

## **Siva: the Great God of the Hindus**

Om. A-sa-to ma sad gam-ma-ya. Ta-ma-so-ma jyo-tir gam-ma-ya. Mri-tyor ma a-mri-tam ga-ma-ya. Avir avir ma e-dhi. Rudra yat te dak-shi-nam mu-kham. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam.

Lead us from the unreal to the Real. Lead us from darkness unto Light. Lead us from death to Immortality. Reveal to us Thy Resplendent Truth and evermore protect us, Oh Lord, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face.

The subject of my talk this morning is: Siva: the Great God of the Hindus. Those who have read some literature in Hinduism will remember the name, Siva. Hinduism is based on the Upanishads, the Vedas. Now the Upanishads speak of God as the Supreme Brahman, which is really beyond our words and our thoughts, but Who is experienced nonetheless in our [inwardly?]... by this earnest seeker. He is experienced as the all-embracing truth -- in the universe, and beyond the universe, inside our body and outside our body. But this experience cannot be conveyed by words. We may read many things but we won't be able to grasp the truth of this. So the Upanishads prescribe a lower level of God.

The highest level of God is beyond our words and thought, [and] can only be experienced by the earnest seeker. But what about others -- the common human being? For them that highest truth has been divided into three realities: one [is] God the Creator; one [is] God the Preserver and one [is] God the Dissolver. Now usually the creation is attributed to Brahma and the preservation-sustenance is attributed to Vishnu. These are phases of the same Brahman, but this Brahman is now called Saguna Brahman (Brahman with attributes). The highest Brahman, which cannot be described with words, is called Nirguna Brahman-- Brahman without any attributes. But when that Brahman comes down for the sake of man, because man cannot... [only] a few persons can grasp the experience of the highest non-dual Truth. So for them a God of worship is necessary, a God to Whom we can pray, the God to Whom we can open our heart, the God who helps us in our crises of life. So that God is called, Saguna Brahman-- Brahman with attributes, and It has three names, according to three functions, the creation, and the preservation and the destruction.

Now usually the creation is given to Prajapati or Brahma and the preservation is given to Vishnu and the destruction or dissolution is given to Siva. But all the time, it is mentioned in the teachings that these three gods are the same God, the One Reality. It is for the sake of [the] worship of man, it is for the sake of development of our spiritual life that God is brought down in our level of thinking. We understand what creation is. We understand what preservation is and we understand what dissolution is. Now, Brahma, the Creator is given a lower status. Creation is given to Brahma, and Brahma is a position, which can be attained by human beings also. Human beings by the development of their wisdom, spiritual wisdom can attain a sphere, which is called Brahma-Loka, the

sphere of Brahman, Brahma. And so there could be many Brahmas, but the case of Vishnu and the case of Siva are different. They are really gods. They are eternal.

And so Siva, Siva is given the picture of calmness and detachment. Siva does not care for any praise or blame or worship. Yet he is very kind; he is very compassionate. He is... you can worship Siva in any manner you like -- usually some leaves and flowers and a little water. So you get some [leaves and flowers], and anything can be a symbol of Siva: a stone or rock can be a symbol of Siva, if you worship by devotion. He finds a rock, a nice rock on the street and if he finds some water, if he finds some leaves, he can take those leaves and put a... and pour some water on that stone, and say "Namah Shivaya." And Siva will be pleased. And Siva, the temple of Siva... All over India there are temples of Siva, big temples, small temples, and the roadside stones. Eh? The India is filled with Siva. And, Siva, you can pray to God in any manner you like, and is a picture of complete detachment and complete sacrifice.

Many mythological stories are described in the Puranas, in the mythological books of the Hindus. And many stories give the unusual compassion of this god, Siva. He is pictured as sitting in meditation, in a snow-capped mountain, which is called Kailāsa.<sup>1</sup> It is outside the Himalayas, beyond the Himalayas when Tibet comes. There is a high peak, and that peak, it is all the time there is snow. And Siva is pictured sitting in meditation. And by his side there is an attendant who is called Nandi. He is really a bull. And Siva's Shakti, Divine Mother, is also present there.

Siva is in meditation, so one very illuminating story is given in the Puranas, and Sri Ramakrishna liked to tell this story! Siva was in meditation and his attendant Siva [Nandi] was near him, and there was an **unusual** sound. And his attendant, Nandi asked him, "Oh Lord, what is this sound?" Then Siva thought [said?] "It is a signal of a great evil power, born in this earth. He will be born in Lanka." Lanka is Ceylon. "And he will ... he has got some boons formally from God and he is... though he will be very erudite, he will be a scholar, but his heart is full of evil. And he will be so aggressive that he would not be satisfied in subduing this human beings or other subhuman beings, but he would adventure to invade the heavens, the gods. So he became so powerful that the gods were afraid. And he invaded heaven and the king of the gods was Indra. Indra had to come down and other gods came down on earth and were walking around like homeless people." [He laughs and the audience laughs with him.] But there were no shelters, because there was no US government. [Audience laughs more.] "And so what they did, all these gods..." These are minor gods, the god who controls the air, the god who controls water, the god who controls sun. So all these minor gods, the idea is: that one universal consciousness, of God... He is manifest in this universe as the powers of nature and each power is called a god, or goddess sometimes feminine. "So there is, there are these gods, and they went to Brahma." Brahma

was the creator as I mentioned, and he was called a great-grandfather. “So they went to him, and prayed to him that we are in trouble and you have to... So Brahma said, ‘Well, my power is limited, let me go to Vishnu and Siva.’” So the three had a talk-conference. [He laughs with audience.] And the result of that conference is mentioned in the book on the Divine Mother, Shakti, the Chandi. I won’t mention that. I will mention here at this stage, this much, that Siva said that this sound you heard, he told his attendant, Nandi, is a signal that Ravana, his name was Ravana... He’s a Rakshasha, and he was born in Lanka, in south India – not in India, an island, a separate island, Ceylon. Between Ceylon and India there is a very narrow passage, a strip of ocean.

“So he’s born there and he will create tremendous commotion in the three worlds. And he will be a source of terror and he will be a great power, evil power. And this is the signal that he is born. And in order to subdue him, Lord Vishnu will have to come down on earth in the form of man, an incarnation, Rama. He will be born as Rama and he will be able to subdue this Ravana with the help of monkeys. [He laughs.] Monkey-soldiers!” This is told in the story of Ramayana. Ramanaya is now available to be seen in the tv, you see. “Anyway, this is the signal that this great power is born.”

Then this Nandi was sitting and Siva was again in meditation then there was another terrible sound. Then Nandi said, “What is this sound, My Lord?” “Well, that evil power is gone, is dead.” “But... dead? You said that he will be a source of terror to the three heavens and Vishnu will have to be born on earth to help mankind. So many things will happen, you said.” “Well all is over.” [Audience laughs.] In two seconds! This one sound [clap]: Ravana is born, and second sound [clap]: Ravana’s play in the three worlds is over. That shows that Siva’s scale of time is different from ours! What is [a] thousand years of ... or ten thousand years to us, is to Siva, just a second. So Siva is the eternal witness.

Things are happening-- to us they are very important, but to Siva they are just passing shadows. Great things are happening; trivial things are happening. But Siva is the eternal witness. In meditation from time to time he is seeing the fun of this creation. Creation is not to him real, it is just a play. It is just a play of Vishnu. So that is Siva’s wisdom and he is with... he is meditating with that wisdom in the depth of his heart. And sometimes he gets up [from meditation] for a little [while to be] in creation. Then he dances. See, for him, this whole world movement is a cosmic dance going on. And the dancer... the power that is creating this dance is Vishnu, Rama. So Siva does not want to take credit to himself. He dances to the rhythm of this cosmic movement of this world, singing, “Rama, Rama, Rama, Rama.” That shows Siva’s humility. In power, and in wisdom, he is not really different from Vishnu. With all three, except

Brahma [in His transcendental aspect], they are One. But when Siva dances, with the rhythm of this cosmic movement of life, he sings the name of Rama in order to give reverence to Vishnu. He wants to remain a servant, though he is supremely powerful. So in the Puranas, we find Siva is not interested in creation. He is interested in helping creation, helping mankind. You ask from him anything you want, he will give you. And his worship is very simple. Wherever you go, you can worship him and there is no caste restriction. The brahmanas, usually have some [restriction] in the pujas; in the worship they have so much restriction in caste rules. This [is their way], but not for Siva. He is always available to all people.

But these attributes we find in the Puranas about Siva. Many stories are told. And these stories are beautiful hints: the wonder of his character, the greatness of his character. And that is why Vishnu, Brahma, they respect him. They respect him. And he is... when he is... his official dress when he is meditating, there is no question of dress. But he wants to go to some respectful place you see, [laughs] he has to be dressed. But he does not care for his dress. All these things he picks up from the streets – a tiger skin and a snake, which...whom people fear, and Siva says, “There is no fear in me. You come. You be an adornment, a substitute of a golden necklace.” So Siva has a... that is his official dress, [audience laughs] like a mad... like a mad person. And he is, he does not care for that. So in the hymns... many hymns take... mention one of these things and glorify Siva. You stand for fearlessness, the snake on your shoulder shows that in you there is no fear. And your ragged dress, and your locks of hair... he had no time to shave you see. So locks of hair accumulated. It is the... “I don’t care. I don’t care for your formalities. I don’t care for your fineries. Anything I get: when you give me food or give me a fruit and you [do] not bring a plate or a cup.” You can just throw it to him. “Lord Siva, I offer it to you.” [Audience laughs.] [Siva says], “I will accept. I will stretch my hands and accept that.”

See? In Siva’s worship there is no restriction, and he loves to hear the adoration. If you say just, “Om namo Sivaya” he is happy. And if you compose a hundred stanza poem, he is also happy. There is a great poem Adoration of Siva, it is called the Siva Mahimna Stotram.<sup>2</sup> That hymn is chanted everywhere. They say that if you chant this Siva, this, all giving glories... sections of his glories are different because he is eternal. Through the ages so many things have happened, though he is not attached to anything. So he is completely selfless and completely detached from this creation. That is why these young girls who need most [a] husband, a beautiful husband, so they worship... tomorrow is the Siva Ratri. Tomorrow the whole night they perform Siva Puja and you have to do [it] four times, four times... four wakes of night you do Siva Puja in a simple way. So the girls are taught in Hindu homes to worship Siva and

the... their mother and grandfathers tell [them], “Well Siva is not so... as you see from [the] outside, [he] is a rugged and all, like a mad person, but he is not so. You can... You see his character, how completely selfless... at any moment he is ready to suffer for the sake of creation.”

There is another story, the story of creation. Early in the story of creation the oceans were churned. The gods in heaven and the asuras, the demons, they are enemies, but they heard that in the depth of the ocean there is nectar, there is a special jar and in that jar there is amrita. Amrita means nectar. If you can churn the ocean, then that nectar you can discover. So that was a common interest for the gods and the asuras. So they united, [a] temporary peace like Pakistan and India. [Audience laughs with him.] The asuras said, “All right let us unite and let us churn the ocean.” And so they had a... a big mountain, a straight mountain like a... our California, the tall tree, the... what is the name of that tall tree? [Audience replies.] “Redwood.” Redwood, the redwood tree. Like a redwood tree there is a tall mountain which is called Sumeru mountain. That Sumeru mountain was put in the center of the ocean, the churning rod and around that, there must be a rope. So there was the king of snakes, his name was Vasuki<sup>3</sup>, he said, “I will offer [myself] as a rope around, around your... this churning rod.” So, this snake, he was breathing, and it was so hot breath was coming, so devas were clever, they stood on the tail side. [He laughs with audience.] And the asuras, they are happy... “We are superior to the devas, so we shall have the head side.” And when [there was] the hot air as they began to churn, the mountain was revolving. And who will be the base of such a tremendous affair? That base must be strong where this mountain will stand. And Vishnu said, “I will cooperate. I will be a cosmic tortoise, and I will go to the depth of the ocean and the mountain will stand on that and you, Vasuki the snake will be the churning rod, and you go on churning this side, that side, this side, that side.” And as they began to churn, many things appeared. The moon appeared. Before that there was no moon! [He laughs.] The moon appeared; a celestial horse appeared; and then the king of the heavens said, “This horse is mine.” So that horse went, [to him--] a celestial horse. An elephant came and so many things, other things came. And Mother Lakshmi also came and Mother Lakshmi said, “I will... Vishnu will be my husband.” In this way the story goes many things and **eventually** a terrible poison appeared. And a black and a blue poison and the three worlds are afraid. This, this poison will kill us. Everybody was afraid, the gods and the demons both are afraid. Then Siva said, “Give me the poison. I will take that poison for you.” So Siva drank that poison, but the poison cannot go... Siva’s inner biological system was different, you see. [He laughs with audience.] Poison can at most go up to his throat, [it] cannot go down. So the poison remained in his... in his

throat as a blue mark. That is the symbol of Siva's sacrifice. That poison could not do anything to the Siva, but he was happy to help these gods and demons but the poison stayed there in his... that is why his one name of Siva is Nilakanṭha, that is "Blue-Throated" the god whose throat is blue, because that shows the sacrifice he made for the gods during the churning of the ocean.

Then, eventually a heavenly being appeared. He is a celestial physician. In his hand was that pot of... amrita. Amrita means nectar. And then they understood, both the gods and the asuras, the demons understood: this is the...now this ~~poison~~ [nectar] is coming. So they are rushing there to get hold – who will get hold of that, that jar of nectar will be the... immortal. So Vishnu again helped them. Vishnu assumed the form of a beautiful woman, a supremely beautiful woman and began to show her belly dancing. [Audience laughs.] And the asuras said...think... "Well, forget the nectar; now let us enjoy," seeing this belly dancing. So they rushed to that woman – Vishnu in disguise—and in this time interval, the gods who were more understanding, they were thankful to Vishnu and they got hold of that... for that amrita for that nectar and they drank that. And so the asuras are cheated, you see, and so their anger to the gods is eternal. Always. Hnn? [Laughs with audience.] They are, "Oh, they cheated!" They said, "I did not cheat you; it is Vishnu who in order to help us in the form of woman... the woman's name was Mohini, the Enchantress – in the Puranas. So [in] that you have a story about Siva, his great sacrifice for the creation, by drinking the poison. Poison stands for the evil – the combined evil of the three worlds...the combined evils of the three worlds. Siva said, "I will drink [it]."

So in your prayer, you see, if you... the girls, the unmarried girls do Siva puja with great devotion. They have been taught to do that by their grandmothers. They want, "Oh Lord Siva, be my husband sometime when the time for marriage comes. You be my husband." It means, in you I want a husband who will develop your character, the traits of your character. He'll be calm; he'll be patient; he will not beat me; he will not scold me; he will not threaten me and I can ask from him... Detachment. Like Siva our character, my husband will be a mortal Siva." So they do the Siva worship.

On other occasions also people do some... somebody wants something. but Siva is most happy when somebody... somebody wants devotion, wants self-knowledge. Siva is most happy. There are many stories about that, how sincere devotees in their spiritual life, asked, prayed for Siva's grace. And Siva's also sanctioned that. And then Siva thought, well these human beings are suffering so much. Now, let me have a city. It will be called the Siva City. It is called Varanasi. It is between two small rivers, Varuna and Asi, between them there is a Siva

temple, later on. And he said, this will be my great capital for emancipation. Those who want to be immortal, to go beyond maya, the round of birth and death, transmigration, should come here and worship me – simple with a little water, a little leaves.

And so the Siva's [city], the city of Varanasi is full of temples, small temples, big temple and on like that. And people who are most willing to have the freedom from transmigration, freedom from rebirth are old women who are suffering so much from arthritis, from bronchitis [audience laughs] from this and all. They said, "Let us go to Benares and Siva has guaranteed us freedom... So we shall, every morning we shall roam around with a small pitcher of Ganga water and we put some water and get some leaves and put some leaves and say, "Namō Shivaya." And when death comes, Siva will see that we are not reborn; we become immortal. So with that faith you will see. That city is full of widows. They are retired from home and family and they have got some small dwelling place. Their family helps, and their duty is to the whole day to pass in the contemplation of Siva, in the worship of Siva, and one meal they get from some temple. In this way they spend their days.

And once Sri Ramakrishna had a vision that is very also illustrating. Once he saw that there is a cremation ground in Benares which is called Manikarnika. There, people who are dead-- they are cremated. And once Sri Ramakrishna had gone to Benares on a pilgrimage and there he saw in that cremation ground one person has died. And he saw that the Mother, Siva's consort, Mother, she has come and Siva has also come. So Mother is making the... opening the... you know Mother is Shakti, Power. So Mother is opening the mouth of the dead man or woman and Siva is giving, is repeating, "Om Namō Shivaya" the mantra. And the man like a bird, flew over, leaves the body to be burned and flew over, up, up, up, up, up to heaven.

Now, Sri Ramakrishna had... Sri Ramakrishna had a sort of superstitious mind. [laughs] That is why... we find he had many visions. Many visions, he had. So this vision he mentioned: that the Benares is really a place of emancipation. If you have faith you can go there to die.

So many people, many Hindus would love to spend their last days in Benares. They have that faith that somehow... I have done many wrong things but I will be easily pardoned by... I will repeat the name of Siva and see his many temples all over the big city. All over there are these temples of Siva. And I will spend my time [there], instead of spending the time idly, and talking and seeing cinema and movies. There was no cinema and movies in those days, but I'll go visit temples. And in this way, a little, my mukti, my salvation is ensured. The Siva will come and cut the bondage of my world and Siva's name I will chant and I will fly like a bird. Man, the Upanishads says is really like a bird. Man's soul is like a bird. Like a bird

it has entered into this body and like a free bird it can fly away from, from this body.

So with this hope many persons, see, want to live in Benares, and die in Benares, even many swamis, sannyasis. Idle sannyasis. They do not like [to] be on the place of work and all and do japa and meditation. They are expected to do that! You are not a helpless householder and they have some...they have worked hard in their life. That is why they have arthritis, they have chest pain, they have this and that. But you are sannyasis. You should attain salvation by your own effort, wherever you are. You meditate. You pray and all. You should depend on your salvation on your own effort. But there are some idle sannyasis who [say], "No. A simpler method is there. Go to Benares [laughs with audience] and wait there and when death comes, the Siva will come. Mother will come and my soul will be emancipated." In that hope, they live in Benares, you see.

So Siva is really a great god when you consider all these things together: his compassion, his selflessness, his acceptance of everyone whether you are of any race, any tribal [group]. Simple worship and simple meditation and his desire to be free from the maya: all these things make him really a great god. That is why in all parts of India there are these temples – big temples, small temples, and you hear people are repeating the name of Siva. "Namō Shivaya... Om namō Shivaya...Om namō Shivaya." They are sprinkling some water on the... their image. And [they are repeating] "Om namō Shivaya." And they are happy, that we have done our duty.

So in the Hindu mythology, in the Hindu stories there are these... very beautiful hymns also are there. One such hymn is called Siva Mahimna Stotram, the hymn to describe the glories of Siva. It is chanted everywhere. It is a long hymn, one of the gandharvas, he was cursed by... and he in order to get rid of the curse, he wrote this poem, beautiful in the literature and so this Mahimna Stotram is chanted everywhere.

So in the Hindus have a great devotion for this god, Siva. Of course there are some very dogmatic Vaishnavas, you know. They would say like the Christians that Christ is the only savior, but they forget the vedic, the principal vedic teaching, "Ekaṃ sad viprā bahudhā vadanty."<sup>5</sup> "God is one and the sages declare that God is one and people worship Him in many ways." That is one of the earliest teachings of the Vedas: the harmony and the unity of all religions. But some people forget. These Vaishnavas they have made... they say, "No. Krishna is the only savior." And they are very dogmatic. They won't even look at the image of Siva, see. But Siva does not mind [audience laughs]... Siva does not mind. Except [for] them, he is adored as a great god.

*We shall have a special puja, a special worship called Sivaratri, the night of Siva tomorrow. At 7:30 we shall do a simple puja and we shall decorate a picture of Siva. The picture we have in our retreat, we took a photograph of that picture. It is in the flower room. So he will be decorated in the middle and we shall have a simple puja from 7:30 to say 9:30 – [around] one hour and a half with a program of meditation and singing Siva songs and some prayers, and then finally some prasad. This will be tomorrow's function.*

[Further announcements follow.... and then this song to Lord Siva, given here in very rough format as I could not locate it on the Internet.]

Jaya Shiva Shankara Hara Tripurari.  
Pashi Pashupati Pinaka Dhari.  
Jaya Shiva Shankara Hara Tripurari.  
Pashi Pashupati Pinaka Dhari.

Shire Jata Kanthe Kalakuta  
Sadhaka Janagana Manasa Bihari  
Shire Jata Kanthe Kalakuta  
Sadhaka Janagana Manasa Bihari

Triloka Palaka Triloka Nashaka  
Triloka Palaka Triloka Nashaka

“Didn't work...” [voice cues him to next word]

Paratpara Prabhu Moksha Bidhayaka

Vkaruna Nayane Hera Bhakata Jane

Oh Lord Shiva with Your Graceful Eyes  
Look upon your Bhakta, Your Devotee

Vkaruna Nayane Hera Bhakata Jane  
Layechi Sharane Pade Tomari

I have taken refuge in your holy feet  
So within the grace of your compassion look on me  
And make me free from the bondage of ignorance.

Vkaruna Nayane Hera Bhakata Jane  
Layechi Sharane Pade Tomari

Jaya Shiva Shankara  
Jaya Shiva Shankara

Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya  
Jaya Shiva Shankara  
Mahadeva Shankara

Jaya Shiva Shankara Hara Tripurari.  
Pashi Pashupati Pinaka Dhari.

Jaya Shiva Shankara

Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti  
Peace, Peace....

1. Siva. (verified spelling of some terms here). Wikipedia articles. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva> accessed November 5, 2013. Also accessed Wikipedia article on Ravana. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ravana>
2. Siva Mahimna Stotram. Wikipedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva\\_mahimna\\_stotram](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva_mahimna_stotram) accessed November 12, 2013.
3. Samudra Manthan. Wikipedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samudra\\_manthan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samudra_manthan) accessed November 12, 2013.
4. Varanasi. Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Varanasi> accessed November 12, 2013.
5. Rg Veda in Sanskrit, Book 1, Hymn 164, verse 46. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rvsan/rv01164.htm> accessed November 20, 2013.