SADHANA MANDIRA
तत्त्वमेव त्वमेव तत्

SHIVA - THE AUSPICIOUS

The place He chooses to roam about is the cremation ground, the companions He uses to smear are ghosts and goblins the (cosmetic?) powder He uses to smear His body with the ashes of the cremation ground; the garland He wears is one of human skills! All this indeed seems to be inauspicious. Yet the mere thought of Him makes devotees receives the most auspicious inner upliftment. Lord Siva is auspicious not 'because' of, but 'inspite of' all factors around Him.

The very word Siva means auspicious. He is easily pleased (*Ashusosh*) by devotees' prayers. Combining supreme serenity and unfathomable power in Himself, He is adored by all as the very grand form of the Infinite Almighty. A traditional verse speaks of worshipping Siva as one of the four most worthy acts in this otherwise pithless world.

असारे खलु संसारे सारमेतत् चतुष्टयम् ।

काश्यां वासः सतां सङ्गः गङ्गाम्बुनि शम्भु-पूजनम् ॥

asāre khalu saṁsāre sārametat catuṣṭayam ।

kāśyāṁ vāsaḥ satāṁ saṅgaḥ gaṅgāmbuni śambhu-pūjanam ॥

Residing in Kasi, the company of saints, the use of Ganga water and the worship of Shambhu makes one's life moat worthy. “Worship Siva.....In order to perform the worship of God, you will be preoccupied for a long time with such religious duties of plucking flowers, making sandal paste, polishing the utensils of worship and arranging the offerings. As you perform these duties, your mind will naturally be directed to God. You will get rid of meanness, jealousy and so forth.” Thus advised Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa to a group of lady devotees (gospel I-431) one must constantly chant the name of the Lord Shiva, Shankara, Jagadeeshwara and so on. The name purifies our minds. All sufferings, if one analyzes deeply, is the making of our own mind. Either a wrong attitude now or a wrong perspective in the past is the cause of unrest and agitation. Act now, make the mind healthy wise and strong. Take refuge in Shiva Parameshwara!

In our worldly lives, we are attached to the 'names and forms' of the world. These attachments take the form of the mental (and even physical) dependence on people and things of the world. We have then truly lost freedom or independence. Our desires persecute us, our aversions corner us. In life, we come alone not knowing any one at birth, we go alone at death. But how many of us can walk alone between? It is not to propose here that everybody makes an island for himself or herself and keep everyone else away; but it is a question of inner independence and an ability to rise above one's emotional attachments. We can conquer our attachment to the names and forms of the world by developing attachments (devotion) to the names and forms of God. Shri Ramana Maharshi touches upon this strategy in the Ramana Gita (16:7). Ultimately like no thorn is retained after removing one in the foot with the help of a second, the seeker establishes himself in Brahman, the one with no names and form whatsoever!

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Where there is a will, there is a way. We can develop love of God in us by effort. We must practice spiritual discipline in solitude. In time, our relation with God grows deeper and deeper. God soon becomes the top priority in our minds. A longing for God starts consuming the entire personality. All our thoughts are then of our beloved, the Lord. Our hearts burns with sorrow at not enjoying union with HIM see how Appaya Dixit a great devotee of Shiva sings:

"Cold Ganga, the cooling moon on the head; cold bodied snakes on the hands and feet; Daughter of the (cold) Himalayas on the left; cooling sandal paste all over the body! How would you bear all this cold O Lord, If you were not residing in my heart. Heated up by the burning desire for you?"

Among the innumerable divine sports of Lord Shiva a well known one is of Him coming on earth as a hunter (Kirata). He confronts Arjuna in this manifestation. Now, referring to this form assumed by Lord Shiva, Shri Shankaracharya in his Shivananda Lahari (43) says:

मा गच्छ त्वमितस्ततो गिरिश भो मय्येव वासं कुरु
स्वामिन्नादिकिरात मामकमनः कान्तार-सीमान्तरे ।
वर्तन्ते बहुशो मृगा मदजुषो मात्सर्य-मोहादयः
तान् हत्वा मृगया-विनोद रुचितालाभं च सम्प्राप्यस्यसि ॥

mā gaccha tvamitastato giriśa bho mayyeva vāsaṁ kuru
svāminnādikirāta māmakamanaḥ kāntāra-sīmāntare ।
vartante bahuśo mṛgā madajuṣo mātsarya-mohādayaḥ
tān hatvā mṛgayā-vinoda rucitālābhaṁ ca samprāpyasyasi ।।

"O hunter, do not go hither and thither come to the wild forest of my mind!
Here are beasts like jealously and delusion, have the pleasure of hunting them down!"

We must pray as above. Prayer can work wonders. It is simple and very efficacious! May Shiva the auspicious makes our lives sublime with unswerving devotion to His Lotus Feet!

JAYA GURUDEVA ! JAYA JAGADEESHVARA !!

- Swami Chidananda