

THE MAHASHIVRATRI FESTIVAL

Bharat is one of the ancient countries of the world. It has a great heritage of glory and an elevated way of life. Even now it is very well known as being the land of deities with palaces and a lifestyle of legendary beauty. Bharat is a great pilgrimage place and so the soil of Bharat is held in great respect. Bharat is well known for festivals and by tradition one festival or another is celebrated almost daily.

Significance of Mahashivratri

Mahashivratri, being a significant Hindu festival, is celebrated every year to commemorate the event of the descent of Almighty God, the most Beloved Father of all souls. The prefix “Maha” means great and “Shiv” denotes benefactor and “Ratri” signifies ignorance and darkness. The Shivratri is a unique festival. It is a social custom to celebrate the day of a particular person’s birthday annually. Even if a person is born at night, yet the celebration is always called a ‘birthday’. The singular instance of Shivratri is peculiar. Is there any particular significance to Shiva’s birth being mentioned as Shivratri, when Shiva, the Supreme, is known as the one beyond death and birth?

What does the night signify in this instance? The Night of Shiva signifies not the usual darkness resulting from the revolution of the earth around the sun but this alludes spiritually to the darkness of ignorance, where the world is full of vices at the time of the end of the Iron Age or Kaliyuga. It is at this time, a little in advance of the end of the Iron Age that God Shiva incarnates in the world. This is why Shivratri is being celebrated on the 14th night of the dark cycle of the moon in the month of “Phalgun” (generally during the last week of February). Phalgun is the last month of the Hindu calendar and complete darkness prevails during the 14th night of the last dark half of this month, in the last but one night of the Hindu calendar year. And it is particularly at midnight of that day that the worshippers celebrate the festival of the descent of God Shiva. This indicates the truth that He comes a little prior to the end of the world cycle, when total darkness of ignorance prevails in the universe. Immediately afterwards starts the day of knowledge and the light of knowledge spread throughout the world. This is the beginning of the New Era called Satyuga - the Righteous Age. Hence the period when God Shiva descends on earth is called “Confluence Age”- the end of Iron Age (Kaliyuga) and the beginning of the Golden Age (Satyuga).

Some of the rituals connected with the Shivratri festival are: -

- **Pouring milk and water On the Shiva Lingam**
- **Fasting or “upvas”**
- **Staying awake at night (*Jagaran*)**

Drops of water dripping on the “Lingam” from the pot symbolizes the thoughts that are contained in the pot of our Intellect which should be so clean and pure that it is worthy to be offered to God Shiva.

Fasting or Upvas

***Up* - means near, *vas* - means to live, which together means to be close to God with intellect. The fasting, which keeps the soul close to Shiva, is the fasting from waste (negative) and impure thoughts. With such spiritual fasting the mind is cleansed and stays close to Shiva.**

Staying awake at night

Jagran symbolizes the beginning of spiritual awakening. Thus keeping the third eye of wisdom open so that one is able to protect one's moral values and innate pure qualities of the Soul.

It is also believed that one should chant the name of Shiva continuously in order to receive boons and blessings. This custom symbolizes that devotees are asked to remember Shiva constantly through their thoughts.

Even in Indian Mythology (Puranas), it is stated that God descends in the form of a 'Spark' and 'Dot of Light' at the beginning of the Kalpa (i.e. a Cycle of 5,000 years). It is in commemoration of this religious event that the most auspicious festival called Mahashivratri is celebrated every year.

This year we are celebrating the 70th divine incarnation of our beloved God- Father.

His message is :-

Sweet children -

- **Make efforts to liberate yourself from the five vices and the negative and wasteful thoughts which are the cause of your downfall.**
- **Make your life blissful and be worthy to claim blessings.**
- **Remain content and satisfy others.**
- **Have good thinking for the self and good wishes for everyone.**
- **Celebrate this year as the year of success by using all the treasures in a worthwhile way, and be victorious in each and every aspect during Shiv-Jayanti celebrations.**

Om Shanti