

Vishnu Sahasranamam - Origin 🤔



Vishnu sahasranamam Collection

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Description: Understanding the profound six questions that serve as the prologue to Vishnu Sahasranamam and their deeper spiritual significance

Tags: shat-prashni, yudhishtira, bhishma, vishnu-sahasranamam, upeyam, upayam, six-questions

The Six Sacred Questions: Shat Prashni of Yudhishtira 🤔

Section 1: The Questions - A Spiritual Framework 📖

Based on the discourse, the *Shat Prashni* (Six Questions) asked by Yudhishtira to Bhishma serve as the prologue to the *Vishnu Sahasranamam*. The commentary categorizes these questions into two distinct groups: **Upayam** (The Destination/Goal) and **Upeyam** (The Means to attain the goal).

The Complete Verse 🕉

Kim ekam daivatam loke kim vap ekam parayanam

stuvantah kam kamarchantah prapnayur manava shubham

ko dharma sarva dharmanam bhavatah paramo matah

kim japan muchyate jantur janma samsara bandhanat

Part 1: Upeyam (The Destination) 🎯

The first two questions focus on the Goal or the Object of attainment.

Question 1: Kim ekam daivatam loke

Translation: "Who is the one deity in the world?"

Detailed Meaning: This question asks for the unique, supreme Lord of Lords (*Devata*) as prescribed by the Shastras. It inquires about the singular entity that stands above all others in the universe (*Loke*).

Classification: **Upayam** (The Destination/Goal)

Question 2: Kim vap ekam parayanam

Translation: "Who is the one supreme refuge/destination?"

Detailed Meaning: *Param Ayanam* means the supreme destination. This question asks for the highest goal or the ultimate refuge to be attained by a living being.

Classification: **Upayam** (The Destination/Goal)

Part 2: Upayam (The Means)

The remaining four questions focus on the method, the path, or the vehicle used to reach the destination. The commentary further sub-classifies these into *Siddha* (Ready), *Sadhyā* (To be practiced), and *Salambana* (Supportive) means.

Question 3: Stuvantah kam

Translation: "Praising whom (do men attain good)?"

Detailed Meaning: This inquires about the object of *Stuti* (hymns/praise). It asks whom one should glorify to achieve auspiciousness.

Classification: **Upayam** (The Means) – Specifically **Siddha Upayam** (The means that is always ready/existent)

Question 4: Kam archantah

Translation: "Worshipping whom (do men attain good)?"

Detailed Meaning: This asks about the object of *Archana* (external worship/ritual). It seeks to know whose divine form (*Divya Mangala Vigraham*) should be worshipped.

Classification: Upayam (The Means) – Specifically **Siddha Upayam**

Question 5: Ko dharma sarva dharmanam bhavatah paramo matah

Translation: "Which Dharma is considered by you to be the greatest of all Dharmas?"

Detailed Meaning: Amidst the many duties and righteousness prescribed, which single Dharma stands supreme?

Classification: Upayam (The Means) – Specifically **Sadhyā Upayam** (The means that must be practiced or accomplished)

Question 6: Kim japan muchyate jantur janma samsara bandhanat

Translation: "Chanting what does a living being get liberated from the bondage of birth and samsara?"

Detailed Meaning: This asks for the specific *Japa* (chanting/recitation) that liberates a soul (*Jantu*) from the cycle of birth and death (*Janma samsara bandhanat*).

Classification: Upayam (The Means) – Specifically **Salambanopayam** (Easier means/Supportive means)

Summary Classification Table

| Question No. | Question (Sanskrit) | Focus | Classification | Specific Type |
|--------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | <i>Kim ekam daivatam...</i> | The One Deity | Upayam (Destination) | - |
| 2 | <i>Kim vap ekam...</i> | The Supreme Refuge | Upayam (Destination) | - |
| 3 | <i>Stuvantah kam...</i> | Object of Praise | Upayam (Means) | <i>Siddha Upayam</i> |
| 4 | <i>Kam archantah...</i> | Object of Worship | Upayam (Means) | <i>Siddha Upayam</i> |
| 5 | <i>Ko dharma sarva...</i> | Greatest Dharma | Upayam (Means) | <i>Sadhyā Upayam</i> |
| 6 | | | Upayam (Means) | <i>Salambanopayam</i> |

| Question No. | Question (Sanskrit) | Focus | Classification | Specific Type |
|--------------|------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|---------------|
| | <i>Kim japan muchyate...</i> | Object of Chanting | | |

Section 2: The Answers

Based on the sources, Bhishma answers Yudhishtira's six questions by identifying **Narayana** (Vishnu/Purushottama) as the single answer to all inquiries.

Bhishma structures his reply in a specific order: he first addresses the **Means** (Upayam—Questions 6, 4, 3, and 5) and then addresses the **Destination** (Upayam—Questions 2 and 1).

Here is the detailed breakdown of Bhishma's answers with the corresponding Sanskrit shlokas.

Part 1: Answers regarding the Means (Upayam)

Bhishma begins by answering the last question first (regarding Japa), followed by worship (Archana) and praise (Stuti).

Answer to Questions 6, 4, and 3:

- **Q6:** *Kim japan muchyate...* (Chanting what does one attain liberation?)
- **Q4:** *Kam archantah...* (Worshipping whom?)
- **Q3:** *Stuvantah kam...* (Praising whom?)

Bhishma's Answer:

"Jagat prabhum deva devam anantam purushottamam stuvan nama sahastrena purushas satatohitah"

Meaning: One should praise the Lord of the Universe (Jagat Prabhum), the God of Gods (Deva Devam), the Infinite (Anantam), and the Supreme Person (Purushottamam) through His thousand names with complete dedication (satatohitah).

He further adds regarding worship (Archana):

"Tamevacharchayan nityam bhaktya purushamavyayam"

"Dhyayan stuvan namasyam cha yajamanastameva cha"

Meaning: One should worship, meditate upon, praise, and bow down to that same imperishable Purusha (Purushamavyayam) with devotion (Bhakti).

Answer to Question 5:

- **Q5:** Ko dharma sarva dharmanam... (Which is the greatest Dharma?)

Bhishma's Answer:

"Yeshame sarva dharmanam dharma adhikatamo matah Yadbhaktya pundarikaksham stavairarchair narasada"

Meaning: "In my opinion (matah), the greatest of all Dharmas (dharma adhikatamo) is to always worship and praise the Lotus-eyed Lord (Pundarikaksham) with devotion (Bhakti)."

Part 2: Answers regarding the Destination (Upayam)

After establishing the means, Bhishma describes the goal or the object of attainment.

Answer to Question 2:

- **Q2:** Kim vap ekam parayanam (Who is the supreme refuge/destination?)

Bhishma's Answer:

"Paramamyo mahatejaha, paramamyo mahatapaha, paramamyo mahat brahma, paramamya parayanam. Pavitranam pavitramyo mangalanam scha mangalam"

Meaning: He is the supreme light (Mahatejah), the supreme penance (Mahatapah), the supreme Brahman, and the supreme refuge/destination (Parayanam). He is the purity within the pure (Pavitranam pavitram) and the auspiciousness within the auspicious (Mangalanam cha mangalam).

Answer to Question 1:

- **Q1:** Kim ekam daivatam loke (Who is the one deity in the world?)

Bhishma's Answer:

*"Daivatam devataanam cha bhutaanaam yo vyayah pita yatasarvaani
bhutaani bhavantyaadi yugaagame yas minsh cha pralaayam yaanti
punareva yugakshaye"*

Meaning: He is the Deity of deities (Daivatam devataanam) and the imperishable Father (Avyayah Pita) of all beings. From Him, all beings emerge at the beginning of a cosmic cycle (Yugagame), and into Him, they merge during dissolution (Pralayam).

Conclusion ✨

Bhishma concludes that because the Lord is the answer to all these questions—being the Supreme Deity, the Supreme Goal, and the object of all worship—one should chant His thousand names to attain all auspiciousness.

"Tasya loka pradhanasya jagannathasya bhupate"

Meaning: Therefore, recite the names of that Lord of the World (Jagannatha).

Reference 🎥

[Vishnu Sahasranamam Commentary Discussion](#)



Acknowledgment & Disclaimer

These articles are based on discourses by **Sri Dushyanth Sridhar**, who renders discourses in English & Tamil on Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Bhāgavata, Vishnu Purāna, Bhagavad Gitā, Vishnu Sahasranāma, and Divya Prabanda in the upanyāsam, pravachanam, or kālakshepam style. Visit <https://desikadaya.org> for more information. These notes are presented solely for educational purposes to help viewers download and benefit from these teachings. Any incorrect interpretations or inaccuracies are mine and unintentional—please forgive me. For any feedback, please send an [email](#).

