

Shree Maha Shiva Ratri

Prem Namaste, Vanakkum, Jai Srimati Gauri Devi- Shree Shankar Mahadeva.

Om ganapataye namah / Om sarasvatyai namah



Shiva (Lord Shiva) and Ratri (night), so Shivaratri means the night of Lord Shiva. Every lunar month on the 14th day of the dark half of the moon phase there is a Shivaratri but in the Vedic month of Phalgun (February-March) there is a Maha Shivaratri. Chaturdashi (14th day of the dark moon phase). So Maha Shiva-ratri night falls on the **4th March**. This auspicious ceremony takes place at night. This festival is observed in the honour of Lord Shiva, who was married to Mother Parvati (a.k.a Mother Durga/ Gauri) on this auspicious Vedic day.

Devotees observe a strict fast on this day. Some really strict devotees perform a nirjal fast i.e. they do not even have a sip of water. They keep a strict Virgil the entire night. The Shiva Lingam is worshipped throughout the night by washing the Lingam every three hours with milk, yogurt, ghee, honey and so forth, whilst chanting of the mantra “Om namah shivaya”, continues. Offering of bael leaves are made to the Lingam. Bael leaves are very sacred (as Tulsi is to Lord Vishnu and Dhaar is to Mother Durga are very pleasing to Them) and Lord Shiva becomes pleased with that offering. Many different hymns glorifying Lord Shiva are sung with intense fervor and devotion. Aspirants perform japa of the Panchakshara mantra “Om namah Shivaya” (At the end of this article there is a very detail explanation of each syllable of this mantra.)

One who utters the names of Lord Shiva during Shivaratri with perfect devotion and concentration is freed from all sins that one has committed. One reaches the abode of Lord Shiva and resides very happily there.

The Katha of King Chitrabhanu

In the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, Maharaja Bhishma, whilst resting on a bed of arrows and discoursing on Dharma, refers to the observance of Maha Shivaratri by King Chitrabhanu. The pastime goes as follows.

Once, King Chitrabhanu was observing a fast with his wife, and it was the day of Maha Shivaratri. The sage Ashtavakra came on a visit to the king's court. The sage asked, "O king why are you observing a fast today?" King Chitrabhanu explained the reason, as he had the gift of remembering the incidents of his previous birth. The king said to the sage, "In my past birth I was a hunter in Varanasi Dham (Kashi). My name was Suswara. My livelihood was to kill and sell birds and animals. One day, I was overtaken by the darkness of night. Unable to return home, I climbed a tree for shelter. It happened to be a bael tree. I had shot a deer that day, but I did not have time to take it home. I bundled it up and tied it to a branch on the tree. As I was tormented by hunger and thirst, I kept awake throughout the night. I shed profuse tears when I thought of my poor wife and children who were starving and anxiously awaiting my return. To pass away time that night I engaged myself in plucking bael leaves and dropping them down onto the ground. "The day dawned and I returned home and sold the deer. I bought some food for myself and for my family. I was about to break my fast when a stranger came to me, begging for food. I served him first and then took my food."

"At the time of death, I saw two messengers of Lord Shiva, they were sent down to take my soul to his abode. I then learnt for the first time of the great merit I had earned by the unconscious worship of Lord Shiva during the night of Shivaratri. They told me that there was a Lingam under that tree and that I had dropped the leaves on that Lingam. My tears, which I had shed out of pure sorrow for my family, fell onto the Lingam and washed it. And I had fasted all day and all night. Thus, I unconsciously worshipped Lord Shiva on that most auspicious day." "I lived in the abode of the Lord and enjoyed divine bliss for long ages. And now I am reborn as Chitrabhanu."

Lord Shiva's assurance

When creation was completed Lord Shiva and Parvati Mata went to live on the top of Mount Kailash. Mother Parvati asked, "O adorable lord, which of the many rituals observed in your honour pleases you the most." The Lord replied, "The fourteenth night of the new moon in the dark fortnight during the month of Phalgun, is my favorite day. It is called Maha Shivaratri. My devotees give me great joy and happiness by mere fasting than by ceremonial baths and offerings of flower, sweets and incense."

"The devotee observes strict spiritual discipline in the day and worships me in four different forms during each of the four successive three hour periods of the night. The offering of a few bael leaves is more precious to me than precious jewels and flowers. My devotee should bath me in milk in the first period, in yogurt in the second period, in ghee in the third, and in honey in the fourth and the last. In the morning he should feed Brahmins (that is if this is possible), and after doing that

he/she breaks his/her fast. No ritual can compare with this simple routine in sanctity.” Mother Parvati was deeply impressed by the words of her husband. She repeated this to her friends, who in turn passed it on to everyone else. Thus the sanctity of Maha Shivaratri was broadcast all over the world.

The Shivaratri fast is aimed at controlling a persons two great vices (rajas – the quality of passionate activity) and (tamas - that of inertia). The entire day is spent on worshipping Lord Shiva. Continuous worship of the Lord necessitates the devotee’s constant presence in the place of worship. One's motion is controlled and evils like lust, anger and jealousy, born of Rajas, are ignored and subdued. The devotee observes Virgil throughout the night and thus conquers tamas as well. Constant control is exercised over the mind. Every three hours a round of worship of the Shiva Lingam is conducted and thus Shivaratri is the perfect vrat.

At many ashrams around the world Maha Shivaratri is celebrated in the following manner. Aspirants fast the whole day, many of them without taking a single drop of water. Some ashrams perform a grand havan to Lord Shiva for peace and welfare of all and the world. The whole day is spent in chanting of the mantra “Om namah Shivaya” and in meditation upon the Lord. At night all assemble in the temple and chant this mantra and during the four quarters of the night the Shiva Lingam is worshipped with intense devotion.



The Linga Ashtakam (Eight verses glorifying the Shiva Linga.)

One chants these mantras when performing Abhishek.
This Ashtakam pleases Lord Shiva tremendously.

Brahma-murari surachit lingam, nirmal bhakchit shobhita lingam
Janma ja dukha vinashaka lingam, tat pranamami sadaa shiva-lingam

I bow before that Sada-Shivalinga, which is adored by Lord Brahma,
Lord Vishnu and revered by others, praised in mantras and which
destroys the cycle of births and deaths.

Deva muni prawa-rarchita lingam, kamadahang karunakara lingam
Ravan darp vinashana lingam, tat pranamami sadaa shiva-lingam

I bow before that Sada-Shivalinga, which is the focus of the worship of
Saints, infinitely compassionate and the subduer of the pride and
passion.

Sarva-sugandhi sulaypita lingam, budhi vivardhan kaarana lingam
Sidha-surasur vandita lingam, tat pranamami sadaa shiva-lingam

I bow before that Sada-Shivalinga, smeared with Vibhuti, scented with
perfumes and which elevates the power of the mind and kindles the
light of discrimination, to which the Suras and Asuras prostrate.

Kanak maha-mani bhukchita lingam, phani-pati veksh-tita shobhit lingam
Daksha suyagya vinashana lingam, tat pranamami sadaa shiva-lingam

I bow before that Sada-Shivalinga, destroyer of King Daksha's ego, and
which is decorated with various ornaments glowing within the embrace
of the coiled serpent.

Kumkum chandana laypit lingam, pankaj haar sushobhita lingam
Sanchit paap vinashana lingam, tat pranamami sadaa shiva-lingam

I bow before that Sada-Shivalinga, adorned with Saffron, Sandal- paste
& garlands of lotus flowers, which exonerates all sinful actions.

Deva ganarchit sayvita lingam, bhavai bhakti bherewa-cha lingam
Dinakar koti prabha kara lingam, tat pranamami sadaa shiva-lingam

I bow that before Sada-Shivalinga, worshipped by the Sages & Saints
with full faith and devotion and which is the source of unlimited
brilliance.

Ashta dalopari veksh-tita lingam, sarva samudbhava kaarana lingam
Ashta daridra vinashana lingam, tat pranamami sadaa shiva-lingam

I bow that before Sada-Shivalinga, destroyer of manifold wretchedness,
which is the cause of creation and dissolution.

Soorguru soorwar poojit lingam, soorwan pushpa sadachita lingam
Paraatparam paramatmaka lingam, tat pranamami sadaa shiva-lingam

I bow before that Sada-Shivalinga, the Transcendent Being,
worshipped by the learned and all devotees, offering Bael leaves,
flowers, fruits and water.

Lingaashtak medang punyang yuh, pathay-chiva sannidhow
Shiva-loka mawapanoti, shivena saha moditay

Whosoever repeats these eight Shlokas glorifying the Shivalinga in the divine
presence of Lord Shiva attains final and everlasting relationship in the abode of
Shiva Loka.

Lord Krsna and the Cowherd Boys Celebrate the Shiva-ratri Festival

The cowherd men of Vrindavan, headed by Nanda Maharaja, desired to go to
Ambikavana to perform the Shivaratri performance. (From the 10th canto Srimad
Bhagavatam)

The rasa-lila was performed during the autumn, and after that the next big
ceremony is Holi or the Dolayatra ceremony. Between the Dolayatra ceremony and
the rasa-lila ceremony there is one important ceremony, which is called Shivaratri,
which is especially observed by the Saivites, or devotees of Lord Shiva. But
sometimes the Vaishnavas (devotees of Lord Vishnu) also observe this ceremony
because they accept Lord Shiva as the foremost Vaishnava. Nanda Maharaja and
the other cowherd men desired to go to Ambikavana for Shivaratri. Ambikavana is
situated somewhere in the Gujarat province.

They very devotedly began to worship the deity of Lord Shiva and Ambika (another
name for Ma Durga). It is the general practice that wherever there is a temple of
Lord Shiva, there must be another temple of Ambika because Ambika is the wife of
Lord Shiva and is the most exalted of chaste women. She doesn't live outside the
association of her husband. After reaching Ambikavana, the cowherd men of
Vrindavan first bathed themselves in the river Sarasvati. If one goes to any place of
pilgrimage, his/her first duty is to take a bath and sometimes to shave his head.
That is the first business. After taking bath, they worshipped the deities and then
distributed charity in the holy places. The cowherd men who had come to execute
the ritualistic function of worshipping Lord Shiva and Mother Ambika finished their
business and prepared to return to Vrindavan. Similarly, the *gopis* also worshipped
goddess Katyayani (Durga Devi) to become more and more attached to Lord Krsna.

Shiva Panchakshara Stotra

Stotra 1:

Nagendra Haaraaya Thrilochanaaya
Bhasmaanga Raagaaya Maheshvaraaya
Nityaaya Suddhaaya Digambaraaya
Tasmai Nakaaraaya Namah Shivaaya

Meaning:

I offer my humble salutations to Lord Maheshvara - who has a garland of serpents around the neck; who has three eyes; whose body is covered with ash (vibhuti); who is eternal; who is pure; who has the entire sky as His dress and who is embodied as the first letter **Na**.

Stotra 2:

Mandaakini Salila Chandana Chaarthitaaya
Nandeessvara Pramatha Naatha Mahesvaraaya
Mandaara Pushpa Vahu Pushpa Supoojitaaya
Tasmai Makaaraaya Namah Shivaaya

Meaning:

I bow to Lord Maheshvara, who is embodied as Makaara (letter **Ma**), whose body is anointed with holy waters from the river Ganges and sandal paste, who is the sovereign king of the Pramatha Ganas and who is adorned with innumerable divine flowers such as Mandaara.

Stotra 3:

Shivaaya Gauri Vadana Aravinda
Sooryaaya Dakshaadhvara Naashakaaya
Sree Neelakantaaya Vrisha Dhvaajaaya
Tasmai Shikaaraaya Namah Shivaaya

Meaning:

I offer my salutations to Lord Shiva, who is the resplendent sun for mother Gauri's lotus face, who is the destroyer of Daksha's sacrificial ritual, who is the blue necked Lord (due to the Haalahala poison which He agreed to consume), whose banner bears the emblem of a bull and who is embodied as the letter **Shi**.

Stotra 4:

Vasishta Kumbhodbhava Gautamaaya
Muneendra Devaarchita Sekharaaya
Chandraarka Vaishvaanara Lochanaaya
Tasmai Vakaaraaya Namah Shivaaya

Meaning:

I prostrate before you O Shiva, who is worshipped and prayed to by great sages such as Vashishta, Agastya and Gautama, whose eyes are sun, moon and the fire and who is embodied as Vakaara (letter **Va**).

Stotra 5:

Yajna Swaroopaaya Jataadharaaya
Pinaaka Hasthaaya Sanaatanaaya
Divyaaya Devaaya Digambaraaya
Tasmai Yakaraaya Namah Shivaaya

Meaning:

Prostrations to the sacred Lord who is the Yaksha incarnate, whose hairs are long and matted, who holds Pinaaka (trident) in His hand, who has the entire sky as His attire and who is embodied as the letter **Ya**.

Stotra 6:

Panchaaksharam Idam Punyam
Yah Pateh Shiva Sannidhau
Shivaloka Mavaapnothee
Shivena Saha Modate

Meaning:

Whoever repeats this prayer composed with the five holy letters before Lord Shiva, attains that supreme abode of his and enjoys the eternal Bliss.



**How to perform the pujas and
Abhishekam (bathing of the Linga) during the night.**

Bathing and staying clean, the worship of Lord Shiva in the form of Shiva Lingam is done in the four jamuns (four equal time intervals) of the night.

Firstly perform Ganapati puja praying for no hurdles to the puja. Simply have a murti of Lord Ganesh and offer him incense, lamp and flowers. Before the prayer starts make sure that you wash the Lingam properly with water. Now place the Lingam on a tray. You can perform the Abhishek in your prayer room. Also you should have made during the day 4 flower garlands. Many use cloths to dress the linga after each abhishekam. (But this is optional). Also make sure that you have at least 4-incense stick, 4 camphor and 4 whole flowers for the arati. Get from a temple lots of Bael leaves.

Then at **18h00** on the **4th** the first Abhishek is performed. While chanting mantras of Lord Shiva bath the Lingam with **milk** (which should be in a lota/pot). Then after offering the milk with one lota of water bath the Lingam. Then with a clean cloth only used for the prayer dab the Lingam to remove the excess liquid. Now place bael leaves on top of the Lingam and with chandan paste with the ring finger of your right hand draw three lines on the Lingam and on the centre line dot it with kum-kum. Then garland the Lingam and now offer arati with incense, lamp and flower 7 times around the Lingam. This is the end of the first Jamun.



At **21h00** the 2nd Jamun is performed. Please replace the Milk above with **yoghurt** and the procedure is the same.

At **00h00** the 3rd Jamun is performed. Please replace Milk above with **ghee** and the procedure is the same. Do not use one lota of ghee, rather in a lota add $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of ghee and add luke warm water to it.

At **around 3h00 - 4h00** the 4th and last Jamun is performed. Please replace Milk above with **honey** and the procedure is the same. Do not use one lota of honey, rather in a lota add $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of honey and add luke warm water to it.

If you so desire the different colour clothes you can use for the different jamuns are as follows...

1st jamun :- RED

2nd jamun :- **YELLOW**

3rd jamun :- WHITE

4th jamun :- BLUE

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