

॥ Shri Hari ॥

“Murthi Puja” On Idol Worship in Gita



Tvameva Maata Cha Pita Tvameva
Tvameva Bandhusa Sakhaa Tvameva
Tvameva Vidyaa Dravinam Tvameva
Tvameva Sarvam Mama Deva Deva

Swami Ramsukhdas

On "Murthi Puja" Idol Worship in Gita

Ye sanatana dharmasthaah sraddhaa prema samanvitha |
Murthi pujan na kurvanti murtau tu prabhu pujanam ||

According to our eternal Vedic principles devotees do not worship idols, rather they worship only God. It means God (Supreme Consciousness) pervades everywhere, however, to be particularly aware of Him, a "murti" (no exact translation, idol is being used) is created for worshiping Him. By doing so, meditation and thinking about God can take place very easily and continuously.

If it is the "murti" that is being worshiped, then a devotee should have the sentiments within of it being a "murti", that it is stone from a particular mountain, it was created by some person, and brought here by another! In other words, O' Lord of stones, you please lead me to my salvation. However, no one says such a thing at all. Then how is it considered "murti" idol worship? Therefore devotees do not do idol worship, however they worship God in the "murti". This sort of worship is the beginning of devotion. This worship continues even when a devotee attains perfection.

Regarding "murti puja" the Lord declares in the Gita, "Devotees prostrating before Me worship Me with devotion. (9/14); "Whoever offers Me with devotion, a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, I accept that pious offering of the pure in heart" (9/26);

"Worship of God (in his five forms – Visnu, Siva, Durga, Ganesa and Sun-God, of the twice born, of teachers (including parents and elders) and of the wise liberated souls – this is called austerity of the body (17/14). If there is no "murti", how will a devotee prostrate and to whom will he offer leaves, flowers, fruits and water etc? It proves that there is description of worship of "murti" in the Gita.

In the same manner if a devotee worships a cow, a basil-plant, a peepala-tree, the twice born, a liberated soul, the Govardhana mountain, the Ganga and the Yamuna etc., their worship is also worship of God. This sort of worship easily leads a devotee to the thought that God pervades everywhere. In other words, to experience "God is everywhere," worship of cow are an immense aid. This is because the worshiper, has begun to believe that "God is everywhere". On the other hand he who does not worship anything, and only makes up talks, he cannot realize that "God is everywhere". It means that worship of God through the medium of a "murti" is a beneficial, virtuous spiritual discipline.

Besides worship of God, to worship body made of bones and flesh, in other words, to adorn our bodies with make-up, beautiful ornaments and clothing and building luxurious homes and decorating it with beautiful objects, is nothing but worship of idols which will lead to ruin.

**** Something Worth Knowing ****

Generally all the believers hold the opinion that God pervades everywhere; But those who have started worshipping Him through the medium of an "murti" or the Veda, the Sun, the pipal, the tulsi plant or cow etc. are really speaking, believers in God's all

pervasiveness. Because, those who accept the presence of God in an "murti", the Veda, the Sun, etc, will on their own, begin to believe in the presence of God everywhere, and in all beings. Those who accept the presence of God only in a "murti" etc., they have been called "Prakrta" (Beginners) (Srimadbhaag 11/2/47) because they have begun the practice of worshipping God in one place, in other words, they have turned towards (developed inclination for) God. But those who merely say that God pervades everywhere but don't hold any object in reverence, have no divine sentiments of worship and devotion, and they are not really called devotees because they simply articulate "God is Everywhere" but do not really believe it; that is, they have not really turned towards God.

Worship of God through the medium of a "murti" is a matter of faith rather than of reasoning. The glory of God is revealed to those who have faith in Him. The worship and adoration done by these devotees is accepted and partaken by God. Just like God ate the "Kitchadi" (cooked rice and lentil) prepared by Karma bai; God ate the tikkad (flat bread cake) from devotee Dhanna; God drank the milk prepared by Meera bai etc. It means God manifest Himself in an idol, in front of a devotee who worships Him with faith and devotion.

Question: How do we know whether God accepts and partakes in the food offered to Him by devotees?

Answer: In God's kingdom things do not hold importance, rather it is the sentiments "bhaav" that are important. It is due to sentiments only that God partakes in the food and the actions offered to Him. When a devotee has the sentiments of feeding God from the core of his heart, then God begins to feel hungry. Because of the sentiments of the devotee, the food that is partaken by God, that thing does not remain perishable, rather it becomes divine. Even if there is some defect in the sentiment of

devotion, He is satisfied merely by the offer of food to Him. For God to be satisfied, things and actions are not important, rather only the sentiments are important. The saints also declare that God relishes the simplest dishes offered with devotion but He rejects the most delicious dishes offered without devotion.

Once I came across a devotee who served a saint with great reverence. He said that he knew that the saint was thirsty. So when he took water for the saint, the saint drank it. Similarly a chaste wife comes to know when her husband is hungry and thirsty and what dish he will relish in lunch or dinner etc. When that dish is offered to the husband, he declares that today he wanted to have that very same dish. Similarly a devotee comes to know when God is hungry and thirsty and foods God wants to relish.

A few anecdotes may illustrate the point –

There was a priest in a temple. His favorite deity was Bal Gopal (Krishna, as a boy). He used to make small "laddoos" (a sweet dish, a sweetmeat in the form of a ball) and place it near his head at night while sleeping because children get hungry at night. One day he forgot to put the "laddoos" so at night Bal Gopal told him in his dream, that I am feeling hungry. There is a similar incident. There was an ascetic. Every year after Diwali, he offered cashews, almonds, pistachios, walnuts etc. to the Lord. One year the nuts became very expensive, so he began to offer peanuts to the Lord. One day the Lord said to him in a dream - What ! Are you going to feed me only peanuts? Thereafter he once again began to offer cashews, almonds etc. Before he had some doubts as to whether God was partaking in the offerings or not? But once God told him in his dreams, then all his doubts vanished. This means that when food is offered to God, He becomes hungry and he accepts and partakes in it.

There was a sage who had a great appetite. One day he fell very sick. Someone advised him to frequently drink the cow's milk, but to only drink that milk that remains after the calf has been fed. He followed the advice of first letting the calf be well-fed and thereafter extracting and drinking the remaining cow's milk was quite filling. After a few days he recovered and became healthy. The act of justice has so much power that it can cure even sickness and satisfy the sage, then what to speak of an object that is offered with devotion to God !

Everyone must have realized the fact that when a person offers you food with love and affection, then that food has extraordinary flavor, it is delicious and that food helps in maintaining divine traits in you. Even animals are no exception. They too are influenced by the sentiments. When a cow dies leaving its calf behind, the calf is fed on milk of another cow. The calf remains alive with that milk, but he does not become well-nourished. The same calf if he had drank the mother's milk, then the mother would lick his body with love, and feed him, by which even with a little bit of milk, the calf would have become well nourished and healthy. When even human beings and animals are affected by the sentiment of affection, then what to speak of God Who knows even the hearts, minds and sentiments of devotees? It was because of this devotion of Vidura's wife that Lord Krishna ate the banana peel offered with great devotion. Again it was out of affection of the gopis (that Lord Krishna ate curd and butter by snatching it from their hands. The Lord says to Brahma -

"Naivedhyam purato nyastam chakshushaa grhyate mayaa |

Rasam cha daasjihvaayaamshraami kamalobhdava ||

"O lord of the Lotus! I accept and partake in the food

preparations put before Me through My eyes but I relish these foods through the tongue of My devotee."

I have also heard the saints saying that sometimes God sees the food offered to Him with devotion, sometimes He touches it and sometimes He also eats a part of it.

As the father of a child gets pleased if the child hands over something to him, then he is very pleased, the father lifts his hands and says to the child, and tells the child to grow big and tall. Was that thing unattainable by the father? Did the father get anything of great importance when the child gave that thing to him? No! The father is pleased, simply due to the sentiments of giving expressed by the child. Similarly, God is not lacking in anything. Nor does God desire anything. Then too God is pleased when a devotee expresses the sentiment of giving (making an offering). But those people who decorate the temples and the idols only for cheating people, who offer delicious dishes to Him to deceive, then God does not accept their offerings. Such people, don't actually worship God, rather they are worshipping money, individuals and selfishness.

Those who call the devotees who make offerings to God, who worship and revere God as hypocrites, and themselves being filled with pride, consider that they are better, and not hypocrites, then such individuals cannot attain salvation. Those who are engaged in performing virtuous deeds in whatever way they can, they are virtuous as such, while those who renounce virtuous deeds out of pride will reap adverse fruit for their evil deeds.

Question - The wicked break "murti" of God, then why does God not reveal His powers, His miracles ?

Answer - He who does not have good sentiments towards God's idols, he who is averse to those who worship and pray to God's idols, and he who destroys the idols out of hatred, why at all would God reveal His powers and His miracles in front of these people? God's greatness is revealed when there is faith.

Those who worship God in an Idol due to their sentiments - "God is present in this Idol" being weak, therefore when evil men who destroy the idols, God does not reveal His powers. But those devotees who have complete and implicit faith and belief that "God is present in this idol," then there God reveals His miraculous powers. Just like in Gujarat near Surat there is a temple of Lord Siva. In the emblem of Lord Siva (Siva Linga) there are many holes. The reason is that when the Muslims came to destroy that emblem of Lord Siva, innumerable large bees came out of that emblem and it caused the Muslims to flee.

The candidates who want to pass an examination respect the examiner because their success depends on him. But God has not to pass any one's examination. Because God's passing in exam does not make Him greater, and His failure does not make Him weaker. Just as when Ravana sends Maricha disguised as a fraudulent golden deer in order to put Lord Rama to test, the Lord chases the deer. It means that He fails in the test given to Him by Ravana. Now what certificate did he wish to get from Ravana! Similarly God fails in the examination given to him by those who destroy temples. The Lord does not reveal His glory to them because they come to Him with evil sentiments rather than as devotees.

A man according to his sentiments has different dealings with his wife, mother, and sister, though the female bodies are of a similar type. Similarly an idol made of stone, brass or silver is God for a

devotee while for a non-believer it is merely an idol made of stone, brass or silver. The properties of each are different, but the sentiments are one and the same (i.e. it is the presence of God in the idol). It is in the sentiments that one can find God -

"God reside neither in wood nor in stone nor in clay but He resides in the sentiment; therefore sentiment plays an important role." (Garuda. Uttara 3/10)

There was an ascetic, that was free from worldly desires. He had two idols - one of the Lord Ganesa and another of a rat - both of the same weight. The ascetic had to go to Ramesvarama for pilgrimage. So he wanted to sell the two idols to a goldsmith. The goldsmith weighed the two and said that he would pay Rs. 500 for each. The ascetic said, "How can both cost the same? One of them is Lord Ganesa while the other is his vehicle." The goldsmith said, "Sir! I don't value Lord Ganesa or the rat; I value only gold". The ascetic's sight was only on Lord Ganesa and the rat whereas the goldsmith's sight was only on the gold. Similarly those who destroy idols perceive stone and brass etc., rather than God in the idol.

In fact all animate and inanimate beings and objects etc., are the manifestations of God. Those who have the sentiments and believe that God pervades every where, behold God in every being and object. But those who attach importance to the world, they behold the various beings and objects as separate. Similar it can be understood with the idols.

Question - The wicked break idols of God, then why does God not reveal His powers, His miracles ?

Answer: (continued) People worship the deities (idols) with faith, they sing glories and pray to the Lord; because they see something extra-ordinary in the idol; but those who destroy the idols, they too perceive something special in these idols. If they

did not see anything special in these idols, then why would they only destroy the idols, why do they not break other stones? In other words, they too believe there is something extra-ordinary in the idol. It is only due to hatred for those who have faith and to want to cause pain and suffering to them that they destroy the idols.

Out of jealousy and egoism, some people, destroy the temples that were constructed according to the limits and boundaries established of customs and as prescribed in the scriptures and they destroy the idols that were invoked with the spirit of God (praan pratishtaa) through a formal process. They do so in order to hurt the feelings of believers, to distress them, to transgress their ethical propriety, and to earn their own name and fame. Out of that hatred, they destroy idols, to invoke pain and distress in the hearts of Hindus, for generations to come as these Hindus on seeing these broken deities are reminded. Such persons have to meet with an extremely evil fate. They go to the treacherous hells because their intentions are evil, to give pain and suffering to others, to destroy others. The outcome of evil intentions is also evil. But those who apply all their strength to protect the temples and the deities, and even sacrifice their lives, they meet with a good end because their intentions were good.

If we respect a learned man, then as such, we are revering the knowledge, not the person's body made of flesh and bones. Similarly those who believe in the presence of God in the deities (idols), they worship God only. Through the deities it is God only that is being revered, not the deity. Those who do not believe in God in a deity (idol), the glory of God is not revealed in front of them; whereas God's glories manifest in front of a believer.

Question: Why should we do murti puja (worship idols)? What is the need of Murti Puja (idolatry)?

Answer: We should worship deities (idols) in order to increase the sentiment of devotion, to awaken that sentiment and to please God. It is also essential to get rid of the importance we have placed for this world in our inner faculties, and to get rid of the various attachments and infatuations to the world. By the worship of God through the deity (idol), by offering flower garlands, by adorning the Lord, by offering homage with kindled lamps and by offering various food preparations to the Lord are all very essential. The point is by worshiping the deities, we gain doubly – our sentiment of devotion is awakened and enhanced and our "sense of mine" and attachment to the mundane objects is renounced.

Every person should hold one place in their heart, for which he is willing to renounce everything. That place may either be God, or a saint or great soul, or mother-father, or a teacher. By doing so, man's worldly sentiments are reduced and spiritual sentiments increase.

As part of a pilgrimage, a group of people were going around Kasi. A guide was showing them around the various temples and made them prostrate before the emblem of Lord Siva to worship Him. Among the group were a few modern day boys. They disliked paying their obeisance at the various different places and so they remarked. "What is the benefit of prostrating so often at the various deities? There was a saint who listened to them. He said to the boys. Brothers, just as you reside in this body made of flesh and bones, so does God reside in the idol. Your life span is fairly short, whereas, the life span of this deity of Lord Siva is significantly longer. Therefore from the perspective of years of life, the Shiv Linga is far older than you. From the perspective of purity if one sees then this body made of flesh and bones is far more impure than this deity made of stone. From the perspective of strength, this stone is far stronger than these bones. If you want to test this, surely you strike your head against this stone

and see for yourself which one breaks - your head or the stone deity. You have sinful qualities and bad conduct, whereas this deity is flawless. The point is that the deity (idol) is better and great in all respects. Therefore the deity is worth worshiping. It is venerable. You consider your name's praise and blame as your own praise and blame, your body's honor and dishonor, as your own honor and dishonor, then will God not consider the worship, eulogy and prayer offered to Him in the idol as His own? O' Brother! In fact your name and body which are praised and honored are not your own self, yet you become pleased by praise and honor. But God pervades the entire universe including the idols. Therefore He is present also in the deities as it too is a form of God. Will God not be pleased while we worship Him in the idol? The extent to which we express our sentiments of worship for Him, God will be that much more pleased with us.

Question: Why should we do murti puja (worship idols)? What is the need of Murti Puja (idolatry)?

Answer: (continued) He who is a believer in God, even though he may restrain himself from worship of idols, but regardless, worship of idols takes place through him. Now how is that? He believes and follows the ordinances of the Vedas, then that too is worship of idols as Vedas too (being written book) are idols only. Revering the Vedas is a form of idol worship only. Similarly reverence and service to the preceptor (guru), to parents and guest etc., to serve them with food, water, clothing etc is a form of idol worship. Their bodies are insentient but by revering their bodies, they too are being revered, by which they are pleased. The point is that man wherever, whoever, in which ever form he respects and reveres, it is all worship of idols. If man worships the idol with deep sentiments, then that worship is God's worship only.

There was a recluse who lived under an umbrella and worshiped an idol of Lord Visnu made of black stone (Shaligram). Some people who did not believe in idol worship, they did not like this Babaji's form of worship. They complained about him to Mr. Hook an English Officer, hat he was insulting the all-pervading God by worshipping this black stone idol. Mr. Hook angrily ordered the recluse to leave that place for good. The next day the recluse made a statue of Mr. Hook and began to beat it with his shoe by demonstrating in front of the people and calling the statue of Mr. Hook an idiot. This incident was brought to the attention of Mr. Hook. He again called the recluse and asked him why he was insulting him in that way. The recluse replied that he did not insult him at all but he was insulting this foolish statue of his. After saying this he kicked the statue with his shoes. Mr. Hook said that insulting my statue, is insulting me only. The recluse said, that you are not in this statue (i.e. idol) at all, then too even simply for name sake you are so very much affected. Our God is in all space, time, things, etc; Thus he who with faith worships God in an idol, then is this revering God or not? Hearing his reasoning, Mr. Hook said to the recluse, that he could go to his place and worship the idol free as he wished.

Question - Some people eat or drink forbidden things such as meat or beer etc. in the temple premises or nearby. Why does God not prevent them from doing so?

Answer – Children play mischievous games in front of their parents; but parents don't punish them because they think that children are our very own, out of ignorance and innocent they are not aware. Similarly God also thinks that they are my very own ignorant children. Therefore God's sight does not go towards our behavior at all. But those who eat or drink forbidden food and perform forbidden actions in the temple premises, they will have to suffer for their misdeeds.

Question – Previously, Kabirji and a few other saints criticized idolatory, Why?

Answer - Saints and great souls manifest and reveal themselves according to the need of the hour and perform actions accordingly. When many fights broke out between the followers of the Siva and those following Vishnu, at that time Tulsidasji Maharaj composed the Ramcharitmanasa, by which the fights between the two came to an end. Many have written different commentaries on the Gita. As according to the need of the hour, the great souls received that particular inspiration in their hearts, and accordingly the commentaries were written. When the Baudha religion (Buddhism) was spreading by leaps and bounds, at that time Sankaracharya revealed Himself and propagated Sanatana Dharma. Similarly when the Muslims ruled over India and the temples as well as, idols were destroyed by them the saints such as Kabirji and other saints declared, "We need neither temples, nor idolatry because our God does not reside only in temples and idols but He pervades everywhere." In fact the intent of these saints was not to criticize idolatry but they meant to direct the people towards God.

Question – Nowadays the times are not as they were before, the Muslims are not destroying the temples and idols. Then too why do the followers of a certain sect criticize idolatry and worship of God endowed with form?

Answer - To criticize any one is to have insistence on your own sect and ways; because those who criticize other sects (their beliefs and opinions), do not want to realize the essence of the Supreme Consciousness (Paramatmatattva), they do not want their own salvation, rather they want their individual form of worship, they want to expand their sect's numbers, they want to propagate their sect and organization. Believers in such sects and groups will not realize God. Those who have insistence of their

own sect, organizations and groups, they are of certain system of opinions, doctrines, religious, philosophical persuasions and such people's talks are not worth believing and accepting -

People who have insistence on their own sect, belief systems and opinions, cannot know the Essence (tattva). (Manas 1/115/4)

Those who believe in the attributeless, formless God, criticize the worship of deities, then as such they are belittling their All Pervading One, because from their beliefs and opinions, that formless God does not pervade at the places where there are idols. In other words, their formless God is in certain space only (not everywhere). If they accepted the formless God even in the idol, then why would they criticize the one endowed with form? Secondly, those who worship the formless, believe that God is neither endowed with form, nor does he incarnate (as an avatar); it means that their Omnipotent, Almighty God, is incapable to (incarnate) and to be endowed with form, in other words, that Paramatma is not Almighty. But in fact Paramatma is not so. "He is being (manifested) and non-being (unmanifested) (Gita 9/19). So instead of getting entangled about His form etc., we should worship Him according to our own belief.

We must think that do we want our salvation, or do we want to engage in controversies and arguments about formless-with form etc.? If according to our interest and inclination, if we utilize our time in worship of either God endowed with form or The Formless then it will lead to spiritual progress.

"Tere bhaave jo karo bhalo burou sansaar |

"Narayan" tu baithike aapnou bhuvan buhaar ||

But if we insist on fighting then there are many mundane affairs in this world pertaining to wealth and property etc., which people

can fight over. But after pursuing the spiritual path, why must we induce fights? Why should we unnecessarily waste our time and energy in condemning and criticizing the ways of worship of other sects? Rather, while we are engaged in worship, how did we find the time to criticize other people's faith? The amount of time we wasted in insulting and blaming other sects and their ways of worship, that much time if we followed our own spiritual path with faith, reverence and devotion then we would be greatly benefited.

Those saints that have criticized idolatry, they have (instead of idolatry) laid special emphasis on chanting the name of God, good company, words of spiritual guide, contemplation on God, meditation etc. But the people who have renounced idolatry and at the same time are not promptly engaged in chanting the name of God and meditation etc., they are deprived of both the benefits! Instead of them, those that worship idols are superior because at least they worship God according to their own belief system.

Some believers may argue that they condemn other ways of worship in order to intensify their own way of worship and to develop exclusive devotion for it. The answer is that a devotee can't develop exclusive devotion to his favorite Deity or to his way of worship by condemning others ways, because it is only He who assumes different names and forms. He is attributeless, as well as, endowed with attributes. Therefore the believers of different sects believing in different ways of worship should respect one another because everyone worships the same God. Those that are with faith and belief, with a simple straight-forward sentiments engaged in the worship of their Beloved (Ishta), by condemning their Beloved, their way of worship, their heart will be hurt, it will feel a blow, whereby they will be pained and will suffer, then those who have condemned them will incur grave sin, whereby their own way of worship will not lead them to perfection.

Condemning others in the name of exclusive devotion is an evil disguised as a virtue. It is easy to escape an evil by considering it an evil, but it is very difficult to escape an evil if it appears as a disguised virtue. Ravana and Kalanemi disguised as Saints could deceive Sita and Hanumana respectively. Similarly Arjuna also recoiled from fighting, that is doing his dharma (i.e. duty) being a member of the warrior class, thinking that he would incur sin by killing his kinsmen. So in Arjuna also he evil of unmanliness appeared as disguised non-violence and virtue. Therefore much effort was required by Lord Krishna in preaching the lengthy gospel of the Gita. If the evil appeared in Arjuna in the form of an evil, then Lord could easily remove it. Similarly if the evil of condemnation appears in us in the form of exclusive devotion, we should not mislead ourselves to ruin by wasting our precious time, capabilities, understanding etc. in condemning others. But an aspirant should want that with great caution and alertness, he must utilize his resources (time, abilities, capabilities etc) in worshipping his favorite Deity.

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Question: How is "Svayambhu" (Self-Existent) idol sculptured?

Answer – This question can arise only if "Svayambhu" (self-existent) idol is sculpted. They are not sculpted at all. They

simply manifest (Reveals themselves), therefore it is called self-existent; or else why would it be "Svayambhu"?

Question – How to know whether an "murti" idol is self-existent "Svayambhu" or sculptured?

Answer – Every person cannot know it (i.e. recognize a self-existent idol). As a person recognizes an old acquaintance, so does a devotee who has vision of God recognize a self-existent idol.

Question – What is the difference if a person worships a sculpted "murti" idol or a self-existent "Svayambhu" idol?

Answer - If a devotee has belief and faith, then worshipping the sages in an emblem of sacrificial grass or Lord Ganesa through betel-nut proves beneficial. Similarly if a devotee beholds and worships the sculptured idol, it leads him to spiritual progress. But worshipping a self-existent idol and having belief and faith leads to special and quick spiritual progress. Just like on listening to the discourse of a saint in person is far more beneficial than reading his discourse from a book, so is worship of a self-existent idol more beneficial. Sanjaya also declares the same about the gospel of the Gita that he has heard the supreme and most profound gospel direct from Lord Krishna (Gita 18/75).

Question – What is the reason that a person is easily and suddenly attached to the world but he is not easily attached to God?

Answer - The reason is that a person regards himself as body. By identifying himself with the body, he is easily attached to the world because the body has its identity with the world. Homogeneous entities are suddenly attached to each other as people of the same social order and same profession etc., are easily connected. Just as those who consider themselves to be

Brahmin, Kshatriya , become connected with Brahmin, Kshatriya, and those who consider themselves to be wise, traders, etc, they easily establish relation with others that are wise, traders etc., - "Samaansheel-vyasaneshu sakhyam" A man does not directly have vision of God and he considers himself to be an idol (body), then for such a one, to have the sentiments of the presence of God in the "murti" idol will be easy. IN other words, as long as there is a sense of Me and mine-ness, till then one should worship idol of God. Even after God-Realization he should not renounce worshipping the idol, because the spiritual discipline that was beneficial to him, he must remain ever grateful to it, it must not be renounced.

From book in Hindi "Gita Darpan" by Swami Ramsukhdasji

The message is available in HINDI titled "GITA MEIN MURTI PUJA" in July 2010 Folder

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Narayana ! Narayana !! Narayana !!!

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