

Famous Five



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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Part 1	3
Part 2	12
Part 3	20
Part 4	28
Part 5	41

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Srimate SrivanSatakopa Sri Vedanta Desika Yatindra Mahadesikaya nama:

THE FAMOUS FIVE



INTRODUCTION

Writing an article, as far as I am concerned, is a collective family endeavor. When I chose a subject, the entire family pitches in with hints, ideas and what not. While my wife gives me possible tips from Desika Stotrams, my son and daughter, who are voracious readers (alas! Only of comics and pulp fiction, apart from an occasional classic or religious work, when the mood strikes them) contribute matters from the loukika angle. My mother serves as a reference point in case of doubts in certain areas. Even friends and relatives occasionally phone in with tips. You would by now have realized that I merely assemble the various items of information given to me, with plausible connecting matter, making the whole into a passably readable composition, which may not attract a shower of bouquets, but would hopefully not result in brickbats.

When I began the current article, true to form, all my family members and a friend enthusiastically threw in clues and tips, which resulted in no less than 45 possible items for inclusion, even without my looking up my usual manuals of reference. And the result is the jumbo-sized article that follows. The point of my sharing with you this rather confidential piece of information (about the process of composition of my articles) is to let you know that in case you intend blaming me for any of its shortcomings, you should apportion it fairly among my family members and not lay the entire thing at my doorstep.

Coming to brass tacks, of the several numbers I have dealt with so far,

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Number Five accounts for the greatest number of mentions in the Scripture. Its significance spans the entire gamut of spiritual literature, with hardly any work which doesn't include a reference to this intriguing integer. Whether it is the Shruti, Itihaasaas, Puraanas, Divya Prabandam or works of Poorvacharyas, 5 occupies a pride of place, with quintets abounding in all these works. What follows is just a sample of such abundance.

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PART 1

THE FIVE ELEMENTS

The moment we think of Five, what strikes us is the Five Elements-Pancha bhootam-of which the entire mundane structure is composed. These are

1. Aakaasam or Atmosphere
2. Air
3. Fire
4. Water
5. Earth.

At the time of Creation, were these five elements brought into existence simultaneously, or did one owe its origin to another? The Upanishad answers this question by telling us that it was the Atmosphere or Aakaasam which the Paramaatma created first from Himself-"Aatmana: Aakaasa: sambhoota:".

"Sabda: sparsascha roopamcha rasaschaapi Dvijottama!

Ete gunaa: pancha Bhoome: sarvebhyo gunavattaraa"

From Atmosphere emerged Air and from air, Fire. Out of Fire came Water and from Water emerged Earth. This is the order in which creation was effected. However, while considering this, we should not construe that only Atmosphere was created by Emperuman and the rest of the elements were the originating point for one another, with Air independently creating Fire and so on. It is the Paramatma Himself, taking on the forms of air, fire, etc., who is responsible for bringing forth the five elements.

Of these five elements, Earth is the most complete, for it has five characteristics (sound, touch, form, smell and taste)-

If we take the life breath, Air, it is also divided into Pancha Praanaas:



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1. Praanan
2. Apaanan
3. Vyaanan
4. Samaanan
5. Udaanan

You would find these names in the Parishechana mantras, through which all food that we consume is first offered to these five types of life breath residing in our body.

THE FIVE FACULTIES

The second grouping of Five that occurs to us is the Five Faculties or sensory organs- these again fall into two groupings of five each.

The five Organs of Action or Karmendriyaas are

1. Hands
2. Legs
3. Speech

4 and 5 the two excretory organs.

THE FIVE ORGANS OF KNOWLEDGE (GNAANENDRIYAS)

1. Eyes
2. Ears
3. Nose
4. Tongue and





5. Skin

The five Indriyaas, as they are called, are responsible for five faculties, viz.,

1. Sight
2. Hearing
3. Smell
4. Speech and
5. Touch.

(And if we take the fingers on our hands and feet, they are again five)

It is these sensory organs which are responsible for most of our troubles, leading us astray even when we ourselves want to tread the path of virtue. The pack of sensory organs is extremely powerful ("Balavaan indriya graama:") and is uncontrollable, except for the sage. And at times, these senses overwhelm even the wisest of men ("Vidvaamsam api karshati"). These sensory organs are compared to five wayward, untamed and untamable horses, which drag the chariot in a direction of their own choice, irrespective of where the charioteer wants to go. Sri Nammazhwar likens the senses to five wicked and cruel men, who constantly torture the Jeevatma- "Avi tikaikka iyvar.paaviyeni nee kaatti paduppaayo!"

While it is indeed extremely difficult to gain control over these indriyaas, one who succeeds is eulogized by the entire world as a "Jitendriya:"

FIVE GREAT SACRIFICES

All of us perform any number of duties every day, depending upon our age, occupation and stage in life. While official duties are treated as paramount, personal ones occupy the next place in our scheme of things. However, the Scripture prescribes five duties for us, performance of which is obligatory and





failure in which would result in accrual of sin. These are known as the Pancha Mahaa Yagyaas-the five great sacrifices. The Taaittireeya Aaranyakam glorifies these Yagyas thus-

"Pancha vaa ete mahaa yagyaa: satati prataayante, satati santishttante, Deva Yagya: Pitru Yagya: Bhoota Yagya: Manushya Yagya: Brahma Yagya iti".

We find explanations too in the same Upanishad, as to what these five yagyaas are about.

1. **Deva Yagya:** Performance of various sacrifices comes under this head. The Havis or sacrificial offering in the various yagyaas forms the staple diet of the Devas, and timely and consistent performance of yaagas keeps the celestials satisfied.
2. **Pitru Yagyam:** Propitiating the forefathers with the offer of "Swadhaa" constitutes Pitru Yagyam.
3. **Bhoota Yagyam** refers to feeding of lowly creatures, which depend on us for their life and sustenance. Even the drawing of "Kolam" at the doorstep of the house would constitute this Bhoota Yagyam, since it is meant for ants and similar creatures to feed on the rice flour used for the purpose. Even today, many families have the habit of feeding the crow prior to partaking breakfast.
4. **Manushya Yagyam:** Feeding of guests-"atithis"-especially learned Brahmins, comes under this head-"Yat braahmanebhyo annam dadaati tat manushya yagya: santistthate"
5. **Brahma Yagyam:** Daily recitation of the portions of Vedas that one has learnt-termed as "Svaadhyayam"-constitutes Brahma Yagyam. One is supposed to recite at least one "Prasnam" or chapter from the portions already learnt from the Guru. This not only bestows on us the incalculable "punyam" that accrues out of Veda paaraayanam, but also, incidentally, helps us retain in memory through repetition, the Veda bhaagam we have learnt by rote.





In practice, while Brahma Yagyam remains what is described above, Vaidikas observe the other four of these Maha Yagyaas as a continuation of Vaisvadevam, offering portions of cooked rice to Devas, Pitru Devatas, human beings and to crows and dogs, with the respective mantras meant therefore

That these five great sacrifices were very much in vogue and practice is known from Tirumangai Mannan's words in Tiruvezhukoottrirukkai---"Mutthee, naanmarai, iyvagai velvi".

FIVE VEDAS

Speaking of reciting Vedas, how many are the Vedas? While "Four" would be the normal answer and while "Three" too might be acceptable as an answer (as Atharva Veda is often considered to be but an adjunct of the other three Vedas), the answer that would be eligible for full marks is "Five". No, I am not talking through my hat, for, along with Rg, Yajur, Saama and Atharva Vedas, Mahabharatam too is considered the Fifth Vedam-"**Bhaarata: panchamo Veda:**". Due to its profound contents, vast coverage of men and matters, clear enunciation of the path of Dharmam, categorical definition of who is the Paramatma, etc., Mahabharata is considered no less than Vedas and is counted on par with them.

There is another version put forth by the Bhaagavata Purana, which considers not only Mahabharatam, but the entire body of Itihaasaas and Puraanas to constitute the fifth Vedam-

"Rg Yaju: Saama Atharvaakhyaa Vedaa: chatvaara uddhritaa:

Itihaasa Puraanam cha panchamo Veda uchyate"

And even if one is unable to learn all the 82 Prasnas or chapters in the Yajur Vedam, one should, as a basic minimum requirement, learn by rote at least the Pancha Sooktam and Pancha Shaanti mantras. The Pancha Sooktas referred to here are the Purusha Sooktam with the Narayana Anuvaakam, Vishnu Sooktam, Sri Sooktam, Bhoo and Neela Sooktam.





PANCHA PAANDAVAAS

The mention of Mahabharatam prompts a thought of another group of five-of-five princely sons of Emperor Paandu-the Pancha Paandavas, viz., Dharmaputra, Arjuna, Bheema, Nakula and Sahadeva.

Krishna considered the Pandavas extremely close, which can be gauged by His remarks to Duryodhana-"Mama praanaa hi Paandavaa:". Of these five princes, who do you think was the dearest to Sri Krishna's heart? One would normally think that Dharmaputra, that paragon of virtue and personification of righteousness would rank for the position of pride, by virtue of his seniority and other qualifications. However, it is in favour of Arjuna that Krishna casts His vote- "**Vrishneenaam Vaasudevosi Paandavaanaam Dhananjaya:**"

This was because of Arjuna's boundless devotion for the Lord, exhibited in various forms.

And the only woman whom we know with five husbands, is Droupati. How did she end up with this rather dubious distinction? It is said that while performing penance addressed to Shankara, Droupati, overwhelmed by the deity's manifestation, uttered the prayer for a good husband, five times. Treating the same as five individual requests, Shankara blessed her with five husbands!-

"Pancha kritva: tvayaa ukta: patim deheeti aham puna:

Deham anyam gataayaaste yathoktam tat bhavishyati"

To the Pancha Paandavas were born five children from Droupati.

THE FIVE FORMS OF PARAMAATMA

Coming to the Lord Himself, we find that He has an inalienable association with Number Five.

The Paramaatma is to be found in Five Forms:





1. **Param:** This is the Lord's primordial form, with which He shines at Sri Vaikunttam, regaling all the celestials with His incomparable beauty, majesty and magnificence.
2. **Vyooham:** The Lord divides Himself into four entities, for carrying out the various functions of creation, protection, preservation and destruction. These four forms are respectively known as Vaasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha.
3. **Vibhavam:** Since only those who have attained liberation can feast their eyes on the aforesaid forms of the Lord, out of His infinite mercy, He descends often to this mundane world of ours for the purpose of protecting the good and innocent, destroying the wicked and for re-establishing Dharma on its foundations. These visits of the Lord, known as Avataaras, are principally 32 in number, (including the famous Dasaavataaras) though Aagamaas mention many more.
4. **Antaryaami:** The Lord resides in all of us, shrinking His majestic form to the proportion of just a thumb, to suit the cramped confines of our hearts. It is this Inner Dweller who has the Jeevatma and our material body as His shareeram. He doesn't lose any of His splendour or magnificence due to this diminutive form He assumes for residing within us. It is indeed a true measure of His love for us that He chooses to dwell in us, in this body composed of blood, flesh and refuse- "Oona kurambai idanul pukku" remarks Azhwar, marveling at the Lord's extreme soulabhyam in leaving His splendorous residence at Sri Vaikunttam for residing in our despicable body.
5. **Arccha:** The Para Vaasudeva is capable of being seen only by the permanent residents of Paradise, while the Vyooha Moorties too are visible only to sages. And while Vibhava avataaras like those of Rama and Krishna benefited only their contemporaries, the Antaryaami is visible only to Yogis.

Then what are we ordinary, sinning mortals to do? Can we not see God at all





while on this earth? It is to cater to beings like us who were unfortunate enough not to have been born during the times of Rama and Krishna, that the Lord assumes various forms at innumerable abodes on this earth, sitting, standing or lying down as His devotees wish Him to, enabling men, women and children to feast their eyes on His glorious form with very little effort. "How is it that You made Yourself the subject matter of weak and devotion-less eyes of mortals like me?" wonders Sri Koorattaazhwan-"**nanu lochana gocharo bhoo:**"

Not only the Paancharaatra Agamaas, but also the Taittireeyopanishad speaks about this five-fold form of the Lord-"**Sa vaa esha Purusha: panchadhaa panchaatmaa**".

If we take the Arcchaavataaram, the images of the Lord at various Sannidhis are made out of five metals generally, cumulatively known as "Iympon". These are Gold, Silver, Bronze, Copper and Brass. The boundlessly beautiful Utsava Moorties of Emeporumans at various temples may be made of metal, but they transcend all the mundane properties of such elements and acquire sanctity, once Praana Prathisttaa is performed. A word of caution here-Swami Desikan tells us never to think of the Lord's images as being made of mere metal-they are verily forms of the Lord which He acquires out of love and affection for His children, devoid of all the base qualities of matter and full of all the auspicious attributes unique to the Lord.

If we take the Lord's abodes, we find that He is again fond of five. Dwaraka was the capital city of Sri Krishna, built by Him as a labour of love. However, there are no less than five Dwarakas:

1. Dakore Dwara,
2. Natha Dwara,
3. Bhet Dwara (which is an island),
4. Moola Dwara and
5. Gangrouli Dwara.





Among the divya desams or temples sanctified by songs by Azhwars located in the South India,, there is another quintet known as the Pancha Krishna Kshetrams:

1. Tirukkanna Mangai,
2. Tirukkannankudi,
3. Kapisthalam,
4. Tirukkannapuram and
5. Tirukkoilur.

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PART 2

PANCHAAYUDHAM

Further asserting His penchant for five, the number of weapons the Lord holds in His beautiful hands is again five. The Panchaayudhaas, as they are known, serve not only as weapons, but also as adornments. Though five principal weapons are often mentioned, the number of armaments the Lord sports is innumerable, as laid down by Sri Ramanuja in the Saranagati Gadyam—"Shankha Chakra Gadaa Asi Saarngaadi asankheya kalyaana divya aayudha!". And though His hands are normally four, the Lord makes suitable adjustments for holding these five weapons.

A question arises here—whenever and wherever we see Him, the Lord always appears holding these weapons, apparently not putting them down even for a minute. Even seasoned warriors carry arms only when they go to war or apprehend some danger. No one normally sports a gun night and day—not even the most hardened of terrorists. This being so, why should the Lord, who is a peaceable person, be always seen in the company of His arms, so much so that they appear inseparable from Him?

We find the answer to this intriguing question in the following couplet of Poorvacharyas—

**"Paatu pranata rakshaayaam vilambam asahan iva
sadaa Panchaayudhee bibhrat sa na: Sri Ranganaayaka:"**

Protection of devotees being His avowed objective, the Lord is unable to tolerate even a second's delay in rushing to their rescue. Like the fire service men who are always fully geared up to respond to calls for assistance, the Lord too does not want to lay down His arms even for a second, lest it result in that much delay in mounting the rescue mission. Further, the very sight of an Emperuman who is always fully armed provides a great feeling of assurance to devotees that in case of distress, divine assistance would not be delayed even





for a second.

We are able to understand the role of the Chakram, Gada, Sword and Bow in destroying enemies—but how could the Shankham be of any assistance in this regard? Can a mere conch have the power to confound enemies? The Bhagavat Gita tells us that the Cosmic Conch Paanchajanyam is no less deadly when dealing with the Lord's opponents. The blowing of the conch results in the emission of a stentorian sound which fills the enemies' hearts with fear and makes them drop down meekly, with nary a shot fired—"Sa ghosho Dhaartaraashtraanaam hridayaani vyadaarayata".

FIVE ACTS TO BE DEDICATED

It is again in the Bhagavat Gita that the Lord tells us to dedicate to Him the following five acts of ours:

1. All our actions, in whatever field and for whatever purpose
2. All that we eat and drink
3. All acts of worship—pooja, homas, yagyas and the like
4. All acts of charity and
5. All acts of penance and meditation

**"Yat karoshi yat asnaasi yat juhoshi dadaasi yat
Yat tapasyasi Kounteya! Tat kuru madarpanam"**

Such dedication of action to the Lord is stipulated so that we do not develop attachment in the fruits for which these are performed.

THE FIVE-HOODED SNAKE

If the number of weapons that the Lord holds is five, so is the number of hoods and mouths of the strange snake that He lies on and which serves Him in





various forms as an umbrella when He travels, a magnificent throne when He sits, a fabulous footwear protecting the divine feet when the Lord walks, a boat transporting Him amidst seas, a glowing torch lighting up His way always and as a soft, spotless and supple bed, when He lies down in Yoga nidraa.

Who says that Adishesha has only five heads and hoods? Is he not reputed to sport a thousand ("ina tutti ani phanam aayirangal aarnda aravarasa perum sodi Anantan")? Well, though Sesha does have a thousand heads, he appears to sport just five on normal occasions, as can be inferred from Sri Nammazhwar's quip—"Iyvaai aravanai mel Aazhi Perumaanaar" and that of Sri Tirumangai Mannan—"Mukkan naal tol iy vaai aravodu"

Lakshmana, enraged due to the inaction of Sugreeva in searching for Sri Mythily, resembled a five-headed serpent, says Sri Valmiki too— "Sva tejo visha sanghaata: panchaasya iva pannaga:"

THE FIVE GLORIOUS GATES

According to the Cchandogyopanishad, there are five gates to the Lord's abode and each of these gates is guarded by a Brahmapurusha of considerable accomplishment— 'Te vaa ete pancha Bramapurushaa: svargasya dvaarapaa:'

The Kaataka Prasnam too confirms that Svarga lokam has five entry points— 'Taa vaa etaa: pancha svargasya lokasya dvaara:'. However, the guards at these doors differ from those stated in the Upanishad—Kaatakam tells us symbolically that the first door is guarded by Penance (Tapas), the second by Shraddha, the third by Satyam, the fourth by the Mind and the last by Charanam.

(In the aforesaid texts, the words Svargam and Moksham have been used interchangeably, according to commentators).





PAANCHARAATRAM

And we have the Paancharaatram, one of the two Vaishnava Agamas, dealing with temple architecture, worship, rituals, etc. And what is the association of these manuals of worship with the Number 5? Explanations abound and the following are some of them:

1. Paancharaatram is called so because it was imparted by the Lord to five deities over a period of five nights.
2. As it deals with the Pancha kaala prakriyaa or the functional division of the day into five parts and what is to be done in each of them, it is known as Paancharaatram.
3. Five sages—Saandilya, Aupagaayana, Maunjyaayana, Kausika and Bharadvaaja—, who were the incarnations of the five weapons of the Lord, propitiated the Lord, who imparted to them the divine wisdom of Paancharaatra in five nights.
4. The Paancharaatra system provides a philosophical basis for the five forms of the Lord, viz., Param, Vyooham, Vibhavam, Antaryaami and Arccha.

PANCHA KAALA PRAKRIYAA

Incidentally, the five duties enjoined on us during various parts of the day, collectively known as the Pancha Kaala Prakriyaa, are:

- a) **Abhigamanam**: After finishing the morning duties, we should go to the Perumal Sannidhi at home, offer the Lord flowers and fruits, recite the Sriranga Gadyam and perform Saranagati at His lotus feet with the Dvaya Mantram, for the unhindered performance of the day's service to the Lord.
- b) **Upaadaanam**: This refers to the collection of materials required for the Lord's worship, like Tulasi, darbham, samit, flowers, provisions required for the Lord's breakfast, etc.





c) **Ijyaa:** This is the time for the elaborate worship of Emperuman through Tiruvaaraadhanam, with Mantraasanam, Snaanaasanam, Alankaaraasanam, Bhojyaasanam, Punar Mantraasanam and Paryankaasanam.

d) **Swaadhyayam:** After partaking of Bhagavat prasaadam, we should perform japam of mantras like the Dvaadasaaksharam, engage in paraayanam of Srimad Ramayanam and other scriptures. After that, till the evening is the time for attending to domestic duties.

e) **Yogam:** This is the time for sleep. However, before the goddess of sleep embraces us, we should mentally recite the Vaikuntta Gadyam, Bhagavat Dhyaana Sopaanam, etc., all of which enable us to focus our thoughts on the extremely beautiful form and features of the Lord. With His magnificent form etched in our mind, with thoughts of His auspicious attributes regaling our intellect, we should slowly drift off to sleep.

We talked about collection of flowers, Tulasi, etc. for the Lord's worship. There are again five ways of gathering these, each one of them successively less desirable than the following one—

1. Ideally, the flowers, fruits and Tulasi leaves used for Tiruvaaraadhanam should be grown by us in our own garden, with our own effort. We may remember the kainkaryams of Sri Periyazhwar, Sri Tondaradippodi Azhwar, et al, in this regard.
2. Not everyone is blessed with the conveniences required for the above method. In such a case, we can gather these from gardens, public places or forests where they have grown by themselves.
3. Next in the order of acceptability are those we buy from the vendors or market. Since there is no guarantee of purity in respect of bought items, offering these to the Lord ranks rather low on the list.
4. Sometimes others bring us flowers, fruits, etc. from their gardens.





Though these can be used for worship, they can never equal those grown by us. Shastras tell us that the fruits of worship with items obtained from others would really reach only the latter.

5. The last on the list is items which we seek and obtain from others. These are to be used only if nothing else is available.

Here is a slokam from Tulasi Maahaatmyam, which lays down the order of acceptability of flowers and fruits—

“Sva prayatna kreetam shastam, madhyamam vanyam uchyate

Adhamam tu kraya kreetam yaachitam tu adhamaadhamam”

This is not to dishearten those using flowers, etc. (in Tiruvaaraadhanam) which are bought, but only to point out the desirability of using flowers grown through our own effort, which are that much dearer to the Lord's heart.

If what is described above represents the functional division of the day into five parts, there is one more chronological division, which is found in the Dharma Shaastras—

1. Praata: kaalam
2. Sangava Kaalam
3. Madhyaahnam
4. Aparaaahnam and
5. Saayamkaalam

PANCHA SAMSKAARAM

If the Lord has such great affinity for five, we find that the means to attain Him are also based on this magic numeral 5.

Every Sri Vaishnava is supposed, upon Upanayanam, to pay obeisance to an

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Acharya and undergo the following five processes, which are cumulatively known as Pancha Samskaaram;

1. **Taapam:** The Acharya imprints on the shoulders of the sishya the signs of the divine discus and the cosmic conch, purifying him physically and cleansing him of sin. Those who do not undergo this process can not attain the Lord, says the Taittireeya Aaranyakam—"Atapta tanoo: na tadaamo asnute".
2. **Pundram:** With the twelve names of Emperuman, the Acharya adorns the sishya's body at twelve places with oordhva pundram (Tiruman and Sreechoornam).
3. **Mantropadesam:** The three esoteric formulations (or the Rahasya Trayam) viz., Ashtaaksharam, Dvayam and Charamaslokam, are imparted to the ardent disciple at this juncture, representing the greatest treasure that can ever be acquired by anyone.
4. **Naamakaranam:** Whatever name the disciple was known by till this ritual, he becomes thereafter a "Raamanuja Daasa", becoming an adherent of the great and glorious tradition that has Sri Ramanuja as its fountainhead, proudly carrying the appellation of a sworn servant of Ramanuja and of his followers.
5. **Yagyam:** The Acharya then instructs the sishya in the worship of Sriman Narayana, through the process known as "Tiru Aaraadhanam".

These five processes represent a giant leap in the life of a Srivaishnava, transforming him from a mere nobody into a blessed Bhaagavata, his life thenceforth dedicated to the ceaseless service of the Lord and His devotees. Hence, for ascending to the pinnacle of Paradise, the Pancha Samskaaras --- represent the first significant steps the aspiring entrant to Sri Vaikunttam should take.

And when we think of ritualistic worship of the Lord in the form of Tiruvaaraadhanam (forming the fifth item of Pancha Samskaaram), we find, to





our total lack of surprise, that five vessels are used in the same, popularly known as Pancha Paatram—meant for offering the Lord Arghyam, Paadyam, Aachamaneeyam, Snaaneeyam/Paaneeyam and Sarvaarththa Toyam.

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PART 3

PANCHA KOSAM

The body is divided into five modes or Kosams, each successive one subtler than the preceding one. According to the Taittireeyopanishad, these five are respectively

1. Annamaya Kosam
2. Praanamaya Kosam
3. Manomaya Kosam
4. Vigyaanamaya Kosam and
5. Anandamaya Kosam

If this is what the Aanandavalli has to say, the Bhriguvalli depicts Varuna telling his son Bhrigu Maharshi to meditate on the aforesaid five as verily the Parabrahmam-- first on Food, then on the Life Breath, then on the Mind, then the Intellect and finally on Bliss, pointing out perhaps that the lower stages of realization have to be gone through before one acquires the knowledge of the Ultimate.

THE FIVE FUNDAMENTALS

Another quintet, without the knowledge of which liberation is impossible, is the Five Fundamentals. These are five concepts, upon knowing which one knows everything worth knowing. All Scripture, whether it is the sacred Shruti, the Itihaasas or the Puranas, is about these five fundamentals. What then are these?

1. The nature and attributes of the Lord: When we seek to attain something, it is imperative for us to know everything about the object of our desire.





Similarly, wisdom about the innumerable auspicious attributes of the Lord and His glorious form that set Him apart from the innumerable other deities and demigods, is to be acquired.

2. Know Thyself: The true nature of the self or the Jeevatma, its eternal bond of service with the Paramaatma and the inalienable relationship of Master and servant that binds it inseparably to the Paramaatma, are to be known, if at all we aspire for the ultimate of pleasures.

3. The Strategy: The Jeevatma, in its quest for Moksham, should learn about, analyse and adopt a strategy ideally suited for achieving the desired goal. Bhakti or ceaseless devotion spread over numerous births and Prapatti or absolute surrender to the Lord, are the two possible ways of attaining liberation. Bhakti, being long-drawn and requiring stringent sense control, etc., is definitely beyond the capabilities of weak mortals like us. Saranagati or Prapatti, involving abject and unconditional surrender to Emperuman, is obviously the sole strategy for people like us without any measure of spiritual strength.

4. The Fabulous Fruit: We should know the indescribable and boundless pleasure which each Jeevatma is destined for, if it attains liberation. This is the bliss which emerges from selfless service to the Lord and His Divine Consort, in the company of like-minded liberated souls having no desire for anything but eternal servitude to the Almighty.

5. The Hurdles: Life is but a hurdles-race. If we take a single step towards liberation, any number of factors intervenes and hinders further progress. The main stumbling block in the Pilgrim's Progress is the accumulated baggage of good and bad deeds which the Jeevatma gathers during its interminable sojourn in Samsaaram, which necessitate more and more births to work them off.

These five concepts form the cornerstones of spiritual wisdom, without which it would be impossible for anyone to even think of, leave alone attain,





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liberation. Here is a beautiful slokam enumerating the Five Fundamentals:

**"Praapyasya Brahmano roopam, Praaptuscha pratyak Aatmana:
Praaptyupaayam phalam chaiva Praapti virodhi: tathaiva cha
Vadanti sakalaa Vedaa: setihaasa Puraanakaa:"**

Here is a much more intelligible translation of the aforesaid sloka, telling us that Sri Nammazhwar's verses provide us blemishless wisdom about these five concepts:

**"Mikka Irai nilayum, meyyaam uyir nilayum
Takka neriyum tadayaagi tokkiyalum oozh vinayum vaazh vinayaum
Odum Kurukayar Kon yaazhinisai Vedaatiyal"**

THE FIVE ENEMIES

We saw how knowledge of the Hurdles (as part of the Five Fundamentals) is essential for everyone. The Vaartthaamaala catalogues these hurdles as follows:

1. **Shareeram:** Our frail body, which is dominated by the five karmendriyas and five gnaanendriyas, is the most powerful hurdle, preventing us from following the dictates of the Lord-- **"Bhagavat anuvarttanattukku pratibandhakam shareeram"**.
2. **Family and Friends:** Often, it is family ties and attachment which prevent us from treading the path of renunciation preached by Acharyas—the more the attachment to the family, the less the inclination to toe the line of Acharyas—**"Aachaarya anuvartthanattukku pratibandhakam putra mitraadigal"** .
3. **Bad Company:** Friendship with people of atheistic, cynical and indifferent mentalities will sap our own faith and make us less enthusiastic for the enlightening and purifying company of Bhaagavatas—





"Sri Vaishnavargal anuvarttanattukku pratibandhakam itara sahavaasam"

4. **Wealth:** The staunch faith that surrender to the Lord is the sole strategy, gets diluted once we engage in -----the unending pursuit of wealth— "Upaaya adhyavasaayattukku pratibandhakam arttha praavanyam". This is why the Lord says that whomever He wishes to bless, first He deprives the devotee of his wealth--"Yasya anugraham icchaami tasya vittam haraamyaham"

5. **Material Pleasures:** Preoccupation with material pursuits and mundane pleasures would lead us into methods for achievement of the same, diverting us from the path of Prapatti and the supreme goal of attaining the Lord. The ultimate bliss of bhagavat anubhavam gets shadowed by the glaring floodlights of material pleasures.

FIVE COMPONENTS OF SARANAGATI

We saw that Saranagati at the lotus feet of the Lord is the only strategy for people like us, capable of redeeming us from the mundane morass in which we wallow. This Saranagati or absolute surrender to the Lord, again has five components:

1. **Aanukoolya Sankalpam:** One who wishes to surrender must first resolve to toe the line of the Lord, as laid down in scripture. 'Irrespective of my long record of crime, I shall henceforth obey Your dictates implicitly', says the Jeevatma to the Lord.
2. **Praatikoolya Varjanam:** Though this is a natural corollary of the first item, still it is reiterated to ensure that there is no misunderstanding about the nature of the contract with the Almighty. The second resolution of the Jeevatma is that it would never transgress divine dictates, as laid down in the Shruti and the Smritis.
3. **Goptrutva Varanam:** The conscious choice of the Lord Sriman Narayana as

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one's sole saviour and a plaintive cry to Him to rush to our rescue, are the next item on the surrenderer's agenda.

4. **Rakshisyati it Visvaasa:** Surrendering to anyone would be fruitful only if we have an absolute faith that the person to whom we are surrendering is capable of and would be inclined to save us. Maha Visvaasam or the Great Faith as it is known is the cornerstone of all Prapatti, without which sincere surrender would be impossible.

5. **Kaarpanyam:** We should be acutely aware of our helplessness in all matters, spiritual and mundane and critically conscious of our total incapacity to save ourselves. Our moral, material and spiritual poverty should always agitate our mind. Aakinchanyam or helplessness and its realization by the Jeevatma impart it the requisite submissiveness essential for surrender. Sri Tondaradippodi Azhwar's Tirumaalai paasurams beginning with "oorilen kaani illai", "Manattilor toymai Illai" "Tavattulaar tammil allen", "Kulitthu moondru analai ombum" etc. are pointers in this regard.

THE FIVE DOUBTS

We thus see that the glorious strategy of Prapatti has five components. However, people are often plagued by doubts regarding the efficacy of Saranagati as a tool to liberation. These doubts are again of five types, as enumerated by Swami Desikan in Sri Nyaasa Tilakam—

1. Jeevaatmas accumulate immeasurable sin during each of their births, with the burden assuming crippling proportions with each successive body that they inhabit. And each of these sins is so serious, that its deleterious effects are likely to continue over several births. In such a case, how can it be said that a simple strategy like Prapatti washes away all our sins?

This doubt arises because of ignorance of the nature of Sri Mahalakshmi. The Universal Mother is so merciful that She intercedes with the Lord on behalf the surrendered soul and makes a strong recommendation to the Lord for





ridding the soul of all sin, however grave and however numerous. Such maternal intervention ensures that all sins are pardoned, irrespective of number and gravity.

2. The Lord is portrayed as an impartial arbiter, doling out reward and punishment in perfect proportion to the meritorious and sinful deeds of the Jeevas. In such a case, how can He bestow on the sinning Jeevatma the ultimate fruit of Moksham, which is beyond the reach of even distinguished deities like Brahma and Shiva?

No doubt the Lord is indeed a judge and jury, affording pleasure and pain to the Jeevas according to their deeds. However, there is an eternal and inalienable bond between Him and the individual souls, as that between father and son. Just as even the prodigal son is entitled to the father's property and the father does give him his share once the son reforms and returns to the family fold, so too, the Lord has no hesitation in rewarding the Jeeva with Liberation, once the latter realizes its follies and surrenders at the lotus feet of the Universal Father.

3. The Lord has nothing to gain from anyone's offering. He is the *avaapta samasta kaama*: or one who has no needs to be satisfied. Such being the case, would He afford the Jeeva the ultimate of all rewards, viz., Moksham, in return for a sinecure of a strategy like *Prapatti*, the effort for which is totally disproportionate to the object sought to be achieved?

Though the Lord has nothing to gain from our *Prapatti*, His natural and boundless mercy for errant souls makes Him bestow the greatest of favours in return for the smallest of gestures, just as a King is pleased by the submission of a mere lime fruit.

4. While demigods are easy to please and shower their devotees with minor boons at the drop of a hat, the Lord is known as one who tests His devotees for quite long, before bestowing major bonuses. This being so, would He grant liberation to the Jeeva who performs *Prapatti*, as and when the latter desires





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the same?

While it is true that minor benefits flow rather late from our Lord, as far as Bharanyaasam is concerned, it melts down Emperuman's naturally merciful heart, resulting in the expeditious grant of Moksham.

5. Those who perform Prapatti are of different types—some are Vidvaans while others are ignoramuses, some are rich while some do not have a penny to call their own, some are paragons of virtue while others have done no good in their lives. How can the Lord bestow the same significant benefit of Moksham on all these surrendered souls, irrespective of the differences among them? Surely, righteous men and wise persons are entitled to better treatment than the wicked and ignorant?

Irrespective of on whom He bestows the fruit of liberation, the Lord considers Himself to be the real beneficiary, since He has brought one more Jeevaatma into His fold, who had been eluding Him so long. Thus the Lord's major concern is "Chetana Laabham". As such, Prapatti is a great equalizer, bringing the same blissful reward to every one of its adherents, irrespective of differences among them.

THE FIVE AVOIDABLES

For a Prapanna, who has surrendered Himself heart and soul to the Lord, five categories of people are to be avoided like the plague. Here, the Vaartthaamaala draws a comparison between a Pativrata and Prapanna, prescribing common matters to be avoided by both:

1. Just as a Pativrata would have nothing to do with a prostitute and would avoid even the latter's shadow, a Prapanna should avoid resorting to demigods, who would harm his dedication and devotion to Sriman Narayana as the sole refuge and saviour.
2. As a chaste woman would look askance at those who patronize prostitutes,





so too, a Prapanna should avoid the company of those who do not owe allegiance to Srīman Narayana as the Supreme Lord and Master.

3. Those who have abandoned their husbands and consorted with others would be avoided by a chaste woman at all costs. So too, Vaishnavas who embrace the practices of other faiths, are to be shunned by a Prapanna.

4. Pretenders, who profess to be Pativratas but do not act accordingly, would have no attraction for a genuine Pativrata. Similarly, a Prapanna would like to avoid those who sport all the external symbols of a Sri Vaishnava, but lack the devotion and dedication that go with the name.

5. Unmarried girls are no company for chaste women, who prefer to consort with other females of their own persuasion and conviction. Similarly, Prapannas find no pleasure in the company of immature Samsaaris.

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PART 4

THE FEARFUL FIVE

It is fear of God that prompts most of us to adhere to correct conduct. This is true not only of we mortals, but of even distinguished deities, we are told by the Taittireeya Upanishad, which reveals that Five exalted entities perform their duties out of fear of God. The Wind blows out of its fear of the Lord, the Sun rises and sets everyday like clockwork at the appointed time, Agni and Indra do their respective duties perfectly and Mrityu, the deity of death, promptly reclaims lives whose time on earth has run out—

“Bheeshaasmaat vaata: pavate, bheeshodeti Soorya:

Bheeshaasmaat Agnischa Indrascha, Mrityur dhaavati panchama iti”

The same mantra is found with slight variation in the Kathopanishad too—

“Bhayaat asya Agni: tapati, Bhayaat tapati Soorya:

Bhayaat Indrascha Vaayuscha, Mrityur dhaavati panchama:”

Shastras tell us that the King is verily the Lord Himself. If the Lord has five forms, the King too represents five deities in his functions, says Srimad Ramayanam. He is verily Agni when dealing with enemies, resembles Indra in his valour, Soma when he functions as the benefactor of his subjects, Yama when he deals out just punishment to the wrongdoers and Varuna, in being pleasant to everyone. Here is the beautiful slokam from Ramayana—

“Pancha roopaani Raajaana: dhaarayanti amitoujasa:

Agne: Indrasya Somasya Yamasya Varunasya cha

Oushnyam tathaa vikramam cha soumyam dandam prasannataam”

We learn from Vaali that there are five five-nailed animals, the flesh of which can be eaten by Kshatriyaas—





1. Porcupine
2. Pig
3. Rabbit
4. Tortoise
5. Iguana (Udumbu).

Enmity is normally caused by one of the following five factors, according to Sri Rama—

1. That which results from one's sworn enemies
2. That which is the result of property disputes
3. That resulting from a dispute over women
4. That caused by a stinging insult, which is much more harmful than physical injury, and
5. That resulting from an act of omission or commission.

A slightly different version of what causes antagonism and hostility, is available in the Shanti Parva of Mahabharata, with a wise bird telling a King the five sources of enmity- disputes over women, disputes over property, intemperate speech, enmity subsisting from birth and that caused by an offensive act, however distant in time.

It is again Sri Rama who tells Bharata that sorrow generally arises from five sources:

1. Fire
2. Floods
3. Famine





4. Disease, and
5. Death.

Five more sources could also be the cause of distress to citizens:

1. Corrupt and inefficient officials
2. Thieves and robbers
3. Aliens
4. Those close to centres of political power, and
5. A miserly and unkind government.

Looking at the current scenario, how true are these words, though it is thousands of years since they were uttered!

In an argument with Ashtaavakra Maharshi, a vidvaan cites the following quintets as significant ones:

1. The Five Fires—Holy Fires are five in number, viz.,
 - a) Gaarhapatyam
 - b) Aahavaneeyam
 - c) Dakshinaagni
 - d) Sabhyam and
 - e) Aavasatyam.

We are told that when Bhageeratha performed penance for bringing down the Ganga from the worlds above, he did so standing amidst the five fires-

“Panchaagni madhye cha tapastepe samvatsaram nripa:”





2. Pankti, one of the beautiful metres in Sanskrit poetry, has five parts
3. The Principal Yaagas are again Five—Agnihotram, Darsapoornamaasam, Chaaturmaasyam, Pasubandham and Somam.
4. The power that prevails in the five elements has five functions-
 - a) Pramaanam
 - b) Viparyayam
 - c) Vikalpam
 - d) Nidraa and
 - e) Smriti.

Here is the relative Mahabharata slokam—

**"Pancha Agnaya: pancha padaa Pankti:
Yagyaa: panchaivaapi atha pancha indriyaani
Drishtaa Vede pancha choodaascha pancha
Loke khyaatam Panchanadam cha punyam"**

5. The Land of Five Sacred Rivers: The aforesaid slokam talks about five sacred rivers. We are reminded here of two such places in India, one in the north and the other in the south, which are named after the five rivers traversing the land. Punjab in the north-west of India derives its name from "Pancha Aapa:" or the land of the five waters. These rivers are known now as the Jhelum, Chenab, Beas, Sutlej and Ravi. Another beautiful name is Tiruvaaiyaaru near Tanjavur in south India, which is blessed by the Kaveri and four of its tributaries—Vadalaaru, Vennaaru, Vettaaru and Kudamurutti. Tiruvaiyyaru finds a mention in the commentary to Periya Tirumozhi—"Kizhakke Iyyaattnile Yaadavaraayar vandirukka" Bathing these days is a hurried affair, lasting at the most five minutes and aimed merely at physical cleanliness.





However, it is a much more significant part of our ablutions and deserves greater attention to detail, if it is to cleanse our inner dirt too. Srimad Azhagiasingar's Aahnika grantham tells us that an effective Snaanam consists of five steps:

1. Sankalpam
2. Sookta Patanam—recitation of Varuna Sooktam
3. Maarjanam
4. Aghamarshanam—recitation of the Aghamarshana Sooktam, and
5. Devata tarpanam

**“Sankalpam Sookta patanam maarjanam cha Aghamarshanam
Devataa tarpanam chaiva snaanam panchaangam uchyate”**

Shall we see some more quintets connected with good conduct, as prescribed by the Scripture?

When you sit down to a meal, five of your body parts should be wet, says the Mahabharata—two hands, two feet and the mouth. The premium placed by Shastras on basic personal hygiene is evident in most of our scriptural prescriptions, which, alas, we ignore too often to our own peril—

**“ Panchaardhro bhojanam kuryaat praangmukho mounam aasthita:
Na nindet anna bhakshyaamscha svaadu asvaadu cha bhakshayet”**

This piece of wisdom from the Epic tells us to eat in silence, facing the east and never to comment adversely about the food on your plate, whether it is tasty or otherwise. (My son and daughter, who were looking over my shoulder as I was typing this article, have mysteriously vanished, fearing another lecture on food habits.)

Sri Bheeshma tells Yudhishtira that five “Doshas” plague all men—





1. Kaamam or excessive attachment
2. Krodham or anger
3. Bhayam or fear
4. Nidraa or sleepiness and
5. Svaasa: or breath

And how do we overcome these "Doshas"?

1. Anger is to be conquered by cultivating tolerance and forgiveness
2. Attachment can be overcome by performing duties without an eye on the fruit thereof
3. Cultivating good habits and personal hygiene would help us dispel sleepiness
4. Perception based on logic and reason would enable us to conquer fear
5. Lightening our intake and overcoming the tendency to eat and drink anything anywhere, would help us restore the rhythm to the life breath.

FIVE SOURCES OF HIMSA

While we may consciously refrain from hurting other creatures, we may be the inadvertent and unwitting source of pain and death for several lowly creatures like insects, flies, etc. Shastras have identified Five Himsa Stthanams, which we use in our everyday life, which could cause suffering and death—

1. Khandinee—refers to domestic pounding instruments like the "Ulakkai"
2. Peshinee—consists of grindstones, etc.
3. The Stove is another identified source of death for lowly creatures.
4. Containers used for carrying and storing water, and





5. Cleaning aids like the broomstick, vacuum cleaner, etc.

It is to rid oneself from the unanticipated sin accruing from the aforesaid five items that Shastras prescribe the performance of Vaisvadevam, Pancha Maha Yagyaas, etc.

All of us know that speaking untruth is to be avoided like the plague. It has been dinned into us that under no circumstance should we speak a lie. However, the Mahabharata enumerates five scenarios in which untruths are permissible and would not constitute a sin—Untruths told at the time of marriage (we all remember the Tamizh saying, "Aayiram poi solli oru kalyaanam seyyalaam"), telling an untruth for protecting one's Guru, uttering a lie for saving one's life, tampering with the truth while speaking to women.

In case you think I am making this up, (especially the last item) here is the Mahabharata slokam—

**"Na narma yuktam vachanam hinasti
Na streeshu na vivaaha kale
Na Gurvartthe na aatmano jeevitaartthe
Pancha anrutaani aahu: apaatakaani"**

The same Epic lists the five holiest of things—

1. Yagyam
2. Daanam
3. Dayaa or mercy
4. Vedas
5. Satyam

"Yagyo Daanam Dayaa Vedaa: Satyam cha Prithveepate!





Pancha etaani pavitraani shashttam sucharitam tapa:"

The Cow is considered holy. Five products from the Cow, cumulatively known as Pancha Gavyam, are considered to be purifying agents, capable of cleansing the physique—

1. Milk
2. Curds
3. Ghee or Clarified Butter
4. and 5 Cow's excreta

For those who are engaged in Yogam, the following five qualities are indispensable, without which their efforts would be in vain—

1. **Akrodham** or an equable temperament, not prone to anger
2. **Guru Susrooshaa** or serving one's Guru with devotion and dedication
3. **Soucham**: Cleanliness of the mind and body
4. **Aahaara laaghavam**: partaking of light meals, giving up food which excites or incites, eating merely for keeping body and soul together
5. **Constant learning** of the scripture from one's Guru, without ever thinking that one has mastered everything—

"Akrodho Guru sushrooshaa soucham aahaara laaghavam

Nitya svaadhyaya iti ete niyamaa: pancha keertitaa:"

says the Yoga Rahasyam.

And the same work prescribes the following five virtues for Sanyaasis—

"Astheyam Brahmacharyancha tyaaga: alobha: tathaiva cha

Vrataani pancha bhikshoonaam Ahimsa paramaani vai"





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1. Refraining from taking or even coveting another's belongings
2. Strict observance of Brahmacharyam, with thoughts focused solely on the Ultimate
3. Complete renunciation of attachment to worldly objects
4. Avoiding causing any type of harm to anyone, by word, thought or deed, which is what Ahimsa is all about
5. Practicing generosity in imparting knowledge, especially knowledge that leads to liberation.

For success in this world and in the meritorious worlds above, the worship of five people is prescribed by the Mahabharata--One's Mother, Father, Acharya, Agni and the Almighty--

**"Pitaa Maataa tathaiva Agni: Guru: Aatmaa cha panchama:
Yasya ete poojita: Paartha! Tasya lokou ubhou jitou"**

FIVE TYPES OF ADHARMAM

Having seen the elements of good conduct, it is essential for us to find out what constitutes Adharmam too. The seventh Skandham of the Bhaagavata Puraanam guides us as to the five types of Adharma which are to be avoided at all cost--

**"Vidharma: Para dharmascha Aabhaasa Upamaa Cchala:
Adharma shaakhaa: pancha imaa dharmaggyo adharmavat varjayet"**

These five items refer to conduct which appears to be righteous, but is not really so according to scriptural prescriptions--

1. Acts done under the impression that they are righteous, but which do not conform to codes of conduct prescribed for oneself, are known as **Vidharmam**.





2. Following rules of conduct prescribed for others is **Paradharmam**. For instance, Arjuna wished to abandon the battlefield, resulting in non-performance of Svadharmam and espousing Paradharmam. Abandoning one's duty and espousing that prescribed for others is roundly condemned by Sri Krishna in the Gita—"Svardharme nidhanam shreya: Paradharmo bhayaavaha:"

3. Performing acts which do not have the specific sanction of scriptures (like Chaidya vandanam) is known as **Upadharmam** or Upamaa.

4. Acts done outside the ambit of the code of conduct prescribed for one's Ashrama are known as **Aabhaasam**. Thus, a Brahmachari consorting with women, a householder wearing ochre robes meant solely for Sanyaasis and a Sanyaasi performing Agni kaaryam, are guilty of Aabhaasam.

5. Interpreting the Vedas in a way contrary to the accepted and traditional manner and bending scriptural prescriptions to suit one's own convenience, are known as **Cchalam**.

FIVE RESIDENCES OF KALI PURUSHA

A beautiful narrative is found in the Bhaagavata Puraanam, where Pareekshit Maharaja defeats the Kali Purusha (the personification of everything bad and wicked) and banishes the latter from his empire. Since the entire earth belongs to Pareekshit, the Kali Purusha seeks some place to reside. Pareekshit tells Kali that he could live in peace at places where sins like prostitution, gambling, drinking and destruction of life for pleasure are committed. Not satisfied with these four residences offered to him, Kali Purusha seeks from Pareekshit a single source of sin, which cumulates all the four mentioned above. The King said, "You can reside in Gold". By doing so, Pareekshit gave to Kali the right of residence at places where five sources of sin are practiced—Untruth, Prostitution, Violence, Hatred and Pride.

And now for Romance!





Shastras tell us that Manmatha (the Indian equivalent of Cupid, the God of Love) is also known as Pancha Baana:, because he shoots five arrows at lovers, to sharpen their romantic feelings. Appropriately, these arrows are not made of iron or other metal, but of soft and supple flowers—

1. Aravindam
2. Ashokam
3. Chootam
4. navamikaa
5. Neelotpalam

FIVE FUNNY PRACTICES

According to Bodhaayana, there are five peculiar practices prevailing in the South of India and five more in the North, which are contrary to the scripture: If we take the South first, these are

1. Eating in the company of uninitiated persons (those yet to undergo Upanayanam)
2. Eating in the company of one's wife
3. Eating stale food
4. Marrying the daughter of a paternal aunt
5. Marrying the daughter of a maternal uncle

As far as North India is concerned, Bodhaayana finds the following objectionable mores:

1. Dealing in wool





2. Drinking Rum
3. Selling animals which have teeth in the upper and lower jaws
4. Trading in arms and
5. Going to the sea for their livelihood

The trees in Deva lokam are five in number—

1. Mandaaram
2. Paarijaatam
3. Santaanam
4. Kalpavriksham and
5. Hari chandanam

Varuna, the deity of the waters, has five names—

1. Prachetas
2. Varuna:
3. Pasee (because he wields a rope)
4. Yaadasaam Pati:
5. Appati: (master of waters)

Similarly, Planet Mars or Chevaai has five names—

1. Angaarakan
2. Kujan
3. Bhouman





4. Lohitaangan

5. Maheesutan

Another planet, Raahu, too goes by five names—

1. Svarbhaanu

2. Raahu

3. Saihikeya:

4. Vidhuntuda:

5. Tamastu

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PART 5

What is Strength to a King? Is it mere muscle, brawn and vast armies? No, says Vidura, telling Dhritaraashtra that Strength is of Five kinds—

1. The availability of wise and mature advisers—Amaatya balam
2. A well-endowed Treasury—Dhana balam
3. Descent from a distinguished royal family—Aabhijaatyam
4. Praggyaa Balam or the strength of intellect and
5. Physical strength, as represented by armies and abundance of brawn.

DEITIES WITH FIVE FACES

Gaayatri Devi is said to have five faces, according to the Gaayatryashtakam—
"Gaayatreeem Harivallabhaam trinayanaam panchaananaam". Interestingly, the mantra is supposed to be divided into five during Japam, with breaks after the Pranavam, the three Vyaahritis and the three parts of the Gaayatri mantra. If Gaayatri japam is done in the prescribed manner, it would rid us of the gravest of sins and if not, prove counterproductive, say Shastras—

"Panchaavasaana Gaayatree pancha paataka naasinee

Panchaavasaana heena tu pancha paataka daayinee"

Another deity often depicted with five faces is Sri Hanumaan. Speaking of Siriya Tiruvadi, let us enjoy a beautiful tribute by Kamban to the Vaanara Veera, with a repeated and effective use of Number Five—

"Anjile ondru pettraan anjile ondrai taavi

anjile ondraar aana aariyarkkaaga egi

anjile ondru pettra anangai kandu

anjile ondrai vaittaan avan nammai alitthu kaappaan"



Though this appears cryptic, it is really simple, and is based on the Five Elements or Pancha Bhootaas. "Anjile ondru pettraan" refers to Hanumaan being the son of Vaayu, one of the five elements. "anjile ondrai taavi" portrays his act of leaping across the skies—(Aakaasam, another of the five elements)—to reach Lanka, in search of Sri Mythily. "anjile ondraar aana Ariyaarkkaaga"—Though the brothers Rama were only four at birth, Rama, in a display of His infinite love and mercy, adopted the lowly hunter Guha as His own brother, saying "Ninnodum iyvar aanom". It is for this Magnificent Monarch Rama, that Maaruti crossed the ocean to Lanka. "Anjile ondru pettra Anangu" refers to Sita Devi, who is none other than the daughter of Bhoomi Piraatti (another of the Pancha Bhootas). "Anjile ondrai vaitthaan" commemorates Hanuman's act of setting Lanka on fire (the fifth element).

Shiva is also a deity with Five Faces, we are told by the Sri Venkateswara Suprabhaatha Stotram, which says that all deities including Shiva, Brahma, Shanmukha, Indra, et al crowd the doors of the Tirumala temple, singing the praises of the Lord of Seven Hills—"Panchaanana abja bhava Shanmukha Vaasavaadyaa: Trivikramaadi charitam vibudhaa: stuvanti". These faces of Mahadeva are known as Sadyojaatam, Vaamadevam, Tatpurusnam, Aghoram and Eesaanam.

FIVE IN TIRUPPAAVAI

The fifth paasuram of Tiruppaavai eulogizes five forms of the Lord—

1. Maayan,
2. Mannu Vada Madurai Maindan,
3. Tooya peru neer Yamunai turaivan,
4. .Aayar kulatthinil tondrum ani vilakku,
5. Taayai kudal vilakkam seida Damodaran.





The latter half of the paasuram depicts five forms of service or kinkaryam to the Lord—

1. Tooyomaai vandu,
2. Toomalar toovi,
3. Tozhudu,
4. Vaayinaal Paadi,
5. Manatthinaal chintikka.

The close association of Tiruppavai with Number Five is brought out in the verse, "Iyyayndum Iyndum ariyaada maanidarai vaiyyam sumappadum vambu". When speaking of ten, Sri Nammazhwar too puts it as a multiple of five—"Iyndinoodu iyndum vallaar". The Dvaya Mantram, with its 25 letters, is described by Swami Desikan as five times four plus five—"Mukuundan isaittu arul seida ynnaal iyndum"

FIVE HOLY WOMEN

"Pancha kanyaa smaren nityam mahaa paataka naasanam" says the Scripture, telling us to think daily of the glory of five great specimens of womanhood—

"Ahalya Droupati Sita Taara Mandodari tathaa

Pancha kanyaa: smaren nityam mahaa paataka naasanam"

Another grouping of five deities which is supposed to be an instant purifier, is as follows:

"Gaayatreeem Tulaseem Gangaam Kaamadhenum Arundhateem

Pancha maatroom smaren nityam mahaa paataka naasanam.

Speaking of women, here is something to make their hearts burn with envy:





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Paying tributes to Aamaruviappan at Terazhundur, Sri Tirumangai Mannan incidentally comments on the beautiful womenfolk of Azhundur. Their hair had five divine characteristics, according to Azhwar—

1. Fragrance (natural and not due to the use of aromatics)
2. Darkness (natural and not owing to application of dyes)
3. Density
4. Silkiness/Suppleness and
5. Sweetness which attracted bees in droves.

It can be noted that all the desirable characteristics of female hair, which women strive today to achieve or at least simulate through the application of shampoos, conditioners, dyes, lotions, potions, etc., were present naturally in the damsels of Azhundur, so much so that bees found their hair more attractive than flowers—“Ambaraavum kan madavaar iympaal anayum Azhundur”. Women’s hair is also known as “Iympaal”, as it is tied in five different ways

BHAKTISAARA’S FAVOURITE NUMBER

Tirumazhisai Piraan makes much of a play with Number Five. His very first verse of Tirucchandaviruttam begins with “Poo nilaaya iyndumaai”, referring to the five characteristics possessed by the first of elements, viz., Earth. The second verse too has a lot to say about five—“Aarum aarum aarumaai, or iyndum iyndum iyndumaai”.

Three groups of five are referred to here.

1. The Pancha Maha Yagyas, of which the Lord is the object of worship
2. The Five Fires which form His body, like other sentient beings and non-sentient objects



3. The Five Aahutis ("Praanaaya svaahaa", etc.) with which food is offered to His form as the Antaryaami.

Azhwar refers to five more quintets in the third paasuram—

"Iyndum Iyndum Iyndumaagi". The three more groups of five described here are

1. The five elements—Air, Water, Fire, Earth and Atmosphere
2. The five Gnaana Indriyas—Skin, Eyes, Ears, Tongue and Nose
3. The five Karma Indriyas—Speech, hands, legs and the two excretory organs
4. The five Tanmaatrams—Sabda, Sparsa, Roopa, Rasa and Gandha Tanmaatrams
5. The Five Shaktis of the Lord—the divine form of Para Vasudeva is said to be of these five shaktis.

THE TOUCH OF FIVE

According to the Vaartthaamaalai, Prapannas should avoid the asociation of five items—"Prapannanukku anju sparsam parihaaryam saiva sparsam, Maayaavaada Sparsam, Ekaayaana Sparsam, Upaayaantara Sparsam, Vishayaantara Sparsam". The prescription for remaining unaffected by the touch of these five is enumerated by the same work, as follows:

"Emperumaanudaya sarvasmaat paratvattai anusandhikka saiva sparsam pom: samasta kalyaana gunangalai anusandhikka maayaa vaada sparsam pom: Sriya: Patitvattai ninaikka Ekaayana sparsam arum: Upaaya poorttiyai anusandhikka upaayaantara sparsam arum: Divya mangala vighrhattai anusandhikka vishayaantara sparsam pom"

The Mahabharata catalogues five types of sinners, with whom we should not even converse—those who kill Brahmins, those guilty of killing cows, adulterers, those living off women and those who are insincere.



PANCHAAKSHARAM

The five letters which form the core, the very essence of the Ashtaakshara mantram are depicted by the Upanishad thus—"Naaraayanaaya it panchaaksharaani". In Saara Sangraham, Swami Desikan tells us the glory of these five letters—"Iyindu ezhuttile aparicchinnamaana parama purushaarttha sambandhattai ugandu".

Another famous mantram of five letters is that relating to Rudra.

FIVE WAYS OF DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

One's Wealth is to be divided into and spent for five purposes, if we are to lead a comfortable existence here in this world and in the worlds above, says the Bhaagavata Puraanam. The first and foremost item for which wealth is to be allocated is Dharmam or charity. One-fifth is to be spent on earning fame, one-fifth on things of one's desire, one-fifth on one's family and friends and the balance one-fifth should be saved for rainy days—

"Dharmaaya yasase kaamaaya svajanaaya cha
Panchadhaa vibhajan vittam ihaamutra cha modate"

SECULAR SIGNIFICANCE

Wikipedia mentions several other reasons for the significance of Number 5.

The Five Pillars of Islam is the term given to the five duties incumbent on every Muslim. These duties are

1. Shahadah (profession of faith),
2. Salah (ritual prayer),
3. Zakat (alms tax),





4. Sawm (fasting during Ramadan), and
5. Hajj (pilgrimage Mecca).

Muslims offer Namaaz or prayer five times a day.

The Bible consists of five principal books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, which are collectively called the Five Books of Moses.

The Japanese names for the days of the week, Tuesday through Saturday, come from the elements of nature, via the identification of the elements with the five planets visible to the naked eye. The Japanese calendar has a five-day weekly cycle that can be still observed in printed mixed calendars combining Western and Japanese systems. .

The Olympic Games have five interlocked rings as their symbol, representing the number of inhabited continents represented by the Olympians (counting North And South Americas as one continent).

To remind you of elementary Geography, the Oceans in the world are again Five—the Indian Ocean, the Pacific, the Atlantic, the Artic and the Antartic.

The hand has five fingers—

“Mani bandhaat aakanishttam karasya karabho bahi:

Pancha shaakha: saya: Paani: Tarjaneesyaat pradarsinee”

----(Amarakosham)

Which of these fingers is the greatest? Well, there was an argument among the fingers, as to their relative importance. The thumb said, “When the palm is closed, it is I who tower head and shoulders above you people. So I am definitely greater than all of you”. The finger next to the thumb said, “People know of things only because I point them out. As I aid in cognition, I am surely the greatest”. The third finger said, “I am the tallest of you all and this is itself testimony of my superiority”. The Ring Finger retorted, “Does anyone





think of adorning any of you with a ring? I am the automatic choice whenever anyone thinks of a ring. Only the best is rewarded and so am I the greatest". The Little Finger said, "I may not possess any of your superlative features. However, I am extremely contented because whenever the palms fold in obeisance before the Lord, it is I who lead the pack of fingers and stand first in expressing my devotion".

Buddhism requires its adherents to eschew Five Great Sins—

1. Destruction of living creatures
2. Stealing from others
3. Sexual misconduct
4. Incorrect speech and
5. Consumption of liquor and other intoxicants.

Well, it would appear that the possibilities of Five are indeed endless— if we scour the scriptures sincerely, we would definitely come up with any number of items involving this great number. As it is, I have had to discard quite a few clues dealing with Five, for fear of too much elaboration, as this piece has already run to 38 pages and more than 10000 words. Because of this, Pancha Tantra, Pancha Sheela, Panchagni Vidya, Pancha Maha Paatakas, Pancha Dakshina, etc. have all faced the guillotine.

In view of all this, how true is the Upanishadic saying, "Paanktam vaa idam sarvam" (All this is verily made up of Five)!

Srimate Sri LakshmiNrisimha divya paduka sevaka

SrivanSatakopa Sri Narayana Yatindra Mahadesikaya nama:

dasan, sadagopan

