

SALAGRAMA SHILA



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The *salagrama* stone, which has attained a place in pan-Indian ritual, is a *svarupa*, a naturally-occurring form of Vishnu found primarily in the Gandaki River, Nepal. Inherently sacred, it needs no consecration rites when it is installed for worship. For a Hindu, it *is* Vishnu. Similarly, the river Narmada produces *bana linga* stones, considered *svayambhu* or “self-born” *lingas*, which may be worshipped as Shiva without consecration. (Eck, 34-35)

According to Puranas; ‘on the northern bank of the river Gandaki and to the south of the Himalayan ranges are the *tirtha* or sacred spot, twelve *yojanas* in extent and created by Brahma himself, and called Chakra-nadi. To the north of this river is a great mountain sacred to Vishnu, and the stones in its shadow found in the river are branded with the sacred marks of Vishnu, especially the discus. These are the Salagrama-stones representing different forms of Vishnu, which must be worshipped for the obtainment of the four-fold values of life, namely *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*.’ In Vedic tradition, this principle is also known as “Purusartha” in the Sanskrit language, a necessity for a meaningful and happy life. The term “Purus” means rational beings and “Aartha” denotes Aim. Simply, those four goals are Dharma (ethics, duty, and religion), Aartha (Finance, wealth), Kama (pleasure, love, work, sex) and Moksha (Nirvana and or Liberation). Worshiping of Sri Shaligram is highly recommended to achieve all those targets.

Salagramas are celebrated as visible symbols of Lord Vishnu and are worshipped all over the country, constituting an important religious practice for devout Hindus. The worship of these natural and sacred stones, go back to a distant past. Ancient texts do not prescribe any specific or elaborate worship, they uniformly say: ‘that it is sufficient to merely look at a Salagrama, touch it, sip water in which it is bathed, or place leaves of Tulsi on it.’

*Ato'dhithana Vargesu Suryadisviva Murtisu /
Salagrama Silaiva Syad Adhithanottamam Hareh*

“The Lord resides in many places in which he may be worshipped, but of all the places Salagrama is the best.” –Garuda Purana, Ch. 9, 1-23

For thousands years, the veneration of sacred stones, called Shaligram Śila, has been an integral part of Hindu ritual practice. Originating from the Kali Gandaki River Valley of Mustang District, Nepal, primarily as natural manifestations of Vishnu, Shaligrams are considered to be inherently sacred. For this reason, they require no rites of consecration or invocation when brought into homes or temples as presiding deities over the household, the family, and the community. These divine gifts of nature have tremendous power, energy and electromagnetic properties which magnificently align the lives of the devotees with positivity all around.

According to Varaha Purana; ‘The origin of the name of Salagrama is traced to a remote village Salagrama on the bank of Gandaki where the holy stones are picked up in Himalayan Nepal and Vishnu is known by the name of Shaligraman. The name is derived from the hut (sala) of the Sage Salankayana, who beheld the form of Vishnu in a tree outside his hut.’

In Hinduism Shaligram or Salagrama is also known as Shaligram Shila. The word Shila translates to 'stone' and Shaligram is a name of Vishnu. The Shila also meaning the sacred form of lord in Self appeared deity form or represent deity when we establish in specific home or temples.

The Gautamiya Tantra states: ‘there is a large area of the Gandaki River known as Salagrama Sthala. Stones found there are called Salagrama Sila.’ It further states: ‘It is impossible to estimate how much happiness the forefathers experience when they are offered oblations, even once, in front of Salagrama Sila.’

According to the Skanda Purana, these *Shalagrama-Shilas* appear in various colours, shapes, and markings. Their colour may be black, blue, yellow, whitish, blood-red or tawny coloured. Their shape may be smooth, rough, uneven, very plump, or frog-shaped. They may be without markings, marked with one *Chakra*, many *Chakras* large *Chakras*, broken *Chakras*, a *Chakra* in the middle of a circle or with one *Chakra* attached to another. Some *Shalagrama-Shilas* exhibit a large mouth and others a down-turned mouth. Red stones or stones with reddish hue bring forth an empire to rule; tawny colour like honey in the stone makes for worldly prosperity as well as final liberation. White - coloured stone is suitable for the obtainment of emancipation; yellow- colour in the stone brings wealth; and all-white contributes to increase of wealth. One must, however, avoid stones which are extremely red. Black-stones are most beneficial, as they make for all worldly prosperity and happiness. The Skanda Purana also enumerates the good and bad results derived from venerating different types of *Shalagrama-Shilas*.

Historically, the use of Shaligrama (or Salagrama) Shilas in worship are traced to the time of Adi Shankara through the latter's works. Specifically, his commentary to the Verse 1.6.1 in Taittiriya Upanishad and his commentary to the Verse 1.3.14 of the Brahma Sutras, suggest that the use of Saligrama in the worship of Vishnu has been a well-known Hindu practice.

Worshiping a smooth *Shila* brings *Mantra-Siddhi* (perfection in the chanting of one's given mantra). Black *Shilas* bestow fame, yellow *Shilas* give sons, whitish *Shilas* destroy one's sins, blue *Shilas* increase wealth, and blood-red *Shilas* bring diseases. Rough *Shilas* create anxiety, uneven *Shilas* give poverty, and fat shilas de-crease one's life span. *Shilas* devoid of markings yield no results. If one mistakenly adores a *Shilas* with the following qualities he will certainly get suffering: tawny coloured, uneven, broken, with one *Chakra*, too many *Chakras*, large *Chakras*, a circled *Chakra*, a broken *Chakra*, a *Chakra* attached to another, with a large mouth, or with the mouth turned down.

The Agni Purana mentions several types of *Shalagrama-Shilas* whose worship brings unhappiness and never happiness. These include a *Shila* with a mouth like that of a snake, a broken *Shila*, one with *Chakras* facing each other, with a circled *Chakra*, a *Shila* with a producing navel, a tawny-coloured *Shila* known as Narasimha, a *Shila* with many lines inside the circle, and a *Shila* unidentifiable due to its confusing markings. The Agni Purana further describes many *Shalagrama-Shilas* who award beneficial results to those who attentively worship them. These benevolent *Shilas* include those that are perfectly smooth, jet black in colour, round like a pearl, natural (not made by hand), or with an evenly shaped *Chakra*. The *Varaha-Shilas*, the *Ananta-Shila*, the *Shila* with a deeply indented navel, the tiny *Vasudeva-Shila* that has an evenly formed mouth, *Shilas* shaped like amalaki fruits, or those shaped like the palm of the hand (arched above and convex below) all give perfection.

The Kartika Mahatmya chapter of the Padma Purana states that for those who worship Sri Hari in the Shalagrama-Shila, Sri Hari will remove their sins and give them the intelligence by which they may obtain liberation. By worship of Shalagrama-Shila in Mathura during the Kartika month, Lord Hari grants *Moksha*. For those who worship Shalagrama-Shila on behalf of their forefathers, Lord Hari protects those forefathers and their families and delivers them to his own spiritual abode. Mal Maas (Adhik Maas) is the month for Vishnu Puja. The Puranas also sing high praises about Purushottam Mass (Adhik Maas) and indicate Puja, reading of the scriptures especially, the recitation of Srimad Bhagavat Purana and of the Bhagavad Gita during this month produce top meritorious results. Also during Adhik Maas, selfless actions, without the expectation of results are to be performed. In addition to singing and listening to the praises of the lord Vishnu, undertake Mal Maas (Adhik Maas) Vrat also.

Shaligram is worshipped as the iconic representation Lord Vishnu, similar to Shivlinga is worshiped as anionic Lord Shiva. Like the worship of Shiva in the form of a lingam, the worship of Vishnu in the shape of a Shaligram is an iconic in character. Shaligrams are always naturally found in the river Gandaki. The region where Shaligrams are found is also called Shaligrams. The Shaligrams region is in Mustang and River Gandaki basin. These also include the famous Kali-Gandaki River, Muktinath, Damodar Himal, Damodar Kunda, Devghat, etc. Shaligram is also found at Muktinath area of Nepal, in Gandaki River. Muktinath is derived from Mukti and Nath. "Mukti" means "Salvation or Nirvana" and "Nath" mean "God or Master."

Ramachandra Rao in his text "Salagrama kosha" mentions, "The particular site in the course of the river where the stones become sacred is known as Chakra-Tirtha (chakra-tirthavachchhina-gandaki-nadyutpana-shilas, shalagrama-pada-vachya). The sanctity of this site, however, extends to three yojanas (24 miles) all round. There is also a river called Chakra-nadi (now called Kagbeni), which flows towards Gandaki and joins it at the site mentioned above. This river is described in Garuda-purana as created by Brahma; and the great peak to the north of the river is said to contain the presence of Vishnu. All the stones found in the river as well as in the mountain are believed to bear the marks of Vishnu. The entire area (including streams and the mountainside to the north of Muktinatha) covers as many as twelve yojanas (96 miles), according to the Puranic account. Among the Shaligraam stones, some are from the waters (jalaja) and some are from the mountainside (sthalaja)." Salagrama kosha further states: "In the worship of Salagrama, no initiation is required; there is no special hymnology or specific procedure of worship, nor any need for a qualified priest or master of ceremonies. Worshipped anyhow, it will bestow the benefits; and there is no error of any kind."

In the Brahma Purana the Supreme Lord Vishnu states; 'that any *Shila* from the place of *Shalagramas* can never be inauspicious though cracked, chipped, split in two though still in one piece, or even broken asunder. Lord Shiva also confirms in the Skanda Purana that even if a shila is cracked, split, or broken it will have no harmful effect if it is worshiped with attention and love by a devotee.' Purana further states; 'that the Supreme Lord Hari, along with His divine consort, Lakshmi, live in the *Shalagrama-Shila* that has either only the mark of a *Chakra*, a *Chakra* along with the mark of a footprint, or only a mark resembling a flower garland.' Dr Holly Walters work on Shaligrams says, 'The Dasavatara are in Shaligrams, there are Matsya Shaligrams and Kurma Shaligrams, Ram Shaligrams and Krishna Shaligrams, each appearing according to the characteristics laid out in the Puranas and in the Epics.'

(Compiled by Chaman Lal Gadoo)