling milk. To prevent the cat of *Maya* from getting at the milk, the door has to be barred by the gate of *Sujnana* (wisdom). After the milk is cooled by *Santhi* (tranquillity) and the buttermilk of the Divine Name is added to it, the curd of Divine Grace is formed. When this curd is churned with the rod of knowledge and the rope of love, the whey of ignorance is separated and the butter of the Atma Reality (the *Jiva*) emerges. It is such a realised Self who attains oneness with the Divine.

Man today fails to recognise his own true nature. He adores men, but does not realise the humanness in them. He worships *avatars* like Rama and Krishna, but is not aware of the exemplary ideals offered by them to mankind. Because of his failure to recognise the *avatars'* exemplary character, man is a prey to all kinds of doubts. Everyone should try to understand the highest human ideals represented by the *avatars*. He must consider how far he has lived upto those ideals. Real worship consists in practising the ideals to the greatest extent possible. Instead of worshipping in this manner, man is degrading himself by resorting to mundane rituals. It is by constant control of thoughts and desires that man can purify himself and raise the level of his consciousness. To the extent man reduces his desires, *his ichcha sakti* (will power) will grow. Today man has lost his will power because of the insatiable growth of desires. In the process, he has weakened his intellect, his memory, his powers of discrimination, his intelligence and his powers of speech and thought.

When to experience the sense of equality

Without understanding fully your human nature, how can you expect to fathom the nature of the Divine or recognise the divinity present equally in all beings? For instance, you are told that God is present in a cat, a dog, a donkey, a pig, a snake or a scorpion, and you also talk about it. But if

your parents, friends or anyone else hails you as "You ass! You swine!," you get angry and feel that you have been insulted. Likewise, if God is described in this manner, is it not an affront to God? When can you experience the sense of equality of all living beings? It is only when you have realised your oneness with God that you are entitled to speak about the equality of all beings. Till then, the dog is a dog, the donkey is a donkey, a man is a man. As long as you regard yourself as a human being, respect other fellow-humans, show love towards other creatures, but do not go about saying all are one and all are equal.

The eleven Rudras man has to conquer

Embodiments of Divine Love! The auspicious and sacred Easwara principle is present in every man. This divine principle can be manifested only through the practice of pure thoughts and actions. Today's *Sivarathri* observance conveys a significant lesson. According to numerology, the three letters "Si", "va" and "Raa" make up eleven ("Si"=5, "Va"=4 and "Raa"=2). These eleven are known as the *Ekaadas Rudras*, the eleven *Rudras*. The fourth syllable "thri" means "three". Thus *Sivarathri* is the day devoted to overcoming the eleven *Rudras* by adoring the Supreme Lord, who is master of them all.

The Rudras turn the *Buddhi* (intellect) towards sensuous objects and thrust the individual in the sea of *Samsara* (worldly life). The *Paramatma* (Supreme Spirit) is master of all the *Rudras*. Only the man who has conquered the eleven *Rudras* can expect to realise the Supreme. Who are the eleven *Rudras*? They are' the five *Karmendriyas* (organs of action) the five *Jnanedriyas* (organs of perception) and the *Buddhi*. Man must seek to control as much as possible these eleven organs. From ancient times, the sages have stressed the supreme importance of sense-control as the means to God-realisation.

No distinction should be made between Siva and Vishnu. The composer Annamacharya declared: "While uttering Linga! Linga! Sivalinga! do not forget, oh man! Ranga! Both are one." Whether the vehicle of the Lord is a bull or an eagle, the Lord is one and the same.

Annamacharya indicated how this Lord is to be worshipped. To perform ablutions for the idol of the Lord he went in search of pure and sacred water. He could not find it in the Ganga, which was polluted by water coming from the mouths of fish and frogs. He lamented over his inability to get completely pure, unpolluted water from any source. He declared: "The only pure water with which I can wash your Linga, Oh Siva, is that coming from my tear-filled eyes, which have been moved by the devotion in my heart filled with the sense of utter dedication to the Lord." Annamacharya felt that only the tears filled with love of the Lord are pure enough for washing the Lord's idol.

How to receive the plenitude of God's grace

Each devotee has his own conception of the Divine. No single specific form can be ascribed to the Lord. The Lord's grace is conferred on each devotee according to the level of his spiritual consciousness. Annamacharya exclaimed: "Oh Lord! You appear to each devotee according to the nature and measure of his realisation."

The ocean is vast and boundless. But the amount of water you can carry from it is determined by the size of the vessel you take. If the vessel you carry is small, you cannot fill it beyond its capacity. Likewise, if your heart is constricted, Divine grace will be equally limited. Broaden your heart and receive the plenitude of God's grace.

How is one to broaden his heart? It is by getting rid of narrow differences and by curbing desires. By developing insatiable desires, the heart gets shrunk. A broad heart means recognising the truth that the Divine dwells in everybody. Only then can you obtain the Reality that is unchanging and eternal.

Discourse in the Poornachandra Auditorium, on 23-2-1990, Sivarathri Day.

It is vital that every one should inquire into the true, the pure and the permanent. For, there is at present delusions about values. Even the leaders of people are hugging the false hypothesis that happiness can be got by means of wealth or health, or housing, or clothing, or the cultivation of skills in handicraft and manufacture! The bird sits upon the bough that sways in the storm, confident of its wings, not confident of the bough whereon it sits! So, you too should feel strong because of wings---the wings of Sraddha and Bhakti---not because of the bough of the objective world, whereon you have perched.

BABA