

Satsang with Sri Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Mṛtyuñjaya Mantra

Question

Is the Mṛtyuñjaya *mantra* chanted so that I die peacefully or chanted so that I may live?

Answer

The Mṛtyuñjaya *mantra* is a Vedic *mantra* meant for healing. It is a prayer to Lord Śiva. *Mṛtyuñjaya* means victory over death. Lord Śiva is said to be Mṛtyuñjaya, the conqueror of death, and therefore, the Mṛtyuñjaya *mantra* is meant for victory over death. This prayer is often chanted to restore the health of someone who is suffering from physical pain or illness. You can also chant this *mantra* for a dying person to be granted a peaceful death. It is the *bhāvana* that you entertain in your mind for his or her release from this life. The words of the prayer are:

ओं त्र्यंबकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् ।

उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनान्मृत्योर्मुक्षीय माऽमृतात् ॥

om tryambakam yajāmahe sugandhim puṣṭivardhanam,
urvārukamiva bandhanānmṛtyormukṣīya mā'amṛtāt.

We worship the fragrant, three-eyed Lord Śiva who nourishes us. May He liberate us from the bondage of death like the *urvaruka* fruit (which separates effortlessly from the vine). May He not let us turn away from immortality!

Tryambakam, the three-eyed Lord, *yajāmahe*, we worship. *Sugandhim*, the fragrant one, *puṣṭivardhanam*, one who provides nourishment. We worship the three-eyed Lord Śiva, who is fragrant and who nourishes us.

Amba means eye and *trayambakam* is the Lord with three eyes. *Trayambakam* is thus another name of Lord Śiva. The third eye of Lord Śiva represents knowledge. It is said that when Lord Śiva opened his third eye, fire emerged from it and burned ignorance, and the passion that is born of ignorance. It is held that with his third eye, he sees what others do not see. What we understand and appreciate is only the perceptible world of names and tangible

forms. However, we do not recognize the presence of the one Self that informs everything. Just as the same gold manifests as all ornaments, this Self is the substratum or basis of every name and form that exists. To see that Self, we require the eye of knowledge in our own mind. It is this knowledge that the third eye of Śiva represents.

The significance of the third eye of knowledge is that it destroys all the sorrow, pain or unhappiness that is born of ignorance. As we study in Vedanta, all forms of unhappiness result from an ignorance of the true nature of the Self, or an ignorance of the true nature of Reality. They could also be the result of having a wrong perception of the Self. Only knowledge can remove this wrong perception and give us the right perception. Lord Śiva embodies this knowledge.

Two adjectives are used to describe Lord Śiva, *sugandhim* and *puṣṭivardhanam*. *Sugandhim* means one who is fragrant. *Puṣṭivardhanam* means one who gives nourishment. Lord Śiva is said to be fragrant with goodness and virtues. He embodies all the virtues and goodness. *Puṣṭivardhanam* is the one who always showers his grace upon the devotees and provides nourishment at both the physical level and the spiritual level.

The first line, *om tryambakam yajāmahe sugandhim puṣṭivardhanam*, says that we worship this Lord Śiva, who destroys ignorance and bestows grace. The second line is a prayer: *urvārukamiva bandhanānmṛtyormukṣīya mā'mṛtāt*, O Lord release us from the bondage of death.

The word death can be understood in different ways. One way is see it as being physical death. Death can also be understood as being nothing but ignorance. We can chant this prayer to the Lord for release from our suffering at the level of the body, our suffering at the level of the mind, or the suffering that arises from ignorance. Please release us from the bondage of death, of suffering, and of ignorance, and give us liberation or release.

How do we want to be released? There is a very beautiful example here of the *urvaruka*, a sweet cucumber-like fruit. This fruit grows on a creeper and when it is ripe, separates from the creeper effortlessly. We pray that we may be released from pain, suffering, and ignorance as effortlessly as the ripe *urvaruka* fruit separates from the creeper. The reference is also to the ripe *urvaruka*, which is fragrant, tender, and sweet, unlike the unripe fruit, which is hard and sometimes bitter or sour. Therefore, we also pray to the Lord to make our mind

like the ripe and delicious *urvaruka* fruit; ready for the knowledge that will release us from the bondage of death. Freedom from the bondage of death is understood as immortality, which is our nature. The prayer asks the Lord to separate us from death, but not immortality. May we abide in immortality that is our nature!

This is a prayer, which heals our mind from sorrow. It also heals the body from its pain and suffering. Students of Vedanta can chant it to be healed from the bondage of ignorance, so that we gain the knowledge to abide in our own true nature. This *mantra* is also chanted for the welfare of others. When the prayer is chanted with the right intonation, it gives peace and becomes more effective¹.

¹ Transcribed and edited by Malini, Subbalakshmi Chandrasekaran, KK Davey, Chaya Raj, and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.