

Soma Pradosham - 5th December 2022 (South Africa)



Pradosha vrata is a vrata (Fast) of Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati. The Pradosha worship is done in the evening twilight on the Trayodashi of both lunar fortnights (Shukla and Krishna Paksha). These are the 13th tithi, or lunar days, from the New Moon (Amavasya) and Full Moon (Purnima). The performance of the vrata involves a fast followed by a vigil. A bath is taken one hour before sunset and Lord Shiva, Mother Parvati, Shree Ganesha, Lord Skanda (Muruga), and Nandi are worshipped. Following this, Lord Shiva is invoked. The Pradosha katha is read out after the formal worship is concluded.

Pradosha Vrata By Shree Swami Shivananda-ji
(A Few additions by Narottam Das)

ALL THINGS in this vast creation function upon definite cosmic laws or laws of God. There is always a beautiful system and sound rationale governing every phenomenon and process, mundane or mystical. Just as the gross elements and physical forces operate differently under different states and conditions, so also the subtler and higher forces respond and react in the inner mystic planes, and in the purely spiritual processes like meditation, prayer, worship, etc. Therefore, you will find definite injunctions for performing certain types of worship in the morning, certain other injunctions for the midday prayers, and still others for the evening worship. Again, some observances are meant to be performed during certain phases of the moon, some when a particular star is in the ascendant, or at the time of a particular conjunction of planets.

The Pradosha worship is to be done in the evening twilight on the thirteenth day of each lunar fortnight. It is the worship of Lord Shiva for victory and success in all undertakings, and the fulfilment of all your heart's cherished desires. When you desire to obtain a favour from a superior person, don't you naturally approach him at a moment when he is likely to be in a very pleasant frame of mind? You will perhaps see him after he has had a good dinner and is happily chatting with a friend in a hearty, expansive mood. Even so, the Hindu, especially the Hindu who is engaged in the motivated type of worship, usually selects the most pleasant aspect of God for his worship. He performs it at a time which the ancient Rishis experienced as being the most helpful and efficacious in propitiating the Deity. The Pradosha worship is based on such mystic psychology.

Pradosha is the worship of Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati when they both are in an extremely propitious mood. Repeatedly worsted in war by the demons, the devas approached Lord Shiva to bless them with a leader for their celestial hosts. They came to the Lord at twilight on the thirteenth day of the lunar fortnight and found him in the blissful company of his consort, Mother Parvati. Hymned and glorified by them, Lord Shiva immediately granted their prayerful request. Hence, the extreme auspiciousness of the period.

The *Skanda Purana* relates how Sandilya Muni prescribed this Vrata to a certain Brahmin lady. She came to the sage with two boys, her son, Suchivrata, and an orphan prince, Dharmagupta, whose father was slain in battle and the kingdom overrun by enemies.

Acting upon the advice of the sage, the woman and the boys performed the Vrata with great devotion. After four months, that is, in the eighth Pradosha, Suchivrata obtained a pot of nectar and drank the divine ambrosia. Prince Dharmagupta won the hand of a celestial princess and, as ordered by Lord Shiva, with the help of the celestial king himself, his enemies were slain and his kingdom restored to him. Then Dharmagupta attained the Lord's supreme abode. So easily, and yet so greatly is the Lord of Kailash pleased by this Vrata.

One who takes this Vrata fasts on that day, and keeps vigil at night after the fast is over. Bathing an hour before sunset, the worshipper first performs a preliminary worship of Lord Shiva, together with all the others of His divine family, namely, Parvati, Ganesha, Skanda and Nandi. After the worship (offer incense, lamp and flowers. Offer these items seven times in a clockwise direction around Lord Shiva and family. Then offer kheer (sweet rice). Now Lord Shiva is invoked, take a betel leaf, betel nut, rice, a 5c coin and flower petals and pray to Lord Shiva (with the mantra - Om shiva bhagavaan aavaahayaamee sthapayamee" in the special *kalasha* (lota/clay pot) placed on a square *mandala* with a lotus drawn in it (optional if you can draw the lotus) and spread over with *darbha* (*kusha*) grass. Pray to Lord Shiva asking Lord Shiva to please enter in the lota/chumbhu/clay pot and accept your prayers.

The puja proper. Now chant the following:

1) Om swagatam su swagatam - Om Shiva-ye namah

(Swagatam means O Lord Shiva I welcome you.)

Then offer flower or flower petals. (Pushpam)

2) Om idam pushpam - Om Shiva-ye namah

Then offer incense (Dhoopam)

3) Om tato dhoopam aghraa-payaami - Om Shiva-ye namah

Then offer lamp (Deepam)

4) Om prat-yaksha deepam darshayaami - Om Shiva-ye namah

You offer the above items by turning the items seven times around the Kalash.

5) Om naivedyam samar-payaami - Om Shiva-ye namah

(Offer cut fruit - Naivedyam = food)

6) Offer prayers for forgiveness

Om yaani kaani cha paapaani janmaantara kritaane cha, taani sarvaani vinashyanti pradakshinaa pade pade //

Then offer your personal prayers to Lord Shiva and his family. Ask Lord Shiva and his family for whatever you desire and they being so merciful will grant what you desire. But be careful what you desire for...

After the formal worship has been completed, a Pradosha katha is read (which is given below) and heard by the devotees. This is followed by the recitation of the Maha Mrityunjaya Mantra 108 times. In the end the sacred *kalasha* water is partaken of, the sacred ash is applied to the forehead, and the water which was used to bathe the Lord, is drunk. A gift of a pot, a cloth and an image of the Lord is given to a Brahmin to conclude the worship (this is optional tho).

A very important point to be remembered in this connection is that during this auspicious period all the hosts of celestial beings and devas come down from the heavens and attend the worship in their subtle forms. This adds immensely to the sanctity of the worship.

Srila Shukadeva Goswami Maharaja said: 'The Suras (the devas) invited the king of the snakes, Vaasuki, promising him a share and wound him around the mountain to serve as a churning rope. Thereupon commenced they in great glee with the job of trying for the nectar, o best of the Kurus. Lord Hari took him first by the head and the godly followed His example. The daitya (demon) leaders didn't like the arrangement and thought to the mature and outstanding knowledge of their study, their birth and experience: 'None of us will try the tail of the serpent because that is the inferior part'. Seeing how consequently the Daityas kept silent, smiled the Supreme Personality. He gave up the front portion and grasped with the devas the rear end. Thus settling the positions for where to hold, did they, the sons of Kashyapa [devas and demoniac], with great zeal churn to get the nectar from the ocean of milk. As they were churning sank of its weight, having no support, that hill down in the water despite of it being captured by the strong, o son of Pandu. Heavily disappointed, dried all of the beauty of their faces up as they saw how their efforts by the stronger will of God were overruled. When He saw how by divine intervention the mountain sank, expanded the Infallible Controller whose ways and powers are so inscrutable, Himself into the wondrous body of a giant tortoise, entered He the water and lifted He [Kurma] it up.

Observing it being lifted cheered up as well Sura as Asura to churn the body that as a big island on top of another one stretched out on His back for a hundred thousand yojanas. The rotating of the mountain moved by the strong arms of the sura and asura leaders, my best, was by the original tortoise who bore it on His back considered an infinitely pleasant scratching. Thereafter, to encourage them and increase their strength and vigor, entered Lord Vishnu the Asuras in the form of their own quality [that of passion], infused He the godly with divinity [the mode of goodness], and assumed He the form of ignorance with the king of the serpents. On top of the big mountain as another mountain grasping Mandara with one hand, exhibited He thousands of hands while from the sky Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva headed by Lord Indra offered Him prayers and showered Him with flowers. As well as on top as below, as with themselves, with the mountain and with the rope having entered as the Supreme, was the ocean that with great strength vehemently was churned, seriously agitated by the great rock, and were all the alligators disturbed. The serpent king heavily breathing in all directions, spitted by the thousands of him fire and smoke and thus affected with the heat of his radiation the Asuras headed by Pauloma, Kaleya, Bali and Ilvala who all began to look like sarala trees scorched in a forest fire. Also the godly were affected in their luster by his fiery breath that smoked their dresses, fine garlands, armament and faces; under the direction of the Supreme Lord it then profusely rained while breezes blew clouds of vapor from the waves of the ocean. When the ocean to the best ability of the godly and Asuras was duly churned but no nectar appeared, began the Invincible One Himself to churn.

As dark as a cloud, in yellow silks, with lightning earrings on His ears, with His gleaming hair on His head disheveled, with His garland, reddish eyes and victorious arms securing the universe, churned He, after taking the snake, the churning rod for which the mountain was used and assumed He for that purpose a size as big as that of a mountain Himself. After first highly agitating all kinds of fish, sharks, snakes, all sorts of tortoises, whales, water-elephants, crocodiles and timingilas [whale-eating whales], appeared, with all the churning going on, from the ocean a very strong poison called Haalahala. That potent unbearable poison, unstoppable spreading in all directions high and low, scared all the people who together with their leaders found no rest, o my best, so that they, not being protected, sought the shelter of Lord Shiva's lotus feet. When they saw him who for the welfare of the three worlds together with his wife sat on his mountain [Kailasa], he, the best of the devas hailed by the saints who in austerity walk the path of liberation in service, offered they him their obeisances.

The leaders of mankind said: 'O Lord of Lords, o Mahaadeva, o soul of each, o love of all, deliver us, who took to your lotus feet, from this poison burning the three worlds. You alone in the whole universe are the lord and master over bondage and liberation, you are the one we worship as persons seeking the fortune; you are the spiritual master to mitigate all distress. By the modes of matter, by your own potency, do you execute the creation, maintenance and annihilation of this material world, o mighty one, when you manifest yourself, o greatest, as Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva. You are the Brahman Supreme, the confidential of the cause and the effect of all the varieties of creation; you with all your potencies manifested are the Supersoul and the Controller of the universe. You are the source of the [spiritual, vedic] sound, the origin of the universe, the Soul, the life breath, the senses and the elements, the modes of nature and the self-realization, the eternal time, the determination and the religiousness of the truth [satya] and truthfulness [rita]; it is unto you that one utters the original syllable consisting of the three letters [A-U-M]. Fire, your mouth, represents the complete of all divine souls; the surface of the globe one does know, o love of all worlds, as your lotus feet; time is the progress of the aggregate of your devas; the directions are your ears and the controller of the waters [Varuna] is your taste. With the sky as your navel, the air as your breath, the sun globe for your eyes, the water indeed as your semen, the moon as your mind and the higher worlds, o Lord, as your head, is your self the shelter of all living beings high and low. With the oceans as your belly, the mountains as your bones, the plants, creepers and herbs as your hairs and the mantras as your seven layers [koshas], are, o Vedas in person, all the religions the core of your heart. The five options [basic texts] of philosophy [called Tatpurusha, Aghora, Sadyojata, Vamadeva, and Ishana] are your faces with the thirty-eight important mantras that ascertain the reality of the Supersoul, the reality of you o Lord, celebrated as Shiva in the position of your self-illumination.

The waves of irreligion [lust, anger, greed and illusion] constitute but your shadow, the shadow on the basis of which there are so many types of creation; your three eyes are the goodness, the passion and the darkness; your simply glancing over brought about the analytic scriptures of the soul, o Lord full of verses, o god of the vedic literatures and their supplements. None of the directors of the world, o Ruler on the Mountain, not Brahma, not Vishnu, nor the king of the Suras [Indra], can fathom your supreme effulgence, the impersonal spirit equal to devas and man, wherein the modes of passion, ignorance and goodness are not found. In this world which, having originated from you, is being destroyed by the sparks of the fire from your eyes at the time of annihilation, have you burned to ashes Tripura, the sacrifices of desire, the poison of time, and many other forms of trouble to the living beings; but these matters do, because you keep this world out of your mind, not serve the praise of you. People who by the self-satisfied spiritual masters within their hearts think of your two lotus feet as moving with Uma your consort do, later on in their penance, criticize your acts and consider you in the crematorium not always a nice person; they indeed being of such a shameless attitude do not understand your activities. For the reason of that being transcendently situated above the moving and the nonmoving, are you difficult to understand; and when it is not possible for even Lord Brahma and the ones belonging to him to comprehend your reality as-it-is, o great one, how much wouldn't that be true for us? Even though we are but creations to the creation [that is of Lord Brahma] do we, to our ability, offer you our prayers. With all things transcendental we cannot see the actual supreme position of you who indeed are there for the happiness of the manifested world, o great controller not known in your activities.'

Srila Shukadeva Goswami Maharaja said: 'Seeing their pernicious predicament spoke he, Mahadeva, the friend of all living beings out of his compassion for the great sorrow to his consort Sati. Lord Shiva said: 'Dear Bhavani, how pitiable this situation of

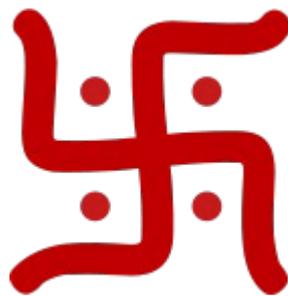
all the living beings, just see how threatening the present situation is because of all the poison produced from the churning of the ocean. Feeling responsible for all of their lives must I indeed do something for their safety; considered their master is it my duty to protect the ones suffering. Devotees protect with their own life other living beings who time bound, bewildered by the external energy, are of enmity with one another. Doing good to others o gentle one, is the Soul of All, the Lord, pleased and because the Supreme Personality of the Lord is pleased are also I and all other moving and nonmoving entities happy; let me therefore drink this poison so that there from me will be the well-being of all creatures.'

Srila Shukadeva Goswami Maharaja said: 'Lord Shiva, the well-wisher of the universe, this way addressing Bhavani then began, with the permission of her knowing the best of him, to drink the poison. Mahadeva there to took the widespread Haalahala poison in his hand and drank it compassionately for the good of all living beings. To him exhibited that poison from the water its potency by giving his neck a bluish line, the line that in the eyes of the saintly person is an ornament. The saints as good as always voluntarily take upon them the sufferings of the common people; that action of theirs is truly the highest form of worship of the original person, the complete of the soul. Hearing of that act of Lord Shiva, the deva of devas, the graceful one, was he highly praised by all the people, by the daughter of Daksha, and by Lord Brahma and the Lord of Vaikunthha. And to the little bit that was scattered here and there as he drank from the palm, attended some other known living creatures like scorpions, cobras and other poisonous animals and plants.

It is said that on the Trayodasi (thirteenth moon day) day, the devas and demons realized that they had committed a sin of not praying to lord Shiva and prayed for forgiveness. Lord Shiva forgave them and danced in between the horns of the Nandi's forehead. This time is called Pradhosham. It's said that if anybody prays Lord Shiva in this time, he/she fulfills their wishes and gives them mukti.

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