



MAHA ŚIVA RĀTRĪ

Om Namah Śivaya



Śiva means auspiciousness

MAHA ŚIVA RATRI

- From “Hindu Festivals and Celebrations” by Smt. Anasuya Sastry
- Maha Shiva Ratri is celebrated on the 14th day of the waning moon in the month of “Magha”
- Maha Shiva Ratri is celebrated in honor of Lord Shiva
- Shiva and Pārvati are regarded as the parents of the universe
- Shiva represents Puruṣa (primary cause) and Pārvati represents Śakti (energy)

FROM THE PURANAS...

- After the creation of the universe from its seed form, Lord Śiva and Pārvati is Prakṛti went to live on top of Mount Kailāsa
- Pārvati asked Lord Śiva which of the rituals pleased him the most
- Lord Śiva replied that the Maha Śiva Ratri, observed with fasting and accompanied by prayer with bilva leaves pleased him the most

Om Namaḥ Śivaya



MOUNT KAILĀSA

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ŚIVA LINGA

- Lord Shiva is worshipped in the form of linga
- The linga is symbolic of something without a beginning or end, the infinite, the Supreme
- The linga form in which Shiva is worshipped is symbolic of the Supreme *with a form* - because the linga has a particular shape
- The linga form is symbolic of the Supreme *without a form* - because the linga has no head, limbs, etc.

STORY OF THE HUNTER

- Once upon a time there was a hunter who lived in the forest.
- One day as he was hunting, his path crossed that of a tiger.
- The tiger started chasing him and in desperation the hunter climbed up a tree.
- The tiger waited under the tree for the hunter so he could pounce on him when he came down or fell down.

STORY OF THE HUNTER

- **Soon the night came and the hunter was very tired**
- **He thought “how can I keep awake through the night and keep from falling off the tree?”**
- **To keep awake he plucked a leaf off the tree and threw it down.**
- **He did this throughout the night and stayed awake even though he was very tired.**

STORY OF THE HUNTER

- The dawn came; the tiger gave up and left
- The hunter saw in the morning sun that there was a Śiva linga below the tree!
- All through the night, the hunter had been plucking bilva leaves off the tree and offering it to the linga without even knowing it!
- He climbed down the tree and prostrated in front of the linga (“*ēka bilvam sivārpaṇam....*”)
- The hunter was blessed and by Siva for his worship
- **All prayer and worship is rewarded by Īśvara!**

LORD ŚIVA: NĪLA KANṬA

- When the devas and asuras churned the milky ocean, poison issued forth first (only later did the ambrosia come)
- Lord Shiva is said to have drunk the poison to save the worlds
- Pārvati stopped the poison from going below the neck of Lord Shiva
- Hence the name “Nīla-kanṭa” or “Blue-necked One”

LORD ŚIVA: NĪLA KANṬA

- The poison made Lord Shiva's body hot. In order to cool the body, the devas channeled Ganga through the locks of hair on his head
- When even that did not cool the head, the moon was placed on top of Lord Shiva's head
- It is customary to bathe the Shiva linga with a continuous abhiśekha of cool water on his head

LORD ŚIVA: SYMBOLISM

- Lord Shiva is the aspect of the Godhead that represents dissolution
- Many of our actions are driven by our ego (“me”, “my”, “I” etc.)
- Contemplation on the form and representation of Lord Shiva helps us to overcome the limitations imposed by our egocentric actions and helps us to open our vision to act selflessly

LORD ŚIVA: SYMBOLISM

- However, we must understand that “dissolution” happens through knowledge and not through action
- When we see the oneness of the Self, we experience “Shiva” or auspiciousness
- In Chapter 15 the Gita, Lord Krishna says “One can see the Truth of this changing universe of names and forms only by cutting asunder the bondage to them by the sword of detachment”

LORD ŚIVA: SYMBOLISM

- Attachment happens through ignorance or incorrect understanding, a feeling of “otherness”
- Detachment happens through understanding that the Divine is expressed in all forms;
 - We can learn to love and accept others as they are
 - We do not discriminate on the basis of color, gender, income, religion, nationality, etc.
 - We learn to enjoy whatever work comes our way and learn to dedicate our actions and results to the Lord