

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SHIVRATRI

The festival of Maha Shivaratri is celebrated every year in India. On this day, devotees visit Shiva temples to offer leaves of bel upon the Shiva linga, observe fast and keep awake all night as a mark of their devotion to God Shiva. In order to celebrate this festival in its true spirit, it is essential to know who is God Shiva and why is Shiva ratri (Shiva's Night) commemorated by the devotees.

INTRODUCTION OF SHIVA

There are innumerable temples to God Shiva all over India, where He is symbolised in the image of a linga. Some of the famed memorials to Shiva are Amarnath in Kashmir, Somnath in Gujarat, Vishwanath in Varanasi, Mahakaleshwar in Ujjain and Pashupatinath in Nepal. The names of these Shiva temples define His divine functions, which also indicate that He is the Supreme Soul.

Legends tell us that Shri Rama invoked the Almighty Shiva at Rameshwaram and Shri Krishna offered his prayers to Him at Gopeshwar in Vrindavan. The memorials of these stands even today at these two places as famous Shiva temples. These legends are also indicators of the truth that Shiva is worshipped as the Supreme Father of all deities, even as the Supreme Father of Shri Rama and Shri Krishna.

The image of Shiva is shown as a *linga*, which proves that He is incorporeal, He does not have any male or female human form like the deities, but He is conceit point of Light. That is why, the 12 famous Shiva temples in India are also known as Jyotirlinga Math signifying His form of Light. Incorporeal God Shiva is also known as Trimurti which depicts His role as the creator of the three subtle deities - Brahma, Vishnu and Shankar.

The three lines marked on the Shiva linga symbolize His triple characteristics of Trimurti, Trinetri (one who has the third eye of wisdom), Trikaldarshi (one who sees the three aspects of time) and trilokinath (the Lord of three worlds). Shiva is also known as Shambhu or Swayambhu meaning that Shiva is the Supreme Soul who has no creator above Him.

The literal meaning of the word Shiva is benefactor. Supreme Soul Shiva brings benefit to all souls by performing the divine functions of creating and sustaining a new pure world and destroying all vices and evil from the old impure world, i.e., He gives liberation and salvation to all human beings. Thus He is truly the Supreme Soul.

WHY SHIVA'S NIGHT

It is a subject to be pondered that when the birth of all corporeal deities, saints etc. are celebrated as birthdays, why is the night of Shiva remembered? For instance, the birth of Shri Krishna is believed to have been at midnight, yet Janmashtmi is celebrated as his birthday. It is only for Shiva that His night is celebrated. What is its real significance?

In fact, the festival of Shiva ratri symbolises the divine incarnation of God Shiva on this earth. The night indicates the moral degradation that sets in due to the darkness of ignorance in this world. Shiva is the Ocean of knowledge who leads humankind from darkness to light, i.e. from untruth to truth by imparting true knowledge. God Himself says, "When religion is defamed on earth, I come to re-establish the true religion and thus transform the impure devilish world into a pure divine world."

But when and how does God Shiva perform this divine function? If we reflect upon it, it will be clear that God performs His triple functions of creation, sustenance and destruction at the Confluence Age - the Age between the end of kaliyuga and the beginning of Satyuga because this is the period of rejuvenation or renewal of the Old World in the whole time-cycle. At this time, Supreme Soul Shiva incarnates in the corporeal human medium of Brahma to impart true godly knowledge in order to establish the divine heavenly world. The Supreme Soul does not take birth through a mother's womb but as per His divine versions, He subjugates matter and enters the body of Brahma to take a divine birth or incarnation.

Today, when corruption, unrighteousness and immorality have spread all over the world, when ethical and moral values have declined drastically, Supreme Soul Shiva is once again imparting the Godly message of "Be Yogi and Be Pure" by teaching true spiritual knowledge and Rajyoga through the spiritual children of Brahma (Brahma kumars and Brahma Kumaris).

WHICH FAST IS NEEDED?

The true fasting (upvaas) on Shivaratri is that we link our intellect with God Shiva and stay in His Company. *Upavaas* (up + vass) means to stay close. The true Jagaran or awakening means to awaken from the slumber of ignorance and to protect the self from the evil influence of vices such as lust, anger, greed, etc. Let us celebrate Shivaratri in the true spirit by knowing its real spiritual significance.

Om Shanti