

### 3. Mahaashivaraathri

MANY stories are told in the *Shaasthras*, to explain the origin and significance of the *Mahaashivaraathri* Festival. Bhaarath, the name for this land used from ancient times, means 'the land of those who have *rathi* (Love) towards *Bha* (Light or *Bhagavaan*). So, for the people of this land, all days are sacred; every moment is precious. The Ganga is holy from source to sea, but, yet there are some places on its banks, associated with some sage or temple, the confluence of a tributary, or a historical incident, which are revered more by generations. Such places are Hardwar, Vaaraanasi, Prayaag, Rishikesh. Similarly, among all the days of the year, some are marked out as holier, when a special effort is made by aspirants to contact the Source and the Sea, the Reality behind all this passing show. Some moments, as that during which the *Linga* (Shiva representation in egg-shaped stone) emerges from the *Avathaar* (divine incarnation), are held to be specially significant for the individuals witnessing it and for the world which is thereby blessed.

Some ascribe the holiness of the Day to the fact of its being the Birthday of Shiva, as if Shiva has birth and death, like any mortal. The story that it commemorates the salvation attained by a hunter who sat on a *bilva* tree on the look-out for animals to kill, and without any intention to worship, unknowingly dropped some of its leaves on a *Linga* that lay beneath, does not make clear why this Day is specially sacred. Another story is that this is the Day on which Shiva danced the *Thaandava* (Cosmic dance) in the ecstasy of His Innate Nature, with all the Gods and Sages sharing and witnessing that Cosmic Consummation. When He consumed the *Haalahala* poison that emerged from the churning of ocean and that threatened to destroy the Universe, the heat of the fumes was well-nigh unbearable, even for Him. So, Ganga flowed uninterruptedly on His matted locks; but, that gave Him only partial relief. The Moon was placed on the head. That was of great help. Then, Shiva danced the *Thaandava* with all the Gods and Sages. All this they say, happened on the same day and so, *Shivaraathri*, was held in commemoration of this occasion.

#### **Aim of all *saadhana* is to eliminate the mind**

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 *puija* 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

*Mahaa-Shivaraathri* a special spurt of spiritual activity is recommended, so that what is *shavam* (corpse) can become *Shivam* (God), by the perpetual awareness of its Divine Indweller.

### **Linga is the Form Symbol of God**

This is a day dedicated to the Shiva that is in each of you. From the Himaalayan ranges down to Cape Kanyaakumari, the entire land is resounding today to the authentic Declaration "*Shivoham*" "*Shivoham*" and to the adoration, "*Om Namasshivaaya.*" Since thousands pray here, and elsewhere in lakhs and crores, the *Linga* is emanating from Me, so that you may derive the Bliss that pervades the World through *Lingodhbhava* (emergence of the *Linga*).

The manifestation of the *Linga* is a part of My Nature. These *Pandiths* (scholars of spirituality) explain it as reminiscent of an epochal event in the past when Shiva challenged Brahma and Vishnu to gauge the height and depth of the *Linga* Form He assumed. They failed and had to accept defeat. But, the *Linga* emerges, as a result of prayer and Grace. You have to recognise in this event a glimpse of Divinity, a sign of infinite Grace. Just as *Om* is the sound symbol of God, the *Linga* is the Form symbol or the visible symbol of God, the most meaningful, the simplest and the least endowed with the appendages of attributes. *Lingam* means, that in which this *jagath* (world of change) attains *laya* (mergence or dissolution), *Leeyathe*. All Forms merge in the Formless at last. Shiva is the Principle of the Destruction of all Names and Forms, of all entities and individuals. So, the *Linga* is the simplest sign of emergence and mergence.

### **Live in the constant presence of Shiva**

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 symbolise *Shantham* (Equanimity), *Roudhram* (Terror), *Mangalam* (Grace) and *Uthsaham* (elevating energy). While adoring the *Lingam* on this *Lingodhbhava* Day, you must contemplate on these truths of Shiva that the *Linga* represents.

It is not this night alone that you should spend in the thought of Shiva; your whole life must be lived in the constant presence of the Lord. Endeavour: that is the main thing; that is the inescapable consummation for all mortals. Even those who deny God will have to tread the pilgrim road, melting their hearts out in tears of travail. If you make the slightest effort to move along the Path of your own liberation, the Lord will help you a hundred-fold. That is the hope that *Mahaashivaraathri* conveys to you. Man is called so, because he has the skill to do *manana*; *manana* means inner meditation on the meaning and significance of what one has heard. But, you have not yet emerged out of the stage of *Shraoanam* (listening) ! All the joy you crave for is in you. But, like a man who has vast riches in the iron chest, but, who has no idea where the key is, you suffer. Hear properly the instructions, dwell upon them in the silence of meditation, practise what has been made clear therein; then, you can secure the key, open the chest and be rich in Joy.

### **Visualise Shiva as the inner power of all**

You have given up even the little *saadhana* that *Shivaraathri* demands. In olden times, people will not put even a drop of water on their tongues, this day. Now, that rigour is gone. They used

to keep vigil at night, the entire night, without a wink of sleep, repeating *Om Namasshivaaya* without intermission. Now, the name Shiva, is on no one's tongue. But, those who deny God are only denying themselves and their glory. All have Love in them, in some form or other, towards some one or other or their work or goal. That Love is God, a spark of the God in them. They have *Aanandha* (bliss) however small or temporary and that is another spark of the Divine. They have inner peace, detachment, discrimination, sympathy, the spirit of service. These are Divine in the mirror of their minds.

Resolve, on this Holy *Shivaraathri*, in the Presence of Shiva Sai, to visualise the Shiva as the inner power of all. With each breath, you are even now, asserting "*Soham*," "I am He," not only you, but, every being that breathes, every being that lives, everything that exists. It is a fact which you have ignored so long. Believe it from now on. When you watch your breath and meditate on that magnificent Truth, slowly, the I and the He (the *Sah* and the *Aham*) will draw nearer and closer, until the feeling of separateness will fade away---and the *Soham* will be transformed into *OM*, the *Pranava*, the Primal Sound, the Fundamental Formula for God. That *OM* is the *Swaswaruupa*---the Reality behind this "relative reality."

*Shivaraathri Day, February 1969*

*Anger turns a man into a drunken brute. The other impulses are equally vicious. Seek only salutary karma, 'eat only saathwik food--food that will not disturb the equanimity you earn through your saadhana. Do not break the even tenor of your spiritual practice. Remember how Raamadas never gave up his Naama saadhana in spite of jeers and jail.*

*Sathya Sai Baaba*