



श्री सनातन धर्म सभा – दक्षिण आफ्रिका

Shree Sanathan Dharma Sabha of South Africa

Established 1941

0733458742 | 0837767274

Email : sanathan.sabha@gmail.com

www.ssdspurohitmandal.org

SHIVA & SHIVARATRI

I prostrate to the Lord of Parvati, who is peaceful, who is seated in the lotus pose, whose crown is adorned with the moon, who has three eyes, who holds the trident, bolt, sword and the fearlessness-giving axe on the right side, and who holds the serpent, noose, bell, Damaru and spear on the left side, who shines with various ornaments, and who is luminous like a crystal jewel.



Introduction

It has often been remarked that the worship of the Shiva started only recently and that this form of worship dates back to the beginning of the Jain branch of the Hindu religion. Really speaking, it is not possible to assign a date to commencement of the worship of the Shiva, as indeed it is difficult to say when exactly the worship of God began. In the Ramcharitmanas, Goswami Tulsidas so clearly reminds us that God is without beginning and his stories therefore are unending. If God has no beginning, then how can we realistically put a date to the commencement of worship of the Lord? Adi Sankaracharya, the Lion amongst Hindus, who lived thousands of years ago, had made the following declaration in connection to Shiva: In the Vedas is described the worship of Shiva, the incarnation of the Supreme Brahman.

Who is Shiva?

It is well known that Lord Shiva is the Superintendent/Lord/Swami of Dissolution, i.e. He is in charge of the destruction of Tamasic qualities. Shiva is regularly referred to as the Destroyer. God does not destroy because HE is not a

vandal. Vandals destroy the world and the environment, God (Shiva) allows everything to merge into Him in the end. Shiva is Ardhanareeswara-half male and half female. In biology we are told that there are both male and female hormones in each individual organism. According to research in psychology every man has a woman in his mind and each woman has a man inherent in her constitution. In other words, nature has made every individual as an Ardhanareeswara. We are all Brahma, i.e. Prajapati – creators. We create for ourselves in our mind a daughter called energy and it is this energy that represents the principles of intelligence. This female energy or the principle of intelligence is the element that makes up the Ardhanareeswara form of each individual.

Shiva Linga



Lord Shiva is represented by the Linga. What is Linga? Linga has been interpreted as a phallic emblem. We must not be modest about the meaning of the Linga. The Linga and Yoni are the symbols of the biological act by which all living creatures are created by nature. There can no higher and purer symbols of the Universal Parents and we know that parents are indispensable for producing life. The more one thinks about the divine purpose and the nature of the life principle, the more one is convinced of the purity of the procreative act which is expected to ensure the continuance of life or Prana. In ancient times people understood the true glory of the phallic emblem in its purity.

The ultimate reality cannot be perceived through direct perception and Hindu scriptures rely on inference and comparison for expressing reality. The Shiva Linga is one such indirect way of communicating reality. The Linga is a symbol of God, in all his attributes. It is shaped like an ellipse – with two points of focus which suggest Shiva-Shakthi. The Linga is generally fixed in a manner that one half is embedded in the ground and is not visible and represents the

manifest/created world (Shakthi). The Linga is therefore a representation of two facets of reality – the unmanifest and the manifest. It also suggests that the male and female exist and strive towards Godhead in harmony rather than in opposition to each other. Lord Shiva is a divine figure of reconciliation of all opposites. In some figures, depicting the full figure of Shiva, the male and female principles are united. In the linga and yoni fusion, we see the totality of Shiva's nature, the whole of created existence, we see the earth and sky, the river and sea, so to speak. These are natural symbols of the supreme God found throughout the whole of the created order.

Shivaratri



Shivaratri is celebrated on the 14th night of the dark half (Krishna Paksha) of the month of Palguna. This particular celebration, the best day for Shiva Puja, is called Maha Shivarathri.

A question that often troubles the mind and therefore needs clarification is, why we celebrate Shivarathri at night while other religious festivities are held during the day. As mentioned earlier, Lord Shiva is the Superintendent/Lord/Swami of dissolution. He is in charge of the destruction of Tamasic qualities. Since night is the image of Tamasic qualities, Lord Shiva naturally loves night. Hence, we celebrate Shivarathri at night. But there are of course other explanations as to why Shivarathri is a PRADOSH or evening/night celebration. Shivarathri is celebrated during Krishna Paksha (dark half). During this period the moon is waning, becoming smaller, until eventually on the 15th night-called Amavasya- the moon is completely blocked out. With the disappearance of the moon and the appearance of the darkest night, the Tamasic qualities in man are awakened. People may become inclined to engage in tamasik or evil or unacceptable activities. The waning of the moon also signifies a decrease in general progress and an increase in evil elements. In order to bring under control and tranquillise these Tamasic qualities we engage in fasting and prayer beforehand. Since we cannot achieve this on our own, we appease the Superintendent or Swami of these Tamasic qualities-Shiva. Hence Shivarathri is celebrated on the 14th night

of Palguna in Krishna Paksha. Furthermore, Bhagwan Shiv-Shankar has Himself uttered the following words in the Shiva Puran:

On the 14th of the dark half, I shall go into Kaliyuga on the surface of the earth at night and not by day. I shall undoubtedly transfer myself to all Lingas, whether moveable or permanently fixed, for the removal of the sins committed in preceding years; therefore, the person who offers worship to me at night, will be free from sin.

It is highly recommended that devotees fast and keep vigil on the night of Shivarathri. In the Bhagwad Gita, Sri Krishna says that when the whole world is asleep, the one who has brought his/her senses under control is AWAKE. One way in which we can bring our senses under control is to FAST. We are fully aware of the effect of alcohol and drugs. But is alcohol and drugs the only intoxicants in this world? FOOD is also an intoxicant. One experiences this after a meal when drowsiness and sloth overtake the body and mind. Once the stomach is full, we are ready to watch a film or to go out to the theatre or to a concert. But a hungry person has no relish or taste or desire for the satisfaction of the senses. Therefore, in order to keep awake FASTING IS NECESSARY. No sleep overtakes one who fasts and brings one's senses under control. It is said that after creation was completed, Shiva and Parvati went out to live on top of Mount Kailas. Parvati then asked Shiva: of the many rituals observed in your honour, which pleases you the most? So Shivaji replied:

My devotees give me greater happiness by mere fasting than by ceremonial baths and offerings of flowers, sweets and incense.

Shivaratri Pooja



Prayer and worship of Lord Shiva on Shivaratri is prescribed in the Shiva Chalisa wherein we read:

पण्डित त्रयोदशी को लवे ध्यान पूर्वक होम करावे । त्रयोदशी व्रत करे हमेशा तन
नहिं ताके रहे कलेशा ॥

On Trayodashi one should invite a Pundit and devotedly make offerings to Lord Shiva. Those who fast and pray to Lord Shiva on Trayodashi are always healthy and happy.

In both the Shiva Purana and the Shiva Chalisa, the devotee is directed to observe strict spiritual discipline. While the ritual offerings of bathing, clothing, incense and aarti are all prescribed, the devotee is especially called on to observe a व्रत or fast. Fast means that we must abstain from all foods that are likely to arouse moods of passion, laziness and lethargy in us. Fasting also means that we should abstain from intoxicants such as alcohol. Fasting also means that we should abstain from the material pleasures of the world – watching television, listening to non-devotional music are some examples of worldly pleasures. The Maha Shivaratri festival should be spent in intense devotion.

On the morning of Maha Shivaratri, the devotee is expected to take a bath and then put on fresh clothes. After worship to Surya, Shiva-Parvati and Luxmi Narayan, devotees observe a fast during the day.

At night, the devotees worship Lord Shiva during each of the four successive three hour periods. In the first period, devotees do Ganesh-Gauri, Kalash-Varun, Nava Graha, Shiva-Parvati and Luxmi Narayan pooja, havan. The panchakshar mantra “om namah shivaaya” is repeated 108 times. The balance of the time in the first period should be spent in bhajans, kirtans and scriptural readings. The first session is concluded with aarti and concluding prayers. In the second, third and fourth sessions worship of the Shiv Linga is done (at the beginning of the session). The panchakshar mantra “om namah shivaaya” must be repeated 216 times in each session (2nd, 3rd & 4th). Each session must include havan, singing of bhajans, kirtans and scriptural readings. At the end of each session there must be aarti and concluding prayers.

In each period the worship of the Shiva Linga is conducted in accordance with the injunctions of the scriptures. The Shiva Purana says that on Maha Shivaratri night Lord Shiva transfers himself to all Lingas and that the devotees who offer worship to the Shiva Linga on Maha Shivaratri will be free from sin. The Shiva Linga is bathed with milk, yoghurt, honey, ghee, sugar and water. Again according to Shiva Purana, the performance of abhisheka of the Shiva linga

with these six items is most pleasing to Lord Shiva. Each of these dravyas used in the abhisheka blesses a unique quality:

- Milk is the blessing for purity and piety.
- Yoghurt is the blessing for prosperity and progeny.
- Honey is the blessing for sweet speech.
- Ghee is the blessing for victory.
- Sugar is the blessing for happiness.
- Water is the blessing for purity.

These offerings to the Shiva Linga help in the purification of our soul. This is followed by the offering of Bilwa leaves, which has a stalk with three leaves. A lamp is lit in front of the Shiva Linga to symbolize attainment of knowledge. There is a belief that by offering water, lighting the lamp and incense and the ringing of the temple bells, devotees call into focus all their senses, making themselves acutely aware of themselves and the universe to which they belong.

The above ritual offerings and its merits are also found in the Shiva Chalisa:

धूप दीप नैवेद्य चढावे शंकर सम्मुख पाठ सुनावे । जन्म जन्म के पाप नसावे अन्त
वास शिवपुर में पावे ॥

Whosoever offers incense , prasadh and performs aarti to Lord Shiva, with love and devotion, enjoys material happiness and spiritual bliss in this world and hereafter ascends to the abode of Lord Shiva.

Conclusion

This is the story of a hunter whose name was Suswara. Suswara received the grace of God by unintentionally worshipping Shiva with Bel Patra on the Shivarathri night. His livelihood was to kill and sell birds and animals. One day as he was roaming in the forest in search animals, it became dark. He was unable to go home, so he climbed up a tree for shelter. This tree was of course a Bel tree. The hunter bundled the deer he had shot that day and tied to a branch of the tree. The hunter was hungry and thirsty and therefore remained awake throughout the night. The hunter shed tears when he thought of his poor wife and children who were starving and anxiously awaiting his return. In order to pass away the time that night he engaged himself in plucking the Bel Patra and dropping them down onto the ground. The next day, the hunter returned home

and sold his deer. He brought some food for himself and his family. Just as he was about to eat, a stranger came to him, begging for food, so he served him first and then had his meal.

The spiritual significance of this story is as follows: The wild animals which the hunter fought with are lust, anger, greed, jealousy and hatred. The jungle in which these animals are to be found is the mind. It is in this mind that the wild animals roam about freely and they must be killed. In pursuing these animals, the hunter was seeking the truth, in other words he was showing the characteristics of a Yogi. If one wants to be a Yogi (a seeker of truth) then one has to conquer the evil tendencies. This hunter's name was Suswara which means melodious. In order to seek God's grace, one needs a pleasant voice. This hunter shed tears for his family. His family (wife and children) are actually the entire world. One who seeks the Grace of God must become an embodiment of love. One must have pure, all-embracing love and sympathy. The hunter's shedding of tears is symbolic of his universal love.

We all want to get closer to God; we desire God's grace. On Shivaratri we are enlisting the help and assistance of Shiva to achieve this. Shiva is out and about on the night of Shivaratri. More than any other night, He is ready to meet us on Shivaratri night. It is therefore appropriate that we should spend the Shivaratri night in fasting, prayer, singing of kirtans and bhajans and discourses.



Editorial Committee: Pdt Rishipaul R Maharajh; Dr L R Maharajh; Pdt Rohith W Maharaj; Pdt Sajeel Maharaj; Pdt Deenanath (Danny) Maharaj; Pdt Basanth Panday.
