

Four-fold Morning Prayers to Lord Sri Venkatesha

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INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the four-fold morning prayers to Lord Sri Venkateshwara refers to the four prayers and they are:

- (1) Sri Venkatesha Suprabhatam,
- (2) Sri Venkatesha Stotram,
- (3) Sri Venkatesha Prapatti, and
- (4) Sri Venkatesha Mangalashasanam.

It is also very well known that these four prayers are recited daily around 3 AM in the temple of Lord Venkateshwara on the Tirumala Hill above the town of Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, India, as part of the first worship (at the beginning of the day) referred as Vishwaroopa seva. The same four-fold morning prayers are recited daily in the morning as the first prayer in all the temples of Lord Sri Venkateshwara around the world. Also, these four-fold prayers are also recited daily as the first prayer in the homes of innumerable number of devotees around the world.

This four-fold morning prayers are generally referred as Sri Venkatesha Suprabhatam. The Sanskrit word "Suprabhatam" means in English language as "Good Morning". This should not be taken as simple greeting. It is important to note that the word Suprabhatam is composed of Su and Prabhatam. The prefix Su refers to "noble and spiritual" and Prabhatam refers to "morning". It is also important to note that the Lord who is Omniscient. Omnipotent and Omnipresent does not sleep like human beings and does not need to be awakened by devotees in the early morning. In every worship (Bhagavad-Aradhana) of the Lord at the end, He is requested by the devotees to have Yoga-Nidra, which symbolically refers to returning to transcendental state of Yoga, in which He is ever active in taking care of the universe. Yoga-Nidra is also termed as Ajadya-Nidra, which refers to Non-Inert or spiritual state of being. The opposite of this is Jadya-Nidra, which refers to inert state or our every night's sleep. So it is we, the humans, who need to wake up from the inert sleep every morning. In order to focus and sustain the spiritual frame of our mind throughout the day till sleeping at night, we need to seek the energy and grace of the Lord in the early morning hours.

The Sanskrit word "Venkatesha" etymologically refers to "Visheshena Papam Katati". This means that "the Lord, Who specially dispels the undesirable thoughts and burns the sins". Also according to the Hindu scriptures, the Lord Venkateshwara is the manifestation of the Supreme Being in Kali-Yuga (present times). It is well known that when thoughts are pure which then refers to pure mind due

to which, speech and actions of the devotees will also be good. In addition when the mind in the early morning engages in the immersion of the glories of the Lord through prayers, then it will be spiritually strengthened to deal with the rest of the day worldly activities. This four-fold prayers were composed by Sri Hastyadrinatha a great scholar and a devotee of the Lord Venkateshwara. He is also known as Sri Annan in Tamil. He is also referred by his title as Prativadi Bhayamkara, which means that he used to convince successfully those who argued against him in scholarly debates. He lived during 1361 A.D to 1454 A.D. in Kancheepuram. He belonged to Srivatsa gotra. The tradition of reciting these four-fold morning prayers for Lord Venkateshwara in the temple on Tirumala Hill has been there for long time. It is also said that these four-fold morning prayers can be seen as four types of spiritual food for nourishing the devotees' minds as referred in the statement by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita (verse 15.14). The verse is

*Aham Vaishvaanaro Bhootva Praaninaam Dehamaashritaha
Praanaapaana Samaayuktaha Pachaamyannam Chaturvidhaha*

This means, "I (Krishna) dwell inside all beings in the form Vaishvaanara fire. Through the vital forces as prana and apana, I (Krishna) digest four kinds of food namely Bhakshya (fried snacks), Bhojya (cooked rice), Lehya (sweet pudding) and Choshyam (like sugar cane)"

A brief discussion of the essential message of these four-fold morning prayers are presented here. The meaning of all 70 verses of the four-fold prayers can easily be found elsewhere.

SRI VENKATESHA SUPRABHATAM

The first two verses in the suprabhatam are taken from Valimiki Raamayanam (Bala-Kanda: 1.23.2) in which Sage Vishwaamitra addresses Sri Ramachandra for the purpose of awakening him and Sri Lakshmana. These two verses could have been an inspiration for the author Sri Hastyadrinatha. The next 27 verses are addressed to Lord Sri Venkateshwara. In verses 3 and 4, Goddess Lakshmi is addressed first as She is not only the consort of Lord Venkateshwara but also the Mother of all the beings of the three worlds. It is a tradition that a devotee worships Mother and seeks her blessings first and then with her blessings and grace, seeks the blessings of the Lord Vishnu (Venkatesha). In the next two verses 5 and 6, the author describes that not only the seven sages namely Atri, Bhaaradwaaja, Gautama, Jama-

dagani, Kaashyapa, Vasishta and Vishwaamitra but also the various gods (devas) namely Shiva, Brahma, Subrahmanya, *Indra* and others worship and praise Him.

In the verse 15, the author describes the Lord as One whose abode is always referred as Hills namely Seshaadri, Garudaadri, Venkataadri, Naarayanaadri, Vrishabaadri and Vrishaadri. Here the author refers to six hills and the seventh hills is Anjanaadri. Thus Lord is known as the Lord of Seven Hills. The first Hills namely Seshadri refers to the shape of a serpent that symbolizes Adishesha, who always serves the Lord Vishnu (Vekateshwara). Adishesha is also a representation of our inner Kundalini Shakti. In the verse 16, the eight presiding deities of the eight directions namely Shiva, *Indra*, Agni, Yama, Niruriti, Varuna, Marut and Kubera are ready to serve Him with folded hands. In verse 17, the author describes the various divine animal vehicles namely Garuda (divine vehicle), celestial Lion, Adishesha, Airavata (celestial elephant) and Uchhaishravas (celestial horse) are all eagerly waiting to take you in grand procession.

In verses 18 and 19, the author describes that all the nine stellar bodies (grahas) such as Sun, Moon, Mars, mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Rahu and Keu along with other main deities and their entourage are all eagerly waiting to receive your grace. It is important to note that the lives of human beings is influenced by these stellar bodies as described in astrology. However, as they are serving the Lord Venkatesha, the human beings should seek the grace of Lord Venkatesha. In verse 20, the author describes that the human beings as devotees on the earth are offering morning salutations to the Supreme Being Lord Venkatesha. The author in the verses 21, 22 and 23 addresses the Lord with beautiful attributes. The author makes a devotional appeal for the Lord to bless devotees through His glance.

In the verse 24, the author describes the various glories of the Lord Venkatesha as Supreme Being including His ten major incarnations namely Matsya, Koorma, Adi Varaha, Narasimha, Vaamana, Parashuraama, Ramachandra, Balaraama, Sri Krishna and Kalki (to appear). In verses 25, 26 and 27 the author is describing that not only the devotees of all types but also various gods and sages have come with all the sacred offerings to seek blessings from you in the early morning. In verse 28 the author addresses the Lord Venkatesha, as you are with

Goddess Lakshmi, you are an ocean of spotless virtues, you are the bridge to cross the mundane human existence, your great virtues are made known to us through the sacred Upanishads and you grant blissful experiences to your devotees. In the last verse 29, the author describes that the devotees who recite these prayers sincerely in the

morning hours, to them very thought of you grants the utmost intelligence and wisdom, which would lead them to realize the ultimate Bliss.

SRI VENKATESHA STOTRAM:

The word Stotram etymologically comes from “Stuti” which means “to praise”. In the words of Yogi-Seer Swami Sri Ranga Priya, “In reality the Lord does not gain anything by listening to any praise from the devotees. The Lord is ever contented and is always full of bliss. However, it is the devotees that gain much by praising the Lord. When devotees address the Lord as the One who is full of knowledge and bliss, One who is an ocean of tranquility and One who is immortal, then the thoughts and vibrations of knowledge and bliss, of tranquility and of immortality are awakened in the minds of devotees. When the Lord is addressed as the Merciful One, then His Mercy will flow out of Him and wash out the sinful thoughts of the devotees.”

This Venkatesha Stotram which has 11 verses describes Lord’s unlimited capabilities of protection and granting desires of His devotees. In verse 1 the Lord (whose consort is Goddess Lakshmi) is described as one having bluish complexion as it symbolic of all-pervasiveness likened to the blue sky. In verse 2 the Lord is described as the Supreme Being as the most benevolent one. In verse 3 the author expresses that the devotees are liable to not only commit but also repeat innumerable omissions and commissions and it is only the Lord due to His merciful nature should forgive them. In verse 4, the author describes Lord Venkatesha as the Self-manifestation of the Supreme Being referred in the Vedas. He is established on seven hills that represent the height at which undesirable thoughts are dispelled.

In verse 5 the author describes the magnetic personality of Lord Krishna. In verses 6, 7 and 8, the author describes Lord Sri Ramachandra, who exemplified the ideals for all devotees.

In verse 9 the author describes that he as a devotee will ever remember Lord Venkatesha and seeks His protection always. In verse 10 the author pleads that he comes from far to worship the Lord and seeks His blessings always. In verse 11 the author expresses that as an ignorant person he (devotee) commits mistakes thinking as though they are good actions. So a devotee should ask for forgiveness from the most merciful Lord residing on the Seshashaila mountain.

SRI VENKATESHA PRAPATTI

It is our common experience that our universe and cosmos is full of infinite wonders no matter where and when we

look. It is the purpose of our precious human life to seek and realize the Supreme Being, Who creates, sustains and dissolves these wonders all the time. The

Scriptures refer to Him as Lord Sriman Naarayana. The universe with all sentient and non-sentient things forms His body. A devotional process to achieve the realization of Lord Naarayana as the Supreme Being and experience of eternal Bliss is referred as Prapatti or Sharanaagati. This process is non-discriminatory and open to all. However this process has six requirements and they are given in a verse below.

*Aanukoolasya Samkalpaha Praatikoolasya varjanam
Rakshishyateeti Vishvaasaha Goptritvaranam tathaa
Aatmanikshepa Kaarpanye Shadvidhaa Sharanaagatihi*

The Aanukoolasya samkalpaha refers to doing whatever is agreeable and conforms to the will of the Lord Naarayana. Then Praatikoolasya varjanam refers to not doing anything that is disagreeable and which displeases the Lord Naarayana. Then Kaarpanya refers to helplessness that results from one's own realization that one is utterly incapable to protect oneself. Then Rakshishyateeti Vishvaasaha refers to the uncompromising faith at all times and all situations in the saving Grace of the Lord Naarayana. Then Goptritvaranam refers to the knowledge and action of sincere seeking of the protection of the Lord Naarayana. Then the Aatmanikshepa refers to the total surrender of the self at the holy feet of Lord Naarayana. Although six components are described here, it is seen that the Aatmanikshepa is the main purpose for which the other five components referred above integrally supports the main purpose of the surrender of the self. The five components are the natural conditions that have to manifest in the individual for the surrender of the self at the holy feet of the Lord Naarayana, which is referred as Prapatti or Sharanaagati.

This segment contains 16 verses, in which the verse 1 addresses to Goddess Lakshmi who is inseparable from the Lord and who blesses both spiritual and materialistic wealth. In verse 2 the author addresses the Lord citing His great qualities such as ocean of compassion, creator and protector of the world, omniscient, etc. In verses 3 through 6, the author describes the feet of Lord with all its characteristics. In verses 7 and 8 the author describes the holy feet of the Lord which are served by Goddess Lakshmi. In verses 9 through 11 The grandeur of the feet of the Lord which are worshipped by various Devatas and Arjuna. In verse 12 the author describes the greatness of the feet of the Lord, which danced on the snake Kaliya. In verse 13 and 14 the author describes the beauty of the feet of Lord, which are an ornament to the Venkatachala hills and

also surrender to the feet of Lord is essential for spiritual nourishment of devotees as mother's milk is essential for the child's nourishment. In verse 15 and 16 the author describes that the feet of the Lord has protected and has blessed the eternal bliss for many devotees earlier. Hence the author describes that he has been advised by his acharya that a devotee should surrender to feet of the Lord and then serve the Lord.

SRI VENKATESHA MANGALAASHANAM

Mangalaashaasanam means "best wishes for the well-being, auspiciousness and the prosperity of". This prayer is an emotional and devotional offering. The devotee is seeing the Lord as a mother (devotee) is seeing her child (Lord). As an example in Valmiki Ramayana (II.25.35), the mother kausalya pronounces the mangalaashaasana to her son Sri Ramachandra as "May you (Sri Rama) have safety and success. Oh! Rama, just as Mahavishnu, with his vast powers that He had in Vamana Avataara". There have been several examples in the devotional literature where a devotee in the state of emotional love and care, offers the best wishes and seeks Lord's blessings. In the words of scholar-professor T. Venkatacharya, "The purpose of Mangalaashaasanam is to express the glory of the Divinity, and to request internal illumination. The Mangalaashaasanam is not a prayer for protection of the deity, but an expression of devotional offering. The aim is to get the blessings of the Lord, which will lead to the devotee's benefit".

The Mangalaashaasanam has 14 verses. Each verse has two lines. In verses 1 and 2, the author describes the Lord as the inexhaustible treasure trove of best virtues and He is always with His consort Goddess Lakshmi to execute His wishes. The Lord is observing the all the worlds (lokas). In verse 3 the author is describes that the Lord is standing on the Venkatadri hills to shower His blessings to all the devotees. In verse 4 the author describes the ever attractive and magnetic beauty of the Lord which has a benevolent influence on the minds of the devotees. In this verse 5 the attributes of Lord Venkatesha as the Supreme Being are described as eternal, without any shortcomings, real, blissful, source of everything and indwelling entity in everything. In verse 6 the Lord is described as omniscient, omnipotent, totally independent of everything, accessible to every devotee and is fully benevolent to the entire creation.

In verse 7 the Lord is the Supreme Reality, as Supreme Being has no desires unfulfilled. In verse 8 the author describes that as devotees focuses their mind on the beautiful form of the Lord Venkatesha they experience the blissful eternal joy which is like nectar not producing satiety at all. The verse 9 describes that the Lord Venkatesha is show-

ing the destination for his devotees by indicating his right hand towards his feet. In verse 10 the author beautifully describes the nature of His divine compassion flowing like a river with ambrosia. The cooling waves coming out of His divine compassion are symbolized by the sidelong glances of the Lord. In verse 11 the author describes that the garlands, ornaments, weapons derive their beauty because the Lord Venkatesha wears them. These beautiful weapons on the Lord Venkatesha, not only symbolizes eternal principles but also provide protection for the devotees.

In verse 12 the author points to the significance of the Tirumala hills where the Lord Venkatesha manifested with his Consort Lakshmi (Ramaa) on the banks of the pond Pushkarini to receive the worship offerings and to bless His devotees. He has preferred the hills to His abode Vainkuntha. In verse 13 the author offers prayers through mangalaashaasanam to the Lord Srinivasa (Venkatesha) who not only is present in all abodes (lokas) but also dwelling eternally in the heart of his acharya Sundara Jaamaatri-muni (Manavaala Mahamuni). In concluding verse 14 the author gratefully records the tradition received by him from previous acharyas through his acharya Manavaala Mahamuni. The author extols that the Lord Venkatesha is worshipped by not only his acharyas but extensively worshipped by many great acharyas.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Thus the four-fold morning prayers beautifully describe the Supreme Being as Lord Venkatesha in all aspects. The Lord Venkatesha is also lovingly addressed as Lord Srinivasa. The seven hills on which Lord Venkatesha has manifested refers to the seven lokas namely Bhu, Bhuvaha, Suvaha, Mahaha, Janaha, Tapaha, Satyam. The seven hills also symbolize the great divine serpent Adishesha eternally serving the Lord. The Lord Venkatesha is worshipped by innumerable devotees as He is referred as Kali-Yuga Varada meaning as the Lord who grants all desires of his devotees in this Kali-Yuga (our present age that started about 5000 years ago).

It is important to remember that the four hands of the Lord Venkatesha signify the four-fold objectives of our life. The four-fold objective are Dharma (knowledge or wisdom), Artha (rightly earned wealth), Kama (right kind of desires for enjoyment) and Moksha (spiritual freedom). Human life derives total fulfillment only when all these four objectives are pursued and achieved. This is only possible with the blessings of the Lord Venkatesha complimenting our human humble efforts.

Also we see the beautiful form of Lord Venkatesha holding the Sudarshana Chakra and Panchajanya Shankha in

His two hands directed upwards. The Chakra and Shankha signify the principles of mind and intelligence and the upward directions indicate that both our mind and intelligence are to be directed towards higher (spiritual) goals. The lower right hand of Lord Venkatesha is directed to His feet and His lower left hand is touching His left knee. This signifies that we should surrender to the feet of the Lord who will bless us and enable us to cross the ocean of life (samsaara) without being submerged in the ocean of life.

Thus when we recite these four-fold prayers (or listen) in the early morning hours we need to focus our mind on the beautiful form of Lord Venkatesha. When we focus our mind on the Lord Venkatesha with contemplation of the inner meanings described above then our mind is being drawn into the spiritual depths. The early morning hours is the best time for dwelling on the great qualities of the Lord because not only the mind is in fresh state but also that gives strength and a reference to our mind in dealing day's activities.

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