Lord Dakṣīṇāmūrti

Lord Dakṣīṇāmūrti is Lord Śiva manifest as the first teacher. It is said in the Purāṇas that Lord Brahma, the creator, in the beginning of creation created out of his mind four progeny known as the Sanatkumāras: Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana and Sanatkumāra. It is said that Lord Brahma asked them to join him in the task of creation. However, they were renunciates by nature and even at that age possessed a keen desire to know the truth. So, they set out in the northern direction in search of truth and then performed penance. Pleased with them, Lord Śiva appeared before them as a teacher, seated under a banyan tree, facing the south, and imparted Brahma-vidyā (knowledge of Brahman) to the Sanatkumāras.

It is said that Lord Dakṣīṇāmūrti revealed the truth, which is the identity between the jīva (the individual) and Brahman (the limitless). Thus, Lord Śiva, as Dakṣīṇāmūrti, is the presiding deity of knowledge. The truth is that the Lord is the source of all knowledge, beginning with the Vedas which are a body of knowledge that is revealed to the Rṣis. Dakṣīṇāmūrti, thus symbolizes knowledge and is a very appropriate altar of worship for seekers of knowledge.

The Meaning of the Word Lord Dakṣīṇāmūrti

The word Dakṣīṇāmūrti can be understood in several different ways. Dakṣina means south and mūrti means form. So Dakṣīṇāmūrti means the one who is facing south. The teacher is facing south while imparting knowledge and the disciples are facing north. Dakṣīṇāmūrti Upaniṣad defines the word daksina as the enlightened mind.
According to this definition, Dakṣināmūrti is the one whose form or truth (mūrti) is perceived by an enlightened mind (dakṣina).

The word Dakṣināmūrti can also be seen as made up of two words: dacṣiṇa and amūrti. Dakṣina means able, skillful, and competent. Amūrti means formless. The Lord who is formless in his true nature is also the competent creator, sustainer, and dissolver of this universe through the power of māyā.

Daksīna also means anukula, favorable or kindly disposed. Lord Dakṣināmūrti is always kindly disposed to his devotees and seekers of knowledge. He imparts the knowledge with love and compassion.