From the Agamas: How Grace Descends as the Guru
Category : April/May/June 2012
Published by dharmalingam on Mar. 18, 2012

From the Agamas

How Grace Descends as the Guru

Siva bestows blessings when maya fades and karmas are balanced

The following text is a translation of verses 36 to 48 of Chapter Four of Paushkara Agama, "On the Nature of the Bound Soul." The topic is the readiness of the soul for initiation by the guru. In Saiva Siddhanta, there are three theological components: pati, pasu and pasa, literally, master, cow and tether; esoterically, God, soul and world. Pasa or mala ("impurity") limits or binds the soul and is of three kinds: anava, sense of ego; karma, results of action; and maya, relative reality. As a soul matures, it frees itself first from maya, then karma and finally anava.

When all of the karmas of the soul, both good and bad, become equal, then Sivasakti destroys them. Thereafter, no karma is left to yield its fruit. At this stage, the soul enjoys the state of vijnanakevala (freedom from karma and maya). (Some deem this to be liberation.)

Through such cessation of all karmas, there occurs the maturation of anava mala, with which karma operates as a cooperating bond. At this time, Sivashakti, the awakening and enlightening power whose nature is to bestow grace upon all souls, descends on the soul whose mala has matured and is ripe for removal.

As soon as Shakti descends, the potency of mala, which keeps the soul in the lower planes of maya characterized by the repeated occurrence of birth and death, is removed. Then the person becomes indifferent to worldly existence. A sense of deep detachment dawns within him toward worldly pleasures and the transmigratory process that leads to the ocean of miseries. An intense desire to attain the lotus feet of Siva quickly unfolds, and he begins to insist, "When shall I see my Lord Siva? When shall I be relieved from the bondage? Which preceptor is there who could enable me see my Lord?"

Through His divine look, brimming with compassion, Lord Siva bestows His grace upon this mature soul that has become disenchanted with worldly existence. Considering the fitness of the soul, Siva bestows His grace instantly. Whichever soul it may be, whatever be its caste or other distinctions, Lord Siva purifies that soul through His immediate presence in the form of a guru.

The potency of anava mala, which veils the innate and essential nature of the soul, is set into a phase of decay by a specific form of grace that is actually Lord Siva's Shakti, called shaktipata. Siva causes a humility of spirit in the soul that has become fit enough to be favored, and a compassionate feeling in the mind of the preceptor. The resulting intimate communion between the blessed one and the blessing one is very rare and hard to come by.

The guru should discern that shaktipata has occurred within the disciple by watching for certain tendencies and behavioral attitudes the disciple will exhibit with uninterrupted zeal. Diksha (initiation) should only be performed for the disciple who has been purified by shaktipata. The siva-dharmas (characteristic proclivities of the mind deeply intent on the path of Siva) as instructed by the guru, as expounded in the Agamas, as explained in the other scriptures, such as the Vedas, and as expressed spontaneously by the disciple--all these are to be observed and analyzed well before giving diksha.

Bestowing diksha, which is basically my (Siva's) command, to a person who is bereft of devotional love, who is not purified with samaya diksha (initiation to the mantra Namasivaya) and vishesha diksha (initiation to perform daily Siva worship), who is cruel and hard-hearted toward living beings, who is bereft of disaffection for worldly existence, who has abandoned austere virtues recommended for his stage, is tantamount to an act of killing. To this effect, there is also the command of the Shakti of the Supreme Ishvara. Diksha severs the constricting bonds from the soul and allows the powers of all-knowing and all-doing, which had remained concealed and inoperative, to manifest in the soul.

Dr. S. P. Sabharathnam Sivacharyar, of the Adisaiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the Vedas, Agamas and Shilpa Shastras. This excerpt is from his recent translation of the Paushkara Agama.