

Shikshapatri Shlok 84

“My devotees shall hold in great reverence all the five deities namely Vishnu, Shiva, Ganapati, Parvati and Surya (Sun)”.

Maharaj has instructed us to worship the 5 deities, whether or not they are our Ishtadev, they hold great importance within not only the Swaminarayan Sampraday but also in the Hinduism teachings in general.

So why these deities in particular?

Vishnu – Woshipped as He is the incarnation of the supreme being

Shiva – is worshipped as He is considered as one with Vishnu Bhagwan. Shiva is known as Vaishnavaraja (King amongst Vaishnavas), which is a key reasoning behind why Maharaj has instructed us to worship and respect Him since we ourselves are part of the Vaishnav varna (caste).

Ganapati – Considered as an avatar of Shree Krishna Bhagwan and is the first of all Devs to be worshipped on any occasion e.g. weddings, new house, new building etc. Therefore, is worthy of high honour and worship.

Parvati – Is considered as the companion or half-body of Shankar Bhagwan, and is therefore honoured and worshipped as the eternal power. Just as a wife of a householder has half a share in her husbands wealth, Parvati has half the power of Shiva. It is this power that helps one become closer to Bhagwan, and hence is of great honour in Hinduism.

Surya (Sun) –

The same way the Gopis, Vasudev, and Ruksmi looked upon Shree Krishna Bhagwan in different ways (as a lover, a son, a husband), however, they all attained His divine abode, in the same way each one of these five Devs have their own power and by worshipping them, it will lead us closer to our Ishtadev, Swaminarayan Bhagwan.

What is an Ishtadev?

Ishtadev worship is the greatness of Hinduism, which allows a person to dedicate himself/herself to any one deity, but in the end attain the same ultimate goal. In this way, only one Ishtadev should be ultimately worshipped but all other Devs are worthy of devotion, respect, praise and worship. Under no circumstances should any Deity be slandered, as it would also mean you are indirectly slandering your own Ishtadev.

Therefore, Lord Swaminarayan has commanded His followers to act in such manner. In doing so, this also includes keeping the various vrats of other deities such as Shiva (Shivratri) etc.

We have also got to consider the fact that Maharaj always taught by example.

Can anyone think of any examples?

One key example is when Nilkanth Varni was on Van Vichran where he was walking through a dense forest. He did not have any water or food for four days but on the fifth day saw a well. He bathed there and got some nuts from the forest, cooked them under a fire and after offering it to Thakorji, then ate it. The next day He came across another well, took water from it and bathed and performed pooja of the Shaligram (black fossil stone representing Lord Vishnu), he carried with him. When Nilkanth offered water to Shaligram, all the water kept disappearing as though the Shaligram was very thirsty.

Nilkanth started to search for food so that he could offer it to the Shaligram but there was nothing around. He could not even find any fruit or berries around that place. In the meantime, Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati had come to see Him in disguise.

Nilkanth thought that if Shaligram Narayan is this thirsty, then He would be hungry as well. He was then quite worried about this. Seeing this, Mahadevji told Parvatiji to offer them some Sathvo and so Parvatiji did. When Nilkanth asked who they were, they requested Him to eat His food first and then they shall reveal their true identity. God offered the food to Shaligram and then ate it Himself. Mahadevji then spoke to Him "O Lord! I am Sadashiva Myself and this is Sati." Lord Shiva said that he would come to offer his services to Nilkanth whenever it was required, and on saying this, they disappeared. Having God and Goddess giving darshan personally to Him, Nilkanth was quiet pleased and started singing hymns, verses and kirtans in praise of Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati.

Another example which we can also relate to this concept of worshipping the deities to ultimately reach our Ishadev is when Swasini Bhabhi fed ladoos to Krishna Bhagwan at their house. At the same time, Nilkanth varni was on His Van Vichran and starving as there was a lack of food available. However, when Swasini Bhabhi fed the thaal to Krishna Bhagwan in at her house, the thaal directly appeared to Nilkanth Varni.

In the same way, by worshipping, respecting and serving these 5 Devs that Maharaj has instructed us to do, means ultimately we are also serving Him with respect, worship and devotion. Although indirectly, it has the same benefit of serving Maharaj directly, as illustrated by the short leela.