



Glory of Bharath » INDICA

Maha Shivarathri

**"Sarva roopa dharam Shantham Sarva naama dharam Shivam
Sachchidananda roopam Advaitam Sathyam Shivam Sundaram"**



The festival of Maha Shivarathri is one of the most important festivals in India. It falls on the 14th day of the (Krishna Paksha) dark fortnight of the Magha month of the Hindu calendar. The very word 'Shivarathri' means auspicious night. All over the country, people throng Shiva temples and spend the night in worship and contemplation of the Divine. According to Hindu belief, the moon is the presiding deity of the mind and the 16 phases of the moon represent the 16 aspects of the mind. On Shivarathri, which falls a day prior to the new moon, only a streak of the moon is visible. This is symbolic of the waning influence of the mind, when 15 aspects have

already merged in the Self and only one aspect remains. Hence on this day, it is easier to control the mind and direct it towards God. Therefore, the night is spent in contemplation and adoration of God, so that the vagaries of the mind can be totally subdued and transcended to attain realization of the Atman.

In the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, Bhishma, whilst resting on the bed of arrows and discoursing on Dharma, refers to the observance of Maha Shivaratri by King Chitrabhanu. The story goes as follows - Once upon a time King Chitrabhanu of the Ikshvaku dynasty, who ruled over the whole of Jambudvipa, was observing a fast with his wife, it being the day of Maha Shivaratri. The sage Ashtavakra came on a visit to the court of the king. The sage asked the king the purpose of his observing the past. King Chitrabhanu explained that he had the gift of remembering the incidents of his previous birth.

The king said to the sage that in his previous he was a hunter in Varanasi and his name was Suswara. His only livelihood was to kill and sell birds and animals. One day while roaming through forests in search of animals he was overtaken by the darkness of night. Unable to return home, he climbed a tree for shelter. It happened to be a Bael tree. He had shot a deer that day but had no time to take it home. So he bundled it up and tied it to a branch on the tree. As hunger and thirst tormented him, he was kept awake throughout the night. He shed profuse tears when he thought of his poor wife and children who were starving and anxiously waiting for his return. To pass away the time that night he engaged himself in plucking the Bael leaves and dropping them down onto the ground.

The next day he returned home and sold the deer and then bought some food for himself and his family. The moment he was about to break his fast a stranger came to him, begging for food. He served the food first to stranger and then had his own. At the time of his death, he saw two messengers of Lord Shiva. They were sent down to conduct his soul to the abode of Lord Shiva. He learnt then for the first time of the great merit he had earned by the unconscious worship of Lord Shiva during the night of Shivaratri. The messengers told him that there was a Lingam at the bottom of the tree. The leaves I dropped fell on the Lingam. His tears, which had shed out of pure sorrow for his family, fell onto the Lingam and washed it and he had fasted all day and all night. Thus, he unconsciously worshiped the Lord. As the conclusion of the tale the King said that he lived in the abode of the Lord and enjoyed divine bliss for long ages and now he has reborn as Chitrabhanu.

History of shivaratri

Once when everything in all the worlds got reduced into Lord shiva, in that darkness of nothing present, the mother pArvati worshipped Lord shiva in the Agamic way with great devotion. The parameshwara pleased by her prayer blessed Her. She asked for the benefit of all the creatures that in future whoever worships the Lord on the shiva ratri day with devotion, they should be blessed and should be given the ultimate liberation. The pashupati granted that showing way for all of us to get blessed easily.

When Brahma and Vishnu fought between themselves as "who is the greatest", Lord Shiva appeared before them as a pillar of fire. They were not able to find the starting and end of that pillar. Then Brahma and Mahavishnu repented for their mistake and prayed to Lord Shiva for forgiving their sin worshipping the shiva li.ngam which is the form of the flame. In the night of Shiva ratri Lord Shiva appeared before them and blessed them. Devotees pray the God throughout the night of Shiva ratri by performing Abhisheka, chanting and other holy deeds.

Skandha puranam describes about four shiva ratri. The first one is nitya shivaratri (daily shivarAtri - every night). The second one is the masa shivaratri which is observed on the krishna paksha chaturdasi (fourteenth moonday on the moons diminishing phase). The third one is the maga prathamadi shivaratri which is observed for the thirteen days starting from prathama titi in the month maga (masi) and on the chaturdasi night the Lord is worshiped throughout the night. The fourth



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one is observed on the masi (maga) month krishna paksha chaturdasi. This is the one observed in a widespread manner. It is also called maha shivaratri.

We have not only the Mahaashivaraathri once a year, we have a Shivaraathri every month, dedicated to the worship of Shiva. And, why is the Raathri (the Night), so important? The night is dominated by the Moon. The Moon has 16 kalas (fractions of divine glory), and each day or rather night, during the dark fortnight, one fraction is reduced, until the entire Moon is annihilated on New Moon night. From then on, each night, a fraction is added, until the Moon is full circle on Full Moon Night. The Chandra (Moon) is the presiding deity of the mind; the mind waxes and wanes, like the Moon. Chandramaa-manaso jaathah--Out of the manas of the Purusha (Supreme Being), the Moon was born. It must be remembered that the chief aim of all saadhana (spiritual striving) is to eliminate the mind, to become A-manaska. Then only can maayaa (illusion) be rent asunder and the Reality revealed. During the dark fortnight of the month, saadhana has to be done to eliminate each day a fraction of the mind, for, every day, a fraction of the Moon too is being taken out of cognisance.

On the night of Chathurdhasi, the 14th day, the night of Shiva, only a fraction remains. If some special effort is made that night, through more intensive and vigilant saadhana, like puja or japam or dhyaana (ritual worship, one-pointed repetition & holy names, and meditation), success is ensured. Shiva alone has to be meditated upon that night without the mind straying towards thoughts of sleep or food. This has to be done every month; once a year, on.

Every form conceived in the Shaasthras and scriptures has a deep significance. Shiva does not ride an animal called in human language, a bull. The bull is the symbol of Stability standing on four legs, Sathya, Dharma, Shaanthi and Prema (Truth, Virtue, Peace and Love). Shiva is described as having three eyes, eyes that see the Past, the Present and the Future. The elephant skin which forms His cloak is a symbol of the bestial primitive traits which His Grace destroys. In fact, He tears them to pieces, skin them, and they become totally ineffective. His Four Faces symbolize Shantham (Equanimity), Roudhram (Terror), Mangalam (Grace) and Uthsaham (elevating energy). While adoring the Lingam on this Lingodhbhava Day, one must contemplate on these truths of Shiva that the Linga represents.



**"Tridalam Trigunaakaaram Trinetrām Cha Triyaayudham
Trijanma Paapa Samhaaram Ekabilvam Shivaarpanam"**

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