

MAHASIVARATHRI

“NALAM THARUM SOLLAI NALUM SOLVOM ;
OM NAMASHIVAYA ; NAMASHIVAYA NAMA OM”

Mahasivaratri (the great night of Shiva) falls on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of Masi (February- March), and is dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva. This festival is purely religious in nature and universally observed by all Hindus.

The origin of Sivaratri is attributed to several stories in Hindu mythology. One very popular story traces the origin of this festival to the churning of the Ocean of Milk by devas (gods) and asuras (demons). It is said that when both gods and demons were churning the Ocean of Milk to obtain amrita (Nectar capable of giving immortal life), they came across many unusual substances, including the deadly poison Kalakuta. As soon as they touched the poison, it exploded into poisonous fumes that threatened to envelope the entire universe by darkness. When the destruction of the universe seemed inevitable, the gods ran for assistance from Brahma and Vishnu, but neither was able to help. At last they ran to Lord Shiva, who raised his trident and condensed the fumes. In order to save the Universe, Shiva swallowed the poison without spilling a single drop. The poison left a dark blue mark on Shiva's throat. Lord Shiva is, therefore, known as “Neelakanta”. Shivaratri is the celebration of this event by which Shiva saved the world.

According to another legend in the Shiva Purana, once the other two of the Trinity of Hindu Gods, Brahma and Vishnu, were fighting over who was the superior of the two. Horrified at the intensity of the fight, the all other gods prayed to Lord Shiva to intervene. To make them realize the futility of their fight, Shiva assumed the form of a huge column of fire in between Brahma and Vishnu and told them whoever finds the top or bottom of the fire is the greatest. Brahma assumed the form of a swan and went upwards and Vishnu as Varaha (boar) went into the earth. But light has no limit and though they searched for thousands of miles, neither could find the end. On his journey upwards, Brahma came across a Thalampoo flower wafting down slowly. When asked from where the flower had come from, the Flower replied that

she had been placed at the top of the fiery column, as an offering. Unable to find the uppermost limit, Brahma decided to end his search and take the flower as a witness.

This false claim by Brahma, angered Lord Shiva and he revealed his true form of Linga. He reprimanded Brahma for telling a lie, and cursed him that no one would ever pray to him. The Thalampoo flower too was banned from being used as an offering in prayers , as she had testified falsely. The day on which Lord Shiva first manifested himself in the form of a Linga, is considered especially auspicious and is celebrated as Mahashivaratri.

In sangam literature, Great Poet and saint Thirumoolar testifies this ego clash between Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva and as to how Lord Shiva sorted out this clash, in his poem stated below:-

பிரமதும் மற்தும் பிரானேதான் என்னைப்
பிரமன்மனம் தங்கன்தம் பெண்தமம் யானே
பரமன் அனைப்பப் பரந்தமன் தீர்க
அனைது தேய அற்றுநின் னானே
திருமால்

Another story in Hindu mythology also emphasizes the auspiciousness of Shivaratri. On the day of Sivaratri, a hunter was chased by a hungry lion. The hunter climbed a Bilva tree to save himself from the lion's attack. The lion waited throughout the entire night at the bottom of the tree for its prey. In order to stay awake to avoid falling from the tree, the hunter kept plucking the leaves of the Bilva tree and dropping them below. In order to ward off the sleep, he was uttering "Om Namashivaya" loudly, while dropping each bilva leaf.

The leaves fell on a Siva Linga that happened to be located at the bottom of the tree. Shiva was pleased by the offering of the Bilva leaves by the hunter, although inadvertently, and saved the hunter . This story emphasizes the auspiciousness of worshipping Shiva with Bilva leaves on Shivaratri. Offering Bilva leaves to Shiva on on this day is considered very auspicious .

Worshipping Shiva on this day is believed to bestow one with happiness and prosperity.

Various traditions and customs related to Shivaratri Festival are followed by the worshippers of Lord Shiva to mark the Shivratri festival. Devotees wake up early in the morning and take a ritual bath, preferably in a river or well. They visit the nearest Shiva temple and pray Him. Devotees observe strict

fast in honor of Shiva, though many go on a diet of fruits and milk, some do not consume even a drop of water. In most of our families, members take only refreshments like Idli, Dosa etc and abstain from taking any Rice during the entire day and night.

On Shivaratri, worship of Lord Shiva continues all through the day and night. Every three hours priests perform ritual pooja of Shivalingam by bathing it with milk, yoghurt, honey, ghee, sugar and water amidst the chanting of “Om Namah Shivaya’ and ringing of temple bells. Devotees keep awake nightlong, singing hymns and devotional songs in praise of Lord Shiva. Devotional songs by great Tamil poets are available for ready reference and for reciting in our “Thuthi Padaalgal” section of our web-site’s Home-Page.

It is only on the following morning that devotees break their fast by partaking prasadam offered to the deity (Detailed, step-by-step, Preparation methods (Recipes) of special prasadam are given, in “Our Community Favourite Dishes Recipe” section of Thondai-mandala Mudaliars, web site’s home page).

Devotees strongly believe that sincere worship of Lord Shiva on the auspicious day of Shivaratri, absolves a person of sins and liberates him from the cycle of birth and death.

Most of our families make it a point to visit their Kula-deivams on this auspicious Day and pray for health, wealth , happiness and prosperity through out the year.