

Significance of MahāShivrātri

Namaste and Hari Om. Many of our festivals are birthday celebrations of Deities or important personalities. Some examples are: *Janmāshṭami*, *Rāmnāvami*, *Gandhi Jayanti*, etc. But *Bhagvān Shivji* is considered unborn so *MahāShivratri* is certainly not *Shivji's* birthday!

- First and foremost, *MahāShivratri* is celebrated as the wedding anniversary of *Shivji* and *Pārvati Mātā*. Thus, *MahāShivratri* is a great festival of convergence of *Shiv* and *Shakti* or *Purush* and *Prakriti*. This convergence is symbolically represented by *Ardhnārishwar*:



Following *Mahākavi Kālidās* in *Raghuvamsh*, we chant:

वागर्थाविव सम्प्रुक्तौ वागर्थप्रतिपत्तये जगतः पितरौ वन्दे पार्वतीपरमेश्वरौ
vāgarthāviva sampruktau vāgarthapratipattaye
jagataḥ pitarau vande pārvatīparamēśvarau

I bow down to the parents of this world, *Mātā Pārvati* and *Parameshwar*, who are inseparable as speech and its meaning in order to gain knowledge of speech and its meaning.

- Second, *MahāShivratri* is the day when *Bhagvān Shivji* saved the world from the pot of highly toxic poison (or *halahal*) that emerged from the churning of the milky ocean during *Samudra Manthan*. You see, *Samudra Manthan* was the epic battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. *Bhagvān Shivji* drank the poison and stored it in his throat--which made his throat turn blue (which is why he came to be known as *Neelkanth*). Thus, *MahāShivratri* marks the anniversary of drinking of poison by *Mahādev* and hence, *MahāShivratri* is celebrated as the thanksgiving to *Bhagvān Shivji*. *Mahādev* drank the highly toxic poison to protect his devotees and so, he is prayed by devotees as the destroyer of negativity, evil, ignorance and even death. One of his epithet is *Mrityunjay* – one has conquered death:

॥ महा मृत्युंजय मन्त्र ॥

ॐ त्र्यम्बकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् । उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनान् मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात्
om tryāmbakam yajāmahe sugandhiṃ puṣṭi-vardhānam
urvārukam īva bandhānān mṛtyor muksīya mā 'mṛtāt

I worship the three-eyed One, *Mahādev*, who is fragrant and who nourishes one and all. Just as easily the fruit falls off from the bondage of the stem, may I be liberated from the fear of death and from the sense of mortality.

The Pauranic form of the above Mantra is:

मृत्युञ्जय महादेव त्राहि मां शरणागतम्
जन्ममृत्युजरारोगैः पीडितं कर्मबन्धनैः ॥

I take refuge in the conqueror of the fear of death and the Chief of the deities, Shivji.
May He protect me from the afflictions of birth, death, old age and disease that are the results of binding actions.

And:

अनायासेन मरणं विनादैन्येन जीवनं ।

देहि मे कृपया शम्भो त्वयि भक्तिं अचञ्चलं ॥

anāyāsena maraṇam vinādainyena jīvanam .

dehi me kṛpayā śambho tvayi bhaktim acanalam ..

Request to Shivji to kindly grant three wishes: To give an effortless death, a life without any dependencies, and total devotion to Him.



- Third, *MahāShivratri* is the night when Shivji is said to have performed the *Tandav Nritya*, or the dance of primordial creation, preservation and reabsorption. One of the epithet of *Bhagvan Shivji* is *Natarāj*, the cosmic dancer. *Nat* means dance, *Rājā* means the King, so *Natarāj* is the King of Dance. You may want to hear Shiv Tandav Stotra in this connection as well as Natraj Stuti both beautifully rendered by Bhāi Shri Rameshbhai Oza.

The scientific symbolism of *Natarāj* is seen to be acknowledged by the following. Switzerland-based European Organization for Nuclear Research, known by the acronym CERN, that operates the largest particle physics laboratory in the world has a *Natarāj* statue at its entrance. CERN is credited with the discovery of the God-particle (Higgs Boson elementary particle). Unveiled in 2004, the two-meter-tall statue was a gift from the Government of India. Famous Physicist Fritjof Capra, explains its significance: “Modern physics has revealed that every subatomic particle not only performs an energy dance, but also is an energy dance; a pulsating process of

creation and destruction. For the modern physicists then, Shiva's dance is the dance of subatomic matter, the basis of all existence and of all natural phenomena."



- Fourth, for the *yogis* or ascetics, *MahāShivratri* is the day *Bhagvān Shivji* became one with Mount *Kailash*. He became like a mountain – absolutely still. *Bhagvān Shivji* is known as the *Ādiyogi* or the first yogi – the originator of yoga. Incidentally, there is an *Ādiyogi* statue in the city of Coimbatore, in the State of Tamil Nadu, in India. It is a 34-meter tall and was designed by Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev.



Bhagvān Shivji is also the *Ādiguru* (the very first guru) as indicated in the verse:

सदाशिव समारम्भाम् शंकराचार्य मध्यमाम्

अस्मद् आचार्य पर्यन्ताम् वंदे गुरु परम्पराम्

Sadāshiv Samārambhām Shankarācharya Madhyamām

Asmad Achārya Paryantām Vande Guru Paramparām

Beginning with *Sadāshiv*, through *Ādi Shankarācharya* in the middle and up to my own Guru, I bow with reverence to the entire tradition of lineage of the teacher and the taught.

In reality, a *Shivratri* occurs once a month on the 14th day or *Chaturdashi Tithi* of *Krishna Paksha* of every lunar month. *Krishna Paksha* indicates the waning phase of the moon. Thus, the darkest day of the month or the day before the new moon day is thus considered as *Shivratri*. Among all *Shivratri*s, *Chaturdashi Tithi* during the *Krishna Paksha* in the month of *Phalguna* is very special and is known as *MahāShivratri*. *MahāShivratri* meaning "the Great Night of *Bhagvān Shivji*" occurs just before the arrival of spring, usually in February or March. The time around *MahāShivratri* is an auspicious period for overcoming darkness and ignorance and to be more in tune with a *dhārmic* way of life. *MahāShivratri* is celebrated across India and is a holiday in most states. It is also a public holiday in several other countries such as Mauritius and Nepal.

Shivji is considered *Ashutosh* (one who is easily pleased with the devotion of his followers). He is described as an ocean of mercy (*karunābdhe*) in *Shiv Mānas Pujā* and as compassion incarnate (*karunāvataram*) in the famous *Karpur Gauram* prayer:

॥ श्री शिव-पार्वती स्तुति ॥

कपूरगौरं करुणावतारं संसारसारं भुजगेन्द्रहारम् ।
सदा वसन्तं हृदयारविन्दे भवं भवानी-सहितं नमामि ॥

*Karpur Gauram Karunnaavataram Sansaar Saaram Bhujendra Haaram.
Sadaa Vasantam Hridayaarvinde Bhavam Bhavaani Sahitam Namaami.*

I bow to that camphor-hued, white complexioned *Shivji*, who is compassion Incarnate, Who is the very essence of (consciousness; the Knowing principle) of life (of the embodied soul); Who wears snakes as garlands, whose eternal abode is in the heart of the devotee, I bow to Him (*Shivji*) and His consort *Mātā Bhavāni* (*Umā* or *Parvati*).

In our Hindu Trinity (*Trimurti*), *Shivji* represents the power of dissolution but the very dissolution of the existing order that is corrupted with time paves the way for the creation of a new order full of *dhārmic* life. Thus, *Shivji* is in reality a rejuvenator of the world. *Shivji* is therefore considered *MahāDev* or the Chief among all the Deities.

MahāShivRatri is both a Festival as well as a *Vratam* in the spiritual discipline for devotees. On this day, devotees observe a fast all day and perform a special *Shiv puja* at night. Devotees offer *billi patra* leaves (*aegle marmelos*) and perform an *abhishek* of the *Shivling*. Though for some, the festival of *MahāShivratri* is celebrated during the day, others celebrate it during the night by organizing a '*jāgaran*' (a night-long vigil replete with prayers, chanting *shiv stotras* (hymns) and meditating on Him). "*Om Namah Shivāy*", the sacred *panchākshar* mantra, is chanted throughout the vigil. As *Sadhguru* says, let this night not just be a night of wakefulness, let this night be a night of awakening for you.

Shiv puja just mentioned can be performed based on *Purānas* – by *purānokta vidhi* – or based on *Vedas* – *Vedokta vidhi*. *Yajurved* contains hymns to *Bhagvān Shivji* for this purpose. *Gujarātis* and *North Indians* follow *Shukla Yajurved* and chant *Ashtādhyayi Rudri*. While *South Indians* follow *Krishna Yajurved* and chant *Rudram* and *Chamakam*.

Shiv puja can be done in a Temple, in a home shrine, or even mentally.

Here is the *Natrāj stuti* mentioned above chanted by Bhāi Shri Rameshbhai Oza.



03 Shri Nataraj Stuti.wma

नटराज स्तुति

सत सृष्टि तांडव रचयिता

नटराज राज नमो नमः...

हेआद्य गुरु शंकर पिता

नटराज राज नमो नमः...

गंभीर नाद मृदंगना धबके उरे ब्रह्माडना

नित होत नाद प्रचंडना

नटराज राज नमो नमः...

शिर ज्ञान गंगा चंद्रमा चिद्रह्य ज्योति ललाट मां

विषनाग माला कंठ मां

नटराज राज नमो नमः...

तवशक्ति वामांगे स्थिता हे चंद्रिका अपराजिता

चहु वेद गाए संहिता

नटराज राज नमोः...

Here is the famous *Shiv Mānas Pujā* chanted by Bhāi Shri Rameshbhai Oza:



01 Shivmanas Puja.wma

रत्नैः कल्पितमासनं हिमजलैः स्नानं च दिव्याम्बरं

नानारत्नविभूषितं मृगमदामोदाङ्कितं चन्दनम् ।

जातीचम्पकबिल्वपत्ररचितं पुष्पं च धूपं तथा

दीपं देव दयानिधे पशुपते हृत्कल्पितं गृह्यताम् ॥१॥

Ratnaih Kalpitam-āsanam Him-Jalaih Snānam Cha Divya-Ambaram

Nānā-Ratna-Vibhuushitam Mrga-Madā-Moda-Angkitam Chandanam |

Jāti-Champak-Bilva-Patra-Rachitam Pushpam Cha Dhuupam Tathā

Deepam Dev Dayā-Nidhe Pashupate Hrt-Kalpitam Grhyatām ||1||

O Mahādev, Ocean of Mercy!, (I have) mentally prepared a seat adorned with precious jewels, an ablution with cold Himalayan water, and divine garments adorned with various gems; sandalwood paste infused with the fragrance of deer or musk; an (arrangement of) flowers prepared with jasmine, champak and bilva leaves of (bilva); and fragrant incense as well as a (brilliant) light, oh Ruler of the entire kingdom. Please accept all this that I have imagined in (my) heart!

सौवर्णे नवरत्नखण्डरचिते पात्रे घृतं पायसं

भक्ष्यं पञ्चविधं पयोदधियुतं रम्भाफलं पानकम् ।

शाकानामयुतं जलं रुचिकरं कर्पूरखण्डोज्ज्वलं

ताम्बूलं मनसा मया विरचितं भक्त्या प्रभो स्वीकुरु ॥२॥

Sauvarṇe Nav-Ratna-Khanda-Rachite Pātre Ghrtam Pāyasam

Bhakshyam Pancha-Vidham Payo-Dadhi-Yutam Rambhā-Phalam Pānakam |

Shākānām-Ayutam Jalam Ruchikaram Karpuura-Khandojjvalam

Tāmbuulam Manasā Mayā Virachitam Bhaktyā Prabho Sviikuru ||2||

With full devotion I have mentally prepared a decorated golden bowl containing clarified butter, milk, rice and sugar (along with) the five kinds of food; a banana smoothie; a myriad of vegetables, pure water; a piece of burning camphor; (and) a leaf of Betel. Oh Bhagvān, please accept!

छत्रं चामरयोर्युगं व्यजनकं चादर्शकं निर्मलं

वीणाभेरिमृदङ्गकाहलकला गीतं च नृत्यं तथा ।

साष्टाङ्गं प्रणतिः स्तुतिर्बहुविधा ह्येतत्समस्तं मया

सङ्कल्पेन समर्पितं तव विभो पूजां गृहाण प्रभो ॥३॥

Chhatram Chāmarayor-Yugam Vyajanakam Cha-Adarshakam Nirmalam

Veenā-Bheri-Mrdanga-Kāhala-Kalā Geetam Cha Nrtyam Tathā |

Sāstāngam Pranatih Stutir-Bahu-Vidhā Hyetat-Samastam Mayā

Sannkalpen Samarpitam Tava Vibho Pujām Grihan Prabho ||3||

A parasol; a couple of whisks –generally used as fans– (made with) the tails of two Yaks; and a spotless mirror; the fine arts of “Geet” –chanting– as well as “Nṛtya” –dancing–, (which are accompanied by) “vīṇā-s”, kettle-drums, “mṛdaṅga-s” (and) large drums; a prostration performed with eight limbs or members –i.e. hands, breast, forehead, knees and feet must touch the ground in this type of reverential salutation; (and) hymns of praise of many sorts indeed. I mentally offer all this to you, oh all-pervading and powerful! Accept (my) worship, oh Bhagvān!

आत्मा त्वं गिरिजा मतिः सहचराः प्राणाः शरीरं गृहं

पूजा ते विषयोपभोगरचना निद्रा समाधिस्थितिः ।

सञ्चारः पदयोः प्रदक्षिणविधिः स्तोत्राणि सर्वा गिरो

यद्यत्कर्म करोमि तत्तदखिलं शम्भो तवाराधनम् ॥४॥

Aatmā Tvam Girijā Matih Sahacharāh Prānnāh Shariiram Grham

Puujaa Te Vissayo[a-U]pabhoga-Racanaa Nidraa Samaadhi-Sthitih |

San.caarah Padayoh Pradakssinna-Vidhih Stotraanni Sarvaa Giro

Yad-Yat-Karma Karomi Tat-Tad-Akhilam Shambho Tava-Araadhanam ||4||

You are my own Self and Mātā Pārvatī (is) my intelligence. My vital energies (are your) companions. My body is your abode. May all my senses be engaged only in your worship. May my sleep be a state of Samādhi. May all my wandering be like circumambulation around you. May all the words utter be hymns in your praise. Whatever action I do, may all that be adoration of you, oh Śambhu.

करचरणकृतं वाक्कायजं कर्मजं वा

श्रवणनयनजं वा मानसं वापराधम् ।

विहितमविहितं वा सर्वमेतत्क्षमस्व

जय जय करुणाब्धे श्रीमहादेव शम्भो ॥५॥

Kar-Charan-Krtam Vāk-Kāya-Jam Karma-Jam Vā

Shravana-Nayana-Jam Vā Mānasam Va-Aparaadham |

Vihitam-Avihitam Vā Sarvam-Etat-Kshamasva

Jay Jay Karuna-Abdhe Shri-Mahādev Shambho ||5||

Dear *Mahādev*, kindly forgive my wrong actions done knowingly or unknowingly, either through my organs of action (hand, feet, speech) or through my organs of perception (eyes, ears) or by my mind. Glory unto Thee O Bhagvān Shivji, who is the ocean of kindness.

इति श्रीमच्छङ्कराचार्यविरचिता शिवमानसपूजा समाप्त ॥

Iti śrīmad Shaṅkarāchāryavirachitā śivamānaspūjā samāpta ||

For devotees, the Puja as discussed so far is only a means to achieve eventual oneness with *Mahādev* and proclaim “*Shivoham*” or “*I am Shiv*” as in the famous composition *Nirvanashatakam* by Ādi Shankarācharya beautifully rendered by Shri Purushottam Das Jalota:



03 Manobuddhi.mp3

मनोबुद्ध्यहङ्कार चित्तानि नाहं

न च श्रोत्रजिह्वे न च घ्राणनेत्रे ।

न च व्योम भूमिर्न तेजो न वायुः

चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥१॥

manobuddhyahaṅkāra cittāni nāhaṃ

na ca śrotrajihve na ca ghrāṇanetre .

na ca vyoma bhūmirna tejo na vāyuh

cidānandarūpaḥ śivo’ham śivo’ham ||1||

I am not the mind nor intelligence nor the ego,

I am not the organs of hearing, nor that of tasting, smelling or seeing,

I am not the sky, nor the earth, neither the fire nor the air,

I am the ever pure blissful consciousness; I am Shiv, I am Shiv,

The ever pure blissful consciousness.

न च प्राणसंज्ञो न वै पञ्चवायुः

न वा सप्तधातुः न वा पञ्चकोशः ।

न वाक्पाणिपादं न चोपस्थपायु

चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥२॥

na ca prāṇasaṃjño na vai pañcavāyuh

na vā saptadhātuḥ na vā pañcakośaḥ .

na vākpāṇipādaṃ na copasthapāyu

cidānandarūpaḥ śivo’ham śivo’ham ||2||

I am not the vital breath, nor the five vital airs,

I am not the seven ingredients (of the body), nor the five sheaths (of the body),
I am not the organ of speech, nor my hands, nor my feet nor my other organs,
I am the ever pure blissful consciousness; I am Shiv, I am Shiv,
The ever pure blissful consciousness.

न मे द्वेषरागौ न मे लोभमोहौ

मदो नैव मे नैव मात्सर्यभावः ।

न धर्मो न चार्थो न कामो न मोक्षः

चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥३॥

na me dveṣarāgau na me lobhamohau

mado naiva me naiva mātsaryabhāvaḥ .

na dharmo na cārtho na kāmo na mokṣaḥ

cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham ||3||

I do not have aversion, nor attachment, neither greed nor infatuation,

I do not have passion, nor feelings of envy and jealousy,

I am beyond the bounds of dharma (righteousness), artha (wealth), kama (desire) and moksha (liberation) (the four purusharthas of life),

I am the ever pure blissful consciousness; I am Shiv, I am Shiv,

The ever pure blissful consciousness.

न पुण्यं न पापं न सौख्यं न दुःखं

न मन्त्रो न तीर्थं न वेदा न यज्ञाः ।

अहं भोजनं नैव भोज्यं न भोक्ता

चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥४॥

na puṇyaṃ na pāpaṃ na saukhyaṃ na duḥkhaṃ

na mantrō na tīrthaṃ na vedā na yajñāḥ .

ahaṃ bhojanaṃ naiva bhojyaṃ na bhoktā

cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham ||4||

I am not accrue the results of my actions as they are dedicated to Shivji, neither am I perturbed by worldly joys nor by sorrows,

I am not defined by sacred hymns nor by sacred places, neither by sacred scriptures nor by yagnas,
I am not enjoyer, nor an object to be enjoyed, nor the enjoyer,
I am the ever pure blissful consciousness; I am Shiv, I am Shiv,
The ever pure blissful consciousness.

न मृत्युर्न शङ्का न मे जातिभेदः

पिता नैव मे नैव माता न जन्मः ।

न बन्धुर्न मित्रं गुरुर्नैव शिष्यं

चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥५॥

na mṛtyurna śaṅkā na me jātibhedah

pitā naiva me naiva mātā na janmaḥ .

na bandhurna mitraṃ gururnaiva śiṣyaṃ

cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham ||5||

I am not subject to death and the fear of death, nor by the rules of class and its distinctions,
I really don't have father and mother, as I was never born,
So I do not really have relations nor friends, neither spiritual teacher nor disciples,
I am the ever pure blissful consciousness; I am Shiv, I am Shiv,
The ever pure blissful consciousness.

अहं निर्विकल्पो निराकाररूपो

विभुत्वाच्च सर्वत्र सर्वेन्द्रियाणाम् ।

न चासङ्गतं नैव मुक्तिर्न मेयः

चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥६॥

ahaṃ nirvikalpo nirākārarūpo

vibhutvācca sarvatra sarvendriyāṅām .

na cāsaṅgataṃ naiva muktirna meyaḥ

cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham ||6||

I am unchangeable, and formless,

I am present everywhere as the underlying substratum of everything, and behind all sense organs,

I am not attached to anything, nor do I wish to be free from anything,

I am the ever pure blissful consciousness; I am Shiv, I am Shiv,

The ever pure blissful consciousness.