

Lord Shiva – Bhole Naath



Shiva

From other sources

What is the difference between the soul and the mind?

The soul is the consciousness or the knowing principle in man.

The mind belongs to the category of matter.

Shiva is the soul and Parvati is the mind.

The consciousness is the Reality, the unchanging, unmoving, all pervading soul.

Mind being matter is changeable and unreal.

We perceive objects through the organs of sense perception. The soul enables the organs to perceive the objects. The soul exists in all living beings as consciousness. It is the light of the soul that makes the sense-organs and the mind appear alive and luminous.

Shiva is the unchanging consciousness – Nirguna or without form or shape. This unchanging consciousness-Shiva – becomes saguna or with form, when Maya Shakti, which is Shiva's illusive power appears as mind and matter. This phenomenon is known as Ardhanarishwar.

Shiva's Maya-Shakti is known by various names such as Uma, Parvati, Kali, Durga etc. This Maya-Shakti or power inheres in Shiva just as the burning power inheres in fire, sweetness in sugar, whiteness in milk and meaning in the words.

Shiva stands for the Absolute, the unchanging, static background, of which Kali, the Shakti (power) is the dynamic expression. We call this Shakti or power Mother or

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Goddess. Goddess Kali combines in herself creative dynamism, destructive terror and redemptive grace.

God's power that is enveloped by Tamo-guna-pradhana is Lord Shiva.

Shiva's trishul or trident (the three-pointed javelin like weapon) represents the three gunas –Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. The Trishul is the emblem of sovereignty. Lord Shiva wields the world through these three gunas, which is the composition of Maya-Shakti or mind and matter. In other words, if one were able to analyse the composition of Maya-Shakti, it will be found to be made of the combination of the three Gunas (Sattwa-Rajas-Tamas).

Shiva is Trilochana, the three- eyed one, in the centre of whose forehead is the third eye, the eye of wisdom (gnana-chakshu). The burning power of the wisdom of the third eye destroys desires for worldly objects. Sensual desire and lust are represented by Kamadev, the god of love (Eros or Cupid). When a person reaches a state of perfect renunciation- he is said to have burnt all his desires. Shiva's third eye burnt to ashes Kamadev- the god of love. The eye of wisdom leads to transcendental vision of the Supreme Reality.

We recite regularly the following Maha Mrityunjay Mantra from the Sukla Yajurveda Samhita III. 60.

**Om Trayambakam Yajaamahe
Suganghim Pushtivardhanam**

**Urvaarukmiva Bandhanaan
Mrityor Mokshiya Mamritaata**

[The meaning of the Mantra is as follows:]

I worship thee, O sweet Lord of transcendental vision (the three -eyed one or Lord Shiva). O giver of prosperity to all, may I be free from the bonds of death, even as a melon (or cucumber) is severed from its bondage or attachment to the creeper.

The word Shiva signifies the auspicious. The good Lord Shiva roots out sin and terror, and is the bestower of earthly happiness, promoter of good and auspiciousness. Shiva is also called Samkara which means doer of good.

Shiva takes one beyond the three bodies (Tripura), gross, subtle and causal that envelope the Jiva or the embodied soul. He is hence the Hara or the remover of all evil and the ideal of renunciation. Therefore we hail 'Hara hara Mahadeva.'

In the Rigveda (x,121,4) it is written: **Yasya ime himavanto mahitva**. That the snow-capped Himalayas appear as if they are meditating (dhyayativa), and they are the

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concrete symbol of the glory of the Supreme. Hence it is no wonder that most of its attributes are transferred to Shiva. Kailash (mountain) in the Himalayas is the abode of Lord Shiva.

The snowy Himalayas are white, and Shiva's body is also white – Gauranga (gauri = light complexioned). Karpura gaura = camphor hued white. Shiva's body is smeared with bhasma or ashes to indicate renunciation, whiteness and purity.

Amazing! Lord Shiva is present in the Kailash mountain. The most sacred symbol in Hinduism AUM imprinted with snow and ice on the face of the mountain by nature.

Snow falls each winter and resides on the mountain top in the shape of Om.

After Arati (devotional adoration of the Lord with waving of lamps) we usually recite the following prayer:

**Karpur gauram karunaa avataaram,
sansaar saaram Bhujendra haaram,
Sadaa vasantam hridayaarvinde,
Bhavam Bhavaani sahitam namaami**

I bow to that camphor-hued, white complexioned (Lord Shiva), who is Incarnation of compassion, 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 (Lord Shiva) and His consort Bhavani (Uma or Paarvati).

Karpur (camphor-hued); Gauram (white);
Karunaa (compassion); Avataaram (incarnation); Sansaar (life of the embodied soul); Saaram (essence, the knowing principle or consciousness);

Bhujendra (wearer of snakes or who wields the Serpent power of Kundalini Shakti); Haaram (garlands); Sadaa (eternal); Vasantam (resides); Hridayaarvinde (in the heart of the devotee);

Bhavam (Lord Shiva); Bhavaani (Uma or Paarvati); Sahitam (together); Namaami (I bow).

The rain water is locked up in the Himalayas as snow or ice and river Ganga (Ganges) falling from the heaven is locked up in the Jata (matted locks) of Shiva. Hence Shiva is called Ganga-dhara. River Ganga issues from the Himalayas, and Ganga flows down to

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earth from Shiva's matted locks after release. The holy river flows down from Shiva's head and therefore it symbolises the stream of wisdom.

Snakes are symbolic of the mental powers (the coiled-up serpent power of Kundalini Shakti) under the control of the divinity. The moon symbolises mind in a state of tranquility and purity. The Damaru (a small drum-like instrument in Lord Shiva's hand) represents the sabda Brahman. This is AUM and the sound of AUM (OM), from which all languages are formed.

Rudraksha Beads

The Mala (rosary) is made from the Rudraksha beads. The Shiva Purana (25th chapter) describes Lord Shiva, the Yogeshwar (master of Yoga), meditating for thousands of years for the benefit of people everywhere. According to the legend, when Shiva opened his eyes, some tear-drops fell on earth and grew into Rudraksha trees. These trees grow in several parts of India.

Both the Shiva Mahapurana and the Devi Bhagavatam describe Rudraksha beads as highly auspicious. The mere looking at Rudraksha beads creates auspiciousness. Touching the Rudraksha beads multiplies the auspiciousness manifold, and the wearing of Rudraksha Mala (rosary) augurs almost continuous flow of auspiciousness.

Rudraksha beads are found with from one eye to up to fourteen eyes or fourteen sided beads. Their medicinal and other uses are specific to how many sides there are on the beads. For example:

One sided Rudraksha bead is producer of worldly happiness and liberation, producer of wealth, destroyer of obstacles and problems, fulfiller of wishes and highly effective in tuberculosis type of diseases.

Two sided Rudraksha bead helps to increase mental powers, calms agitated minds, helps to overcome Tamasic Guna.

Three sided Rudraksha bead helps in acquiring knowledge and skills, helps increase digestive power, effective in reducing fever and in eye diseases.

Four sided Rudraksha beadworks wonders in increasing memory, especially helpful to those with weak memory. Also improves power of speech. The procedure is to drink for twenty days, milk boiled with Rudraksha beads.

Since Shiva is the unchanging consciousness-Nirguna or without form, how to give a form to the formless for the purpose of worship? This dilemma is solved through the symbol of the Shiva-Linga. Like the inverted bowl with the limitless rim called the sky, the Shiva-Linga represents visible infinity. When Shiva and Shakti are separated into a duality of chit and sat- consciousness and manifest existence or matter (subject and

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object), the universe of different planes of existence comes into being. This is variously described as spirit and matter, Purusha and prakriti, Brahman and Maya, Shiva and Shakti, Linga and Yoni etc.

A legend

When creation was completed, Shiva and Parvati went to live on top of Mount Kailash

Parvati asked: "O adorable Lord, which of the many rituals observed in your honour does please you most?"

Lord Shiva replied: "The fourteenth night of the new moon in the dark fortnight during the month of Phalgun is my favourite day. It is called 'Shivaratri'. My devotees give me greater happiness by mere fasting than by ceremonial baths and offerings of flowers, sweets and incense. The offering of a few bilwa (bael) leaves is more precious to me than precious jewels and flowers. My devotee must observe strict spiritual discipline during the day and worship me at night "

Parvati was deeply impressed by the words of Lord Shiva. She repeated them to her friends, who in their turn passed them on to the ruling princes on earth. Thus was the sanctity of Shivaratri broadcast all over the world.

On Mahashivaratri, the devotees observe strict spiritual disciplines during the day. The devotees worship Lord Shiva at night in four different ways during each of the four successive three-hour periods of the night. Bathing the Shiva-Linga in milk in the first period, in curd during the second period, in ghee in the third period and in honey in the fourth and last period. Every three hours, a round of worship of Shiva Linga is conducted. Evils like lust, anger, jealousy, born of Rajas and Tamas, are subdued. The devotees break the fast after the fourth and last round. In the morning, the devotees should feed the Brahmins (priests) first and after doing the prescribed ceremonies, break the fast. The devotees observe vigil throughout the night. After the completion of the rites of Shivaratri, the devotee presents gifts or donations to the officiating priests.

According to Vedic scriptures, the performance of this ritual is both obligatory and desirable. The injunction laid down for the performance of the ritual for transforming the devotee's body into a residence fit for the divinity are: non-injury to living creatures, truthfulness, freedom from anger, celibacy, compassion, forbearance, austerities, calmness, freedom from passion and malice. As a reward, it is said that one who performs the sacrifice of Shivaratri with all the attendant rituals and keeps the fast according to the rules laid down gets happiness and realises his most cherished desires.

In the case of Shiva as chief of ascetics, no food is generally offered as prasad. The daily ceremonials are of austere simple kind. Water is poured on Shiva-Linga with perhaps a few oblations of flowers and bilwa leaves. It is remarkable that even in cases where food is offered to this divinity it is not allowed to be eaten by his votaries. According to

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the Brahminical rule, 'leaves, flowers, fruits and water become unfit to be consumed after being consecrated to Shiva'.

The three most important religious activities during the Maha-Shivaratri festival are: fasting during the entire lunar day, keeping a strict night vigil and worshipping the lingam with offerings of foods, leaves, flowers etc. and with recitation of mantras. The two great natural forces that afflict man are Rajas (quality of passion) and Tamas (inertia). The Shivaratri Vrata aims at the perfect control of these two qualities.

The motivation behind the vrata or fast is mainly the promotion of physical and mental self-control by acts of penance, thanks giving, praise of the Supreme Lord and for desiring special boon.

Swami Shivananda of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, advised to offer this inner worship to Lord Shiva daily:

"O Lord Shiva, Thou art myself. My mind is Parvati. My pranas are Thy servants. My body is Thy house. All my actions in this world are Thy worship. My sleep is samadhi. My walk is circumambulation around Thee. My speech is prayer unto Thee. Thus do I offer unto Thee all that I am."

The following is from the Tulasi Ramayana, Uttara-Kanda, Doha 45:

"Sankara Bhajan Bina Nara Bhagati Na Paavai Mori"
Sri Rama said: "With joined palms I lay before you all another secret doctrine: without adoring Sankara (Lord Shiva) man cannot attain devotion to Me."

Lord Shiva

Lord Shiva has at least four quite distinct characters, each of which has a female or active energising counterpart (shakti).

In the first place, as Shiva, Sada-Shiva, Shankara or Shambhu, the eternally blessed one or the source of blessings. He is the eternal reproducing power of nature, perpetually restoring and reproducing itself after dissolution, under which Shiva is often identified with the eternal creative essence, the great eternal Supreme being as Maha-Deva or the Supreme Lord termed Ishwara. Hence in this aspect Shiva is represented by the symbol of the Lingam and the Yoni combined.

Temples that hold this Shiva's emblem or symbol, which is of a double form to express the blending of the male and female principles in creation, are probably the most numerous of any temples to be seen in India. There can be no doubt, in fact, that the Supreme creative power is universally worshipped throughout India, under the name of Shiva and of his consort Jagan-Matri, or Mother of the universe.

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In the second place, as Maha-Yogi is the great representative Yogi or Tapasvi, who has attained the highest perfection and meditation and austerity. In this aspect Shiva appears as an austere naked ascetic (Digambara) with body covered with ashes and matted hair (dhurjati), abiding fixed and immovable in one spot (sthanu), teaching men by his own example the power to be acquired by renunciation, suppression of passions, and abstract contemplation and meditation as leading to the highest spiritual knowledge. In this aspect of the yogi, as in that of the reproducer, He is also sometimes called the 'Blessed one' (Shiva).

In the third place, Shiva is the entire reverse of the ascetical. In this aspect, living in the Himalaya mountains with his consort Parvati, often dancing with her the Tandava dance, He is surrounded by dwarfish troops (gana). This is the aspect in which He is worshipped by Tantrikas.

In the fourth place, as Rudra or Mahakala, he is the destroying or dissolving power of nature; when he is either a personification of all matter resolving itself into its constituent elements or of Kala (Time), the great dissolver. The more active principle of destruction being assigned to his consort Kali.

In the fourth place, there are yet two other aspects of Shiva. In the first of these, as the dissolver of the universe, He is the terrible destroyer (Bhairav), with His consort Kali engaged in the active role.

In the second of these, He is also called Bhuteswara, Lord of spirits or demons, haunting cemeteries and burial grounds, wearing serpents for garlands, and a string of skulls for a necklace. As Bhuteswara, He is sometimes surrounded by troops of imps and spirits (bhuta), and sometimes He is trampling on rebellious demons who have acquired too great power.

Here we may observe that in every one of his aspects, the consort of Shiva is not only His counterpart, but generally represents an intensification of his attributes. As destructress, She is Kali, as reproducer she is symbolised by the Yoni (Shiva's emblem). She is the mother of the universe (Jagan-matri). She is the type of beauty in Uma. She has also her forms as a female ascetic (yogini). In her role as destructress, she is Bhairavi Durga. As a mountaneer, she is Parvati. All these attributes are combined in her aspect of Mother Durga.

Shiva and Parvati represent the gathering together, and unifying in one personality, numerous attributes, properties and functions belonging to various deities and various divine forces.

The destructive energies of the atmosphere exhibited in wind and storm and personified in the Vedas as Vayu, Rudra and the Maruts; the all-consuming potency of time; the fertilising properties present in dew and rain; the almighty agencies operating in creation and the same agencies operating as re-creation or reproduction; the power of asceticism exhibited in the Maha-yogi; the terrific frightful agencies and operations

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of demons and spirits; as Shiva, Sada-Shiva, Shankara, Shambhu- the eternally blessed one or causer of blessings; He is the eternal reproducing power of nature, perpetually restoring and reproducing itself after dissolution. Under which He is identified with the eternal creative essence, the great eternal Supreme Being as Maha-Deva or Supreme Lord Ishwara.

Hence in this aspect, Shiva is represented by the symbol of the linga and yoni, rather than by any human personification. The Shiva-Linga symbolises the blending of the male and female principles in creation. This Supreme creative power is universally worshipped throughout India under the name of Shiva and His consort Jagan-Matri-mother of the universe- all these have been centralised in Shiva and His consort personified as half male and half female known as Ardhanarishwara (symbolising the union of spirit and matter).

From The Mahabharata
Sauptika Parva Sections VI/ VII
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli
(Abridged)

Aswatthaman, the son of Drona, said: I shall at this hour seek the protection of the puissant Mahadeva! I will take the shelter of that god, that source of everything beneficial, viz., the lord of Uma, otherwise called Kapardin, decked with a garland of human skulls, that plucker of Bhaga's eyes called also Rudra and Hara. In ascetic austerities and prowess, he far surpasses all the gods. I shall, therefore, seek the protection of Girisha (Shiva) armed with the trident.

I seek the protection of Him called Fierce, Stanu, Shiva, Rudra, Sarva, Isana, Iswara, Girisha; and of that boon giving god who is the Creator and Lord of the universe; of Him whose throat is blue, who is without birth, who is called Sakra, who destroyed the sacrifice of Daksha, and who is called Hara; of Him whose form is the universe, who has three eyes, who is possessed of multifarious forms, and who is the lord of Uma; of Him who resides in crematoriums, who swells with energy, who is the lord of diverse tribes of ghostly beings, and who is the possessor of undecaying prosperity and power; of Him who wields the skull-topped club, who is called Rudra, who bears matted locks on his head, and who is a Brahmacharin (celibate). Purifying my soul that is so difficult to purify, and possessed as I am of small energy, I adore the Destroyer of the triple city, and offer myself as the victim. Hymned thou hast been, deserving art thou of hymns, and I hymn to thy glory!

Thou art robed in skins; thou hast red hair on thy head. Thou art pure; thou art the Creator of Brahman; thou art Brahma; thou art an observer of vows; thou art devoted to ascetic austerities; thou art the refuge of all ascetics; thou art the leader of diverse tribes of ghostly beings; thou art three eyed; thou art dear to Gauri's heart; thou hast for thy excellent bearer a bovine bull; thou art the protector of all quarters; thou hast the moon as an ornament on thy brow!

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The Four Faces of Shiva
From the Mahabharata
Anusasana Parva, sections CXL/CXLI
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli
(Abridged)

Uma said: O holy one, why are those faces of thine which are on the east, the north, and the west, so handsome and so agreeable to look at like the very moon? And why is that face of thine which is on the south so terrible? Why are thy matted locks tawny and so erect? Why is thy throat blue after the manner of the peacock's plumes? Why, O illustrious deity, is the Pinaka always in thy hand? Why art thou always a Brahmacharin with matted locks? O lord, it behoveth thee to explain all these to me. I am thy spouse who seeks to follow the same duties with thee. Further, I am thy devoted worshipper, O deity, having the bull for thy mark!

The blessed and holy one (Shiva) said: I became four-faced through Yoga-puissance. Thus I showed my high Yoga- power in becoming four faced. With that face of mine which is turned towards the east, I exercise the sovereignty of the universe. With that face of mine which is turned towards the north, I sport with thee, O thou of faultless features! That face of mine which is turned towards the west is agreeable and auspicious. With it I ordain the happiness of all creatures. That face of mine which is turned towards the south is terrible. With it I destroy all creatures.

I live as a Brahmacharin with matted locks on my head, impelled by the desire of doing good to all creatures. The bow Pinaka is always in my hand for accomplishing the purposes of the deities. In days of yore, Indra (king of heaven), desirous of acquiring my prosperity, had hurled his thunderbolt at me. With that weapon my throat was scorched. For this reason I have become blue-throated.

Uma said: O holy one, O lord of all creatures, O foremost of all observers of duties and religious rites, I have great doubt, O wielder of Pinaka, O giver of boons. These ascetics, O puissant lord, have undergone diverse kinds of austerities. In the world are seen ascetics wandering everywhere under diverse forms and clad in diverse kinds of attire. For benefiting this large assemblage of Rishis, as also myself, do thou kindly resolve, O chastiser of all foes, this doubt of mine. What indications has Religion or Duty been said to possess? How, indeed, do men become unacquainted with the details of Religion or Duty to succeed in observing them? O puissant lord, O thou that art conversant with Religion, do thou tell me this.

Maheswara said: Abstention from injury, truthfulness of speech, compassion towards all beings, tranquillity of soul, and the making of gifts to the best of one's power, are the foremost duties of the householder.

Abstention from sexual congress with the spouses of other men, protection of the wealth and the woman committed to one's charge, unwillingness to appropriate what is not given to one, and avoidance of honey and meat, these are the five chief duties.

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Indeed, Religion or Duty has many branches all of which are fraught with happiness. Even these are the duties which these embodied creatures who regard duty as superior should observe and practise. Even these are the sources of merit.

From The Mahabharata
Santi Parva, section XLVIII
(Extracts-Abridged)
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Bhishma said: Salutation to thee in thy form of vastness! Thou hadst assumed the form of a recluse with matted locks on head, staff in hand, a long stomach, and having thy begging bowl for thy quiver. Salutation to thee in thy form of Brahmacharin. Thou bearest the trident, thou art the lord of the celestials, thou hast three eyes, and thou art high-souled. Thy body is always besmeared with ashes, and thy phallic emblem is always turned upwards. Salutations to thee in thy form of Rudra! The half-moon forms the ornament of thy forehead. Thou hast snakes for the holy thread circling thy neck. Thou art armed with Pinaka and trident. Salutation to thy form of Fierceness. Thou art the soul of all creatures. Thou art the Creator and destroyer of all creatures. Thou art without wrath, without enmity, without affection. Salutation to thee in thy form of Peace!

Shiva and Rudra
From The Mahabharata
Anusasana Parva, Section CLXI
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Shiva has two forms. One of these is terrible,
and the other mild and auspicious.

Vasudeva said: O mighty armed Yudhishtira, listen to me as I recite to thee the many names of Rudra as also the high blessedness of that high-souled one. The Rishis describe Mahadeva as Agni, and Sthanu, and Maheswara; as one-eyed, and three eyed, of universal form, and Shiva or highly auspicious.

Brahmanas conversant with the Vedas say that Shiva has two forms. One of these is terrible, and the other mild and auspicious. Those two forms again, are subdivided into many forms. That form which is fierce and terrible is regarded as identical with Agni and Lightning and Surya (fire, lightning and sun). The other form which is mild and auspicious is identical with Righteousness and Water and Chandramas (moon). Then again, it is said that half his body is fire and half is Soma (or the moon). That form of his which is mild and auspicious is said to be engaged in the practice of the Brahmacharya (Celibacy) vow. The other form of his which is supremely terrible is engaged in all operations of destructions in the universe.

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Because he is great (Mahat) and the Supreme Lord of all (Iswara), therefore he is called Maheswara. And since he burns and oppresses, is keen and fierce, and endowed with great energy, and is engaged in eating flesh and blood and marrow, he is said to be Rudra. Since he is the foremost of all the deities, and since his dominion and acquisitions are very extensive, and since he protects the extensive universe, therefore he is called Mahadeva. Since he is of the form or colour of smoke, therefore he is called Dhurjati. Since by all his acts he performs sacrifices for all and seeks the good of every creature, therefore he is called Shiva or the auspicious one.

Staying above (in the sky) he burns the lives of all creatures and is, besides, fixed in a particular route from which he does not deviate. His emblem, again, is fixed and immovable for all time. He is, for these reasons, called Sthanu. He is also of multiform aspect. He is present, past and future. He is mobile and immobile. For this he is called Vahurupa (of multiform aspect). The deities called Viswedevas reside in his body. He is, for this, called Viswarupa (of universal form). He is thousand-eyed; or he is myriad-eyed; or, he has eyes on all sides and on every part of his body. His energy issues through his eyes. There is no end of his eyes. Since he nourishes all creatures and sports also with them, and since he is their lord and master, therefore he is called Pasupati (the lord of all creatures).

If there is one who worships him by creating his image, another who worships his emblem, the latter it is that attains to great prosperity for ever.

Since his emblem is always observant of the vow of Brahmacharya, all the wolds worship it accordingly. This act of worship is said to gratify him highly. If there is one who worships him by creating his image, another who worships his emblem, the latter it is that attains to great prosperity for ever. The Rishis, the deities, the Gandharvas, and the Apsaras, worship that emblem of his which is ever erect and upraised. If his emblem is worshipped, Mahadeva becomes highly gratified with the worshipper. Affectionate towards his devotees, he bestows happiness upon them with a cheerful soul.

This great god loves to reside in crematoria and there he burns and consumes all corpses. Those persons that perform sacrifices on such grounds attain at the end to those regions which have been set apart for heroes. Employed in his legitimate function, he it is that is regarded as the Death that resides in the bodies of all creatures. He is again, those breaths called Prana and Apana in the bodies of all embodied beings. He has many blazing and terrible forms. All those forms are worshipped in the world and are known as Brahmanas possessed of knowledge. Amongst the gods he has many names all of which are fraught with grave import. Verily, the meanings of those names are derived from either his greatness or vastness, or his feats, or his conduct. The Brahmanas always recite the excellent Sata-rudriya in his honour, that occurs in the Vedas as also that which has been composed by Vyasa. Verily, the Brahmanas and

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Rishis call him the eldest of all beings. He is the first of all the deities, and it was from his mouth that he created Agni.

That righteous-souled deity, ever willing to grant protection to all, never gives up his suppliants. He would much rather abandon his own life-breaths and incur all possible afflictions himself. Long life, health and freedom from disease, affluence, wealth, diverse kinds of pleasures and enjoyments, are conferred by him, and it is he also who snatches them away. The lordship and affluence that one sees in Sakra and the other deities are, verily his. It is he who is always engaged in all that is good and evil in the three worlds. In consequence of his fullest control over all objects of enjoyment he is called Iswara (the Supreme Lord or Master). Since, again, he is the master of the vast universe, he is called Maheswara. The whole universe is pervaded by him in diverse forms. It is that deity whose mouth roars and burns the waters of the sea in the form of the huge mare's head.

[Note: The allusion is to the fiery mare's head which is supposed to wander through the ocean.]

Mahasivaratri (Magha Krsna Chaturdasi)

[The 14th day of the dark half of every month- Krsna Chaturdasi is called 'Shivaratri' or 'Maha-Shivaratri'. The one in the month of Magha (February-March) is christened 'Mahashivaratri', since it is the greatest of all.]

Of all the major Hindu festivals, Mahashivaratri is the only one wherein the austerity part (as signified by the very word 'vrata') is predominant. There is practically no festivity, revelry or gaiety in its observance, the whole thing being one of continuous solemnity. This is but natural since Shiva is the god of the ascetics, the very incarnation of vairagya or renunciation!

This vrata is open to all human beings. The basic disciplines to be kept up on this day are ahimsa (non-injury), satya (speaking the truth), Brahmacharya (continence), daya (compassion), Ksama (forgiveness) and anasuyata (absence of jealousy).

Fasting is one of the most essential aspects of this vrata. So also jagarana or keeping vigil in the night. Worship of Shiva throughout the night, bathing the Shivalinga with panchamrta (five tasty things- milk, curds, ghee, sugar and honey), homa, japa of the mulamantra (basic mantra, viz., Om Namas Shivaya) and prayer for forgiveness- are the other items involved in its observance.

-Swami Harshananda, Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore

"Melt ye in praise of this secret word of God,
It is the touchstone of Truth, in all the four Vedas,
The Name of the Lord - Namasivaya."

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--- Saint Tirugnana Sambandar (Tirumurai Saint).

Abhisheka

Abhisheka – The meaning
By Swami Shivananda
The Divine Life Society, Rishikesh

Abhisheka is a part of the worship of Lord Shiva. Without it, the worship is incomplete. It is the ceremonial bathing of the Shiva Lingam in Shiva temples.

A pot made of copper or brass, with a tiny hole in the centre, is kept hanging over the image or Lingam of Shiva. The water drips (falls) on the image throughout the day and night. Pouring water, milk, ghee (clarified butter), curd, honey or coconut water over the Lingam is also Abhisheka. Whilst this is done, the Rudram is chanted loudly with devotion and love. Lord Shiva is invoked by performing this Abhisheka.

Monday is a very important day for worshipping Lord Shiva. The thirteenth day (Pradosha) of the bright and dark fortnights is also considered sacred. On these days, devotees of Lord Shiva offer special worship with plenty of prasad.

The water of the Abhisheka is considered very sacred. It is known to grant great benefits on the devotees who take it as the Lord's prasad. It purifies the heart and destroys countless sins. You should take it with intense faith and devotion.

When you perform Abhisheka with devotion, your mind is concentrated. Your heart is filled with divine thoughts and with the image of the Lord. You forget your body and your surroundings. Egoism vanishes. When the body is forgotten, you begin to enjoy and taste the eternal bliss of Lord Shiva. The recitation of Mantras during the Abhisheka purifies the mind.

The greatest and the highest Abhisheka is to pour the waters of pure love on the Lingam in the lotus of the heart. The external Abhisheka with objects is intended to lead to this internal Abhisheka, wherein there is a flow of pure love.

The sacred prasad of the Lord and the holy water of the Abhisheka purify the heart if taken with faith and devotion. They can bring peace and prosperity.

Incurable diseases are cured by performing Abhisheka. It bestows health, wealth, prosperity, peace of mind and purity of heart. It expands the heart. It calls for self-sacrifice and self-surrender. There must be a natural feeling in the heart. "I am Thine, my Lord. All is Thine, my Lord."