



Varuna Purana: Illustrating Higher States of Consciousness with Stories of Lord Shiva

Peter F Freund

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Varuna Purana is a collection of ten stories about Lord Shiva. Many of the stories are well-known, such as the destruction of the sacrifice of Daksha, the destruction of Tripura, and the legend of the demon Andhaka. But other stories are unique to this Purana, such as the story of the first recitation of the Brahma Sutras by Agni, the messenger of the gods; the story of the activities of the gods during the time of cosmic dissolution; and the story of the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva. But Varuna Purana is much more than a collection of stories, it is also a concise digest of complete knowledge of all the 40 branches of Vedic Science. At the same time it is a handbook and guide for growing experiences on the path to enlightenment. This Purana is a brilliant tour de force of its author, the Rishi Shaunaka, who lived thousands of years ago. A special feature of this ancient text is the clear explanation, by the narrator, Lord Varuna, of the metaphor of the stories in terms of the growth of higher states of consciousness—the growth of enlightenment, the inner awakening. Shiva is a metaphor for the process of transcending and experiencing pure consciousness, “samadhi,” as it is called in Yoga, the state of oneness of eternal unmanifest Being. The aniconic form of Shiva, called the “Lingam,” is a metaphor for the highest goal of evolution, called “Brahman” in Vedanta, and understood as the supreme, ultimate knowledge of Reality. All of the stories together, in sequence present the milestones in the growth of consciousness on the path to the total awakening in Brahman Consciousness. Since ancient times Varuna Purana has been accepted as one of the 18 Upapuranas. However, in modern times the text has been neglected, and only one copy of the manuscript is known. The text has been transcribed, edited and restored, and translated here for the first time. This book includes the Sanskrit text of Varuna Purana; an English translation; an essay on the importance of Upapurana in Vedic Literature; an analysis of the origin and authenticity of the text; a detailed exposition of the milestones of experience in the growth of higher states of consciousness; parallel passages from other Puranas for each story; and a pictorial presentation of the 108 Karanas or dance-gestures that make up the Dance of Shiva, according to Natya Shastra. All the eternal wisdom of life contained in the Puranas is encapsulated in this Varuna Purana: It is a concise digest of the essential teaching of the Vedas, the wisdom of God realization.

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