

SHREE LALITASAHASRANAMA HOME STUDY COURSE LEVEL1

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LESSON -1

The great laud, Sri Lalitasahasranama is part of a ritualistic creation. The stotra part is preceded by an introductory conversation which in turn is followed by a purification ritual. The stotra is followed by phalashruti where the intimate values of doing this ritual is enumerated. It is in this connection that this stotra has become associated with the Sri Vidya system of worshipping Sri Tripurasundari. The Sri Vidya worship that includes worship of Lalita is one of the ten Mahavidyas associated with the worship of the Mother. The other Vidyas are associated with Kali, Tara, Vagalamukhi, Bhuvaneshvari, Chinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bhairavi, Kamala and Matangi. All of these are highly sophisticated forms of worship. The purpose of this course is to provide sadhakas the meaning and import of the stotra. To imbibe its purport in a practical way one need not get into any ritualistic codes. These lessons will therefore cover the most important part which is the sahasranama itself.

Most books that quote this sahasranama will state that this is in the Brahmanda purana. This is a mistake in translation. The sahasranama does not exist in the Brahmanda purana. The inspiration for this however is indeed based on the purana. This means that the stotra has been framed on the detailed story of Sri Lalita found in the purana. To the basic elements of the story the creator of the sahasranama has added many features that cover several darshanas, yogas and tantras that were in vogue during that period. There is also an intimate connection to Sri Kamakshi of Kanchipuram as revealed in the purana.

The story of Sri Lalita is in a conversation between Hayagriva, an avatara of Vishnu and the rishi Agastya. After the episode of mohini avatara we come upon the story of Kamadahana, the destruction of Kamadeva by the look from the third eye of Siva. A gana of Siva by name Chitrakarma moulds the ashes to form a beautiful boy. This child is enlivened by a single glance of Siva. Chitrakarma advises this child to perform the shatarudriya (a special prayer from the vajaseneya samhita) a hundred times as tapas. At the end of this penance Siva grants him the boon he asks. He asks for strength that is drawn from the devas, the inefficacy of the weapons of the devas when aimed at him and finally a reign of 1600 years to use this power without defeat. Brahma who watches this request exclaims 'Bhanda ! Bhanda ! ' Thus he gets the name Bhanda or the Remarkable One.

As is typical of asuric behaviour Bhanda begins to accumulate riches and wield his strength. Sukracharya the preceptor of the asuras guides him in creating the capital with the aid of architect Maya. This then is Sonitapura or Sunyapura. Dressed in the best of clothes and ornaments, surrounded by many strong daityas, protected by many unique celestial things Bhanda rules. In his kingdom yagnas are performed and vedas are read daily. Different philosophies are studied. Siva is worshipped according to tradition. The devas start partaking of the havis from the yagnas offered by the daityas. Slowly the daivic strength decreases. 1600 years passes.

Indra resorts to Vishnu's help to deal with Bhanda. From Vishnu there emanates a mohini form that entices Bhanda to a grove of champaka tress. Here he remains infatuated by her beauty. Seizing this opportunity Indra and other devas begin rituals and penances to invoke the Feminine Cosmic Energy or Sakti. Ultimately Bhandasura is brought to his senses by Sukracharya. In trying to defeat this mohini form Bhanda finds that no interaction is possible as a border of flames keeps separating them. When Bhanda retreats to his capital to regroup, Indra and the devas commence on a mahayaga where mahaamamsa (human flesh) is offered as bali. Then arises from the yaga a glowing chakra. In the center is the devi Lalita. Indra requests her to defeat Bhandasura and she agrees. Thereupon the devas with the help of architect Visvakarma build a capital for her. This city that contains all mantras, sthuthis, many mother goddesses, their ganas, siddhis, yoginis and gods, is named Sripura or Srinagara.

Before they install Lalita as queen, Brahma brings to her the selected groom Siva in the form of the young, handsome well decorated Kamesvara. Lalita requests from Brahma the assurance that she would be given a status equal to that of her husband and that she be allowed full freedom to go where she pleased and do what she wishes with no hindrance. Under these conditions alone she agrees to marriage. This is called the YUKTa form of marriage. The two ascend in matrimony as Kamesvari and Kamesvara. The devas shower all their glory and possessions as gifts to the couple.

After many years of reigning in Srinagara surrounded by the devoted celestial attendants the devi is reminded by Narada of her promise to kill Bhandasura. Leaving her kingdom in the control of incarnations of the Trimurtis, she leaves for battle. Her large army consisting of many divisions are manned by many important female shaktis. Sampatkari, Dandanatha, Mantrini, Asvarudha, several nitya devis and her daughter Bala are examples of just a few of them. Many of them directed formations or chakras of their own. Bhandasura hearing the news of this audacious woman fighter with the feminine army gathers his great army with its powerful daityas that include his brothers, sons and many valiant generals such as Visukra, Visanga, Durmada, Kurunda Balahaka and Vajradanta.

The battle lasts for many days. Often there are breaks for regrouping, recuperating and strategising. Missiles, weapons, chants, charms of varying kinds are employed. Finally once his army and his generals are defeated by the devi's assistants, Bhandasura himself is killed by Lalita devi in a long drawn out battle. The ashes of Kamadeva is then purified and brought back to life as a gesture of sympathy towards the bereaving Rati by Lalita herself. Thus Kamadeva succeeds in getting Siva and Uma together in order to facilitate the birth of Skanda, who having defeated Tarakasura retires to Srinagara.

The Prelude to the Lalitasahasranama

The sahasranama too like the story in the Brahmanda purana, is a conversation between Hayagriva and Agastya. It is said that once while Lalita was holding sabha where crores of devatas worshipped her, the goddesses that attended on her, began to praise her with hymns. One among them is this sahasranama. This hymn that contains the thousand names of Sri Lalita is the subject of our study.

DHYANA SHLOKA shloka for contemplation

There are several popular shlokas for meditating on Lalita. We have chosen the one that goes closest to the description of the devi that occurs in the beginning. Most art prints of the devi show her in this manner.

**arunaa-karunaa-tharangithaaksheem, dhrittha paashaamkusapushpabaanachaapaam
animaadibhiraavrithaam mayukhairaham ithyeva vibhaavaye maheysheem
The Sri Lalita Sahasranama**

Who glows like dawn, whose eyes flutter with compassion, who holds the noose, the goad, flower-arrows and bow, who is surrounded by the rays (of siddhis such) as anima, on her who appears such, the great queen, I meditate upon.

srimaataa:

One who is the auspicious mother

We start with the mantra for auspiciousness or aisvarya that is sri. The first representative of this auspiciousness for any jiva is the mother. One look at her indicates to the newborn that this is the source of nourishment and protection. The first sound that emanates when the lips are parted is indeed the sound Ma. In Sanskritam the root Ma is 'one who measures'. Everything is measured or figured by her.

srimahaaraajni :

One who is the great queen.

She is the almighty queen and we are her subjects. She rules and we obey. Hers is this kingdom we live in.

srimat simhasanesvari

One who is seated on the lion throne of auspiciousness.

The lion represents royalty. It also reminds us of its capacity to devour. Isvari indicates cosmic rulership. If the devi devours, she destroys. If she rules she protects. If she creates, then surely she produces.

cidagni kunda sambhuta:

One who is produced as a result of a fiery process

In the story she was produced in a mahaayaga. Our mind is a kunda where the chit-stuff is produced. All our thoughts are various modifications of the basic substance called chit. This then is the process from where we too can bring her into focus.

devakarya samudyata: 1.

One who is born to fulfill the daivic purpose

Her birth has a solo purpose. It is for the workings of the devas. In the story it is Indra and other devas who bring her into being so they may gain strength and continue their divine work. The root word deva means the one that reveals or lights. Man has a need for divine illumination. To bring about the fulfillment of this illumination is the reason for her being.

Recognise the Divine mother. Resort to her. Recognise her rule, her pervasiveness over the universe. Remember her origin in the jiva is from us, from the kunda of our mind where the chitta stuff is burning. Align yourself with the workings of the devas. Engage in daivika karyas for that is where she plays.