

29. God Is Known By A Thousand Different Names

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శ్రీయం శ్రీపతానా స మజస్రీమ్
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శాకుంతలం తల వాసు సహస్రం
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Sing the Gita. Utter the thousand names of the Lord. Meditate continuously on Sripati. Spend your time in the company of the good. Give away your wealth to the weak and needy people.

Pavitratma Swarupas!

One of the disciples of Sankara gave this particular verse describing the speciality of *Gita*, *dhyana*, *sacrifice* and the unique features contained in the several names of the Lord. We are asked to sing the *Gita*. By singing the *Gita* we will be turning away our minds from the material desires and mitigating our restlessness. *Gita*, being the essence of *Vedanta*, is the Royal road to salvation. It is the word of Sai as well. It has been said in this verse that there are a thousand names of the Lord.

It is customary in our country to regard the Lord as having several forms and names like Hari, Siva, and so on. God has been described as a *Sahasra Seersha Purushaha*, one possessing a thousand heads. Some people regard *Sripati* as referring to Vishnu and some others say that it refers to Siva. Such an argument is a waste of time. So many different names and forms of the Lord impel you to see His omnipresence which is described as the effulgent light. He represents all that is described in our scriptures. He is the embodiment of prosperity. He is *Sabda Brahman*, and so on. Hence, *Sripati* does not denote any particular name, but it just denotes the divine *Atma*.

We use the appellation *Sri* for denoting sacredness to all things which need to be sanctified. The appellation of *Sri* is affixed to human bodies which are temporary

and made up of five material elements to denote our respect. We also use this appellation even in the case of the Lord because the body in which he appears is temporary. In the case of Rama or Krishna, we use *Sri* because the names refer to the bodies which were impermanent. Thus, for giving sacredness to a destructible body, we use *Sri*.

In the case of Siva, Sankara and *Easwara*—names which denote permanency—we do not say *Sri* Siva or *Sri* Sankara. This appellation has no meaning because the Siva *Thathwa* has no body and no form. It is eternal and does not take a body. The word *Sri* means *Mangala* or prosperity. Because *Mangala* is permanent, He who is the husband of such *Mangala* is referred to as *Sripati*. The *Sri* here signifies that divinity is permanent, unchanging and indivisible, and can be worshipped in any form of the Lord.

It is said that Vishnu rides the Garuda. We also refer to Siva as a *Nandi Vahana*. We refer to Brahma as being the husband of Saraswathi. We say many other similar things. Thus we attribute so many qualities to these names and forms. This is only in accordance with our own notions of looking at these different forms and names. After mature deliberation, we will come to the conclusion that God abides in all *Jivas* and all creation. When we say, “*Jantunam nara Janma durlabham*” we mean that amongst all the animals, to be born as a human being is the most difficult thing. In ordinary parlance,

when we talk of *Jantu* we think of an animal. This word comes from the root “*Jan*”. Whatever is born from the womb of a mother is referred to as *Jantu*. In this sense, man is also an animal. Even a rat, because it gives birth to young ones from its womb, is called a *Jantu*. Another name for animals is *Pasu* and one who looks after the *Pasus* is called *Pasupati*. The name *Pasupati* for the Lord springs from the fact that He looks after all the animals. *Pasupati* denotes *Easwara*.

On the other hand, we know that Gopala is a name for Krishna. These names indicate that He who looks after the well-being of all the animals is God, bearing different names. We should synthesise the apparently differing thoughts. Without our attaching too much importance to these names and without laying too much stress on the concepts of Vishnu as husband of Lakshmi, *Brahma* as husband of Saraswathi, it is good to give one name, the name of *Pasalanatha* to the Lord. This will bring to an end all the confusion of distinction. The word *Pasalanatha* also means that He is the head of all *Jivas*. This is a way of recognising the oneness of divinity. On the other hand, according to our *Puranas*, we can also reach the same conclusion by taking “*pa*” to mean Parvathi, “*sa*” to mean Saraswathi, “*la*” to mean Lakshmi and regard one who is the *Natha* of all the three to be the *Pasalanatha*.

We may now try and reconcile differences between the *Vahanas* or transports of these Lords. We

have accepted that one *vahana* is *Garuda*, the second is *Nandi* and the third is *Hamsa*. We can reconcile these three. If we use one word *Vihanga Vahana* then we can see that all the three will be covered. ‘*Vi*’ stands for *Vrishaba* or *Nandi*, and ‘*ha*’ stands for *Hamsa* and ‘*ga*’ stands for *Garuda*, and the name *Vihanga* brings about the desired synthesis.

We should regard all forms of God as one and the same. It is in this context that the disciple of Sankara used the words *Sripathi rupam*. In this verse, another word *sajjana-sangham* has been used, which means only good company can uproot bad ideas. In this context mere *puja* or visits to holy places is not of much help. Amongst the holy and the good people, you spontaneously feel good and cultivate good qualities. Both your bad and good qualities generally depend on the society in which you move. Therefore, if you want to promote your good qualities, you must move in a good society. By keeping good company, you get an opportunity by which you can promote good work and good ideas. In the third line of this verse, the disciple of Sankara has established that good company is essential.

In the fourth line, it has been said that you must share your wealth with those who deserve to be helped. The poor people, having families, deserve such charity. Sanyasis who have no responsibilities are not in need of such charity. A portion of whatever you earn must be set apart for the future and the good of your children. A

portion should be used for good purposes, for charity, and for helping others. In this way you will be using your wealth in a sacred manner.

However, most of us incline to believe in God if our desires get fulfilled, and loose our faith in God when the course of life runs contrary to our wishes. These considerations, in any case, have nothing to do with the truth about God. The evil propensities are prone to become confirmed habits. The malady of these habits cannot be cured through mechanical *sadhana*.

There is a small story for this. An individual was suffering from indigestion. He took several medicines in vain because the disease had become chronic. However, fortunately for him, a saint came his way and suggested a cure for his disease. The saint told him to chew and suck the pieces of rock salt the whole day. On doing so for some time, he felt considerably relieved of his trouble. This person used to distribute sweets to the children on festival days. On one Deepavali day, he visited various shops and in every shop he found the *laddus* to be tasting bitter. This was on account of his sucking the salt. One shopkeeper who knew his habit of sucking the salt suggested to him to wash his mouth before eating the *laddu*. Complying with the suggestion of the shopkeeper, he found the *laddu* to be sweet. In the same manner, while succumbing to your bad habits, you do not gain the sweet and sanctifying fragrance from the sacred company of the divine personalities that you

come across. You can get benefit from the good company only after cleansing your mind. Then you can enjoy the bliss of *Atma*.

It is in this context that the statement, “*Yad bhavam tad bhavati*”, has come to be used. An object is viewed differently from different points of view. The appearance of the world conforms to the colour of the glasses you wear. The change in the colour of the appearance is due to the change in the colour of the glasses. Therefore, many people do not imbibe good ideas from good company because they hold on to their prejudices, preconceived ideas and preoccupations. To them, Kumbhakarna sends messages of sleep and they go to sleep, while others who are awake are troubled by extraneous thoughts of their offices and so on. Yet others keep on looking hither and thither, and therefore only a small minority of participants absorb the good ideas from *Sathsanga*.

There is a small story for this. At one time, there was a *pundit* who was expounding the *Ramayana*, and he undertook to do this for a period of seven days. A woman, who had recently lost her husband, used to attend the same for some solace. She was a regular visitor and used to always sit in the front row. The *pundit* was expounding the *Ramayana* every day, and this woman was constantly looking at the book and shedding tears. The *pundit* presumed that she had great devotion. So at the end of the seven days, he announced that because of

her regular attendance and devotion, he would give the prasad first to her. While doing so, he asked her if she had enjoyed the discourses on the *Ramayana*. In great sorrow, the lady replied that she did not know whether the *pundit* was reciting the *Mahabharatha* or the *Ramayana*. She further said that she was, however, in great grief, because the black string at the back of the book was reminding her of the string which her late husband used to wear around his waist. Thus she conveyed that her tears had nothing to do with the *pundit's* exposition of *Ramayana*.

Egoism blurs thinking. For instance, there was an artist who had travelled far and wide and had built up for himself great reputation. But, so far he could not achieve access to Krishna. As such, he was anxious to seek the approbation from Lord Krishna as well. With this view, one day he got an appointment with Krishna, met him, and requested him to stay still so that he could paint his picture. He prepared the outline and told Krishna that he would get ready the final painting in a week's time. Krishna was an *antarvasi* and knew the ego of the painter. After a week, the painter brought a finished portrait, covered with a white cloth. In Krishna's presence, when he uncovered the painting, the painter himself was shocked at the lack of similarity between Krishna and the painting. The painter was completely surprised and asked for a further week's time to get the job done. Next time also, the same thing happened. In

this manner, the painter tried several times but every time the result was equally disappointing. In complete frustration and total dejection, he wanted to leave the city and go away.

When he was thus going away, sage Narada met him. Narada told him that it is silly to attempt to paint the picture of Lord Krishna. The Lord has no fixed form and He can change His face every second. Narada advised, "If you do want to paint Him, I will tell you a method which will enable you to do so". Narada whispered something into the ear of the artist. Following the advice given by Narada, the painter came back, covered something with a white cloth and again approached Krishna and told him that this time, he is welcome to change in any manner; but the painting will look exactly like him. When the cloth was removed, Krishna saw a mirror and this mirror reproduced an exact replica of Krishna. If, therefore, you are imagining that God is like this or like that, it is not correct. You cannot describe God and all your attempts will fail. It is much better to make your mind clear and clean, fill it with love and devotion and that will enable you to have the true vision of God.