



## Maha Shivarathiri Festival Details

Festival Aspects	Festival Details
Religion	Hinduism
Title	Maha Shivarathiri
Description	<p>SHIVARAATHRI is a very auspicious day for all. It is the fourteenth day of the lunar fortnight, when the Moon is waning, and the Sun is in the sign of Aquarius. The festival is, however, related to the Moon rather than the Sun. That is the reason why it is called <i>Shivarathri</i> (the night of Shiva). Unlike other nights, this particular night is the night consecration, of dedication, of illumination.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 14, #1 (1978-80)</p> <p>The Moon has sixteen digits. Likewise, the mind has sixteen digits. On <i>Shivarathri</i> night, fifteen of the Moon's sixteen digits are invisible, and only one digit can be seen. The mind also is in the same state. If during <i>Shivarathri</i> one meditates on God, one can achieve nearness to the Divine. Supreme sacredness of <i>Shivarathri</i> consists in realising oneness with the Divine through meditation on God.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 16, #5 (1983)</p> <p>MANY stories are told in the <i>Shasthras</i> (sacred scriptures), to explain the origin and significance of the <i>Maha</i> (great) <i>Shivarathri</i> Festival. Bharath, the name for this land used from ancient times, means 'the land of those who have <i>rathi</i> (Love) towards <i>Bha</i> (Light or Bhagavan). So, for the people of this land, all days are sacred; every moment is precious. The Ganga is holy from source to sea, but, yet there are some places on its banks, associated with some sage or temple, the confluence of a tributary, or a historical incident, which are revered more by generations. Such places are Hardwar, Varanasi, Prayag, Rishikesh. Similarly, among all the days of the year, some are marked out as holier, when a special effort is made by aspirants to contact the Source and the Sea, the Reality behind all this passing show. Some moments, as that during which the <i>Linga</i> (Shiva representation in egg-shaped stone) emerges from the <i>Avathar</i> (divine incarnation), are held to be specially significant for the individuals witnessing it and for the world which is thereby blessed.</p> <p>Some ascribe the holiness of the Day to the fact of its being the Birthday of Shiva, as if Shiva has birth and death, like any mortal. The story that it commemorates the salvation attained by a hunter who sat on a <i>bilva</i> (a sacred leaf) tree on the look-out for animals to kill, and without any intention to worship, unknowingly dropped some of its leaves on a <i>Linga</i> that lay beneath, does not make clear why this Day is specially sacred. Another story is that this is the Day on which Shiva danced the <i>Thandava</i> (Cosmic dance) in the ecstasy of His Innate Nature, with all the Gods and Sages sharing and witnessing that Cosmic Consummation. When He consumed the <i>Halahala</i></p>



	<p>(poison) that emerged from the churning of ocean and that threatened to destroy the Universe, the heat of the fumes was well-nigh unbearable, even for Him. So, Ganga flowed uninterruptedly on His matted locks; but, that gave Him only partial relief. The Moon was placed on the head. That was of great help. Then, Shiva danced the <i>Thandava</i> with all the Gods and Sages. All this they say, happened on the same day and so, <i>Shivarathri</i>, was held in commemoration of this occasion.</p> <p>- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 9, #3 (1969)</p>
Spiritual Significance	<p>The terms <i>Shiva</i> and <i>Sankara</i> mean Auspicious. <i>Sam</i> means <i>Chithananda</i> (blissful awareness). <i>Kara</i> means the one who causes it. Thus, <i>Sankara</i> means the One who causes blissful awareness. <i>Sankara</i> is the One who confers blissful awareness on those who take refuge in Him or adore Him.</p> <p><b>Symbolism of Shiva Form:</b> The secret of creation is evident from the description of the form of Shiva. The crescent moon on Shiva's head symbolizes the consciousness in human beings, the <i>Ganga</i> (Ganges river) symbolizes the life force, and the snakes on Shiva's body represent the myriad of living beings. He resides on a silver mountain. His dearest friend is Kubera, the Lord of Wealth. Despite being endowed with all these, why was He obliged to carry the begging bowl? To demonstrate to the world that every kind of wealth is a hindrance to spiritual advancement, Shiva renounced everything. It is through renunciation that Shiva became the eternal embodiment of supreme bliss.</p> <p>The three eyes of Shiva represent the three <i>lokas</i> (worlds). Shiva's trident is symbolic of the past, present, and future, the three aspects of time. The three <i>gunas</i> (qualities) <i>satwa</i> (serenity), <i>rajas</i> (passion), <i>thamas</i> (sloth) are images of the Trinity: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. The three worlds, the triune aspect of time, and the three qualities are the manifestations of the <i>Easwara</i> (God) Principle. When the Divine is installed in the heart in this manner, man can raise himself to the level of the Divine.</p> <p><b>The inner significance of churning the ocean of milk – the process of self-realization:</b> The spiritual process may be compared to the conversion of milk into butter. The body is like a house. The heart is the vessel in which the milk of consciousness is boiled over the stove of devotion. The vessel is covered by the lid of <i>Shraddha</i> (earnestness). When the fire of <i>Viveka</i> (discrimination) is lit, the cream of understanding comes up from the boiling milk. To prevent the cat of Maya from getting at the milk, the door has to be barred by the gate of <i>Sujnana</i> (wisdom). After the milk is cooled by <i>Santhi</i> (tranquility) and the buttermilk of the Divine Name is added to it, the curd of Divine Grace is formed. When this curd is churned with the rod of knowledge and the rope of love, the whey of ignorance is separated and the butter of the Atmic Reality (the <i>Jiva</i>) emerges.</p> <p>- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Volume 23, #4 (1990)</p>



	<p><b>The Night Of Goodness And Godliness:</b> <i>Shivarathri</i>, is the <i>Rathri</i> (night) of <i>Shivam</i> (Goodness, Godliness, Good Fortune). It is an auspicious Night because the mind can be made to lose its hold on man by devoting the night to prayer. The Moon is the presiding deity of the mind, according to the scriptures. The mind is kindred to the Moon as the Eyes are to the Sun.</p> <p><i>Shivarathri</i> is prescribed for the fourteenth night of the dark half of the month, the night previous to the New Moon when the Moon suffers from total blackout. The Moon and the mind which it rules over are drastically reduced every month on the fourteenth night. When that night is devoted to vigilant adoration of God, the remnant of the wayward mind is overcome and victory ensured. This month's <i>Shivarathri</i> is holier than the rest and so, it is called <i>Mahashivarathri</i>.</p> <p>With firm faith and a cleansed heart, the night should be spent in glorifying God. No moment should be wasted in other thoughts. Time flees fast. Like a block of ice, it melts soon and flows away; like water held in a leaky pot, it disappears drop by drop. The time allotted for one's life ticks off quite soon, and the span ends sometime somehow. So, be vigilant. Be warned. Be alert and aware. Seek the shelter of the Lord and transform every moment into a sacred celebration.</p> <p>- - Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 20, #5 (1987)</p> <p><b>Unity - Lord Shiva Family:</b> Shiva is the supreme exemplar of serenity! Shiva, according to the scriptures has a curious assortment of family members. Yet, each one is so calm and without agitation, that the divine family exists in peace and concord. Shiva has snakes on His arms, round His neck, on His head, around His waist! One of his sons, Subramanyam rides on a peacock, which attacks snakes; Ganesha rides on a mouse, which the snakes feed on! Ganesha has the head of the elephant, which is the prey of the lion, which is the vehicle used by Durga, the consort of Shiva, who is so inseparable that she is the left half of the body of Shiva Himself. Nor is the lion friendly by nature to the bull, which Lord Shiva Himself has as His vehicle! Shiva has fire on the central point of His brow, and water, the river (Ganga) on His head, both are incompatible! Imagine how loving, how co-operative the various components have to be, to render life in Kailash smooth and happy!</p> <p>- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 11, #25 (1971-72)</p>
Prayer	<p><b>Mrutyunjaya Mantra</b></p> <p><i>Om Thryambakam Yajamahe Sugandhim Pushti Vardhanam</i>  <i>Urvaarukamiva Bandhanaan Mrithyor Mukshiya Maamrithaath</i></p> <p><b>Meaning:</b> We worship and adore you, O three-eyed one. You are the fragrant one who nourishes us and restores our health. Just like when the cucumber ripens it is freed from the vine, so to, free us from attachment and death, and grant us immortality.</p>



<p>Purpose of Rituals</p>	<p><b>Bilva Leaf:</b> Shiva is worshipped with the three-leaved <i>Bilva</i>. He is immanent in the three worlds, in the three phases of Time, in the three attributes of Nature. He removes the three types of grief; He has no basis outside Him; He is the source of Bliss; He is the embodiment of the sweetness and efficacy of Nectar. Since every being is Shiva- <i>Swarupa</i> (of the nature of Shiva) - for without Shiva, it is mere '<i>Shava</i>' (corpse) - man has to live up to that Divine status.</p> <p>- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 12, #27 (1973-74)</p> <p><b>Vibhuti:</b> The <i>Vibhuthi</i> (holy ash) <i>Abhisheka</i> (anointing the idol) has a potent inner meaning which Swami wants you to grasp. The <i>Vibhuthi</i> is the most precious object, in the truly spiritual sense The <i>Abhisheka</i> with <i>Vibhuthi</i> is done to inspire you to give up desire and offer Shiva the ashes of its destruction as the most valuable of all the articles you have earned. Ash cannot fade as flowers do in a day or two; it does not dry and disappear or get soiled and unpotable as water does; it will not lose colour as leaves do, in a few hours; it does not rot as fruits do in a few days. Ash is ash for ever and ever. So, burn your viles, your vices, your bad habits; worship Shiva, rendering yourselves pure in thought and word and deed.</p> <p>- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 12, #27 (1973-74)</p> <p><b>Linga Is The Form Symbol Of God:</b> This is a day dedicated to the Shiva that is in each of you. From the Himalayan ranges down to Cape Kanyakumari, the entire land is resounding today to the authentic Declaration "<i>Shivoham</i>" "<i>Shivoham</i>" (I am Shiva, I am Shiva) and to the adoration, "<i>Om Namasshivaya</i>" (adoration to Lord Shiva). Since thousands pray here, and elsewhere in lakhs and crores, the <i>Linga</i> is emanating from Me, so that you may derive the Bliss that pervades the World through <i>Lingodhbhava</i> (emergence of the <i>Linga</i>). The manifestation of the <i>Linga</i> is a part of My Nature.</p> <p>The <i>Linga</i> emerges, as a result of prayer and Grace. You have to recognise in this event a glimpse of Divinity, a sign of infinite Grace. Just as Om is the sound symbol of God, the <i>Linga</i> is the Form symbol or the visible symbol of God, the most meaningful, the simplest and the least endowed with the appendages of attributes. <i>Lingam</i> means, that in which this <i>jagath</i> (world of change) attains <i>laya</i> (mergence or dissolution), <i>Leeyathe</i> (that in which all forms and names merge). All Forms merge in the Formless at last. Shiva is the Principle of the Destruction of all Names and Forms, of all entities and individuals. So, the <i>Linga</i> is the simplest sign of emergence and mergence.</p> <p>- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 9, #3 (1969)</p> <p><b>Abhishekam - Feed the mind with good thoughts and Godly acts:</b> Visiting Shiva shrines, arranging for worship through priests of Shiva <i>Lingams</i>, pouring sanctified waters, potful of them over consecrated idols, fasting, vigil</p>
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	<p>and such other activities are resorted to on this Day. But, these are not quite relevant to the real purpose of the festival. To fulfil these rites and vows, one need not wait one full year When man takes in food four times a day, in order that his body may keep functioning, efficiently, is it too much to ask him to feed the mind with good thoughts and godly acts, at least once every day? The mind too needs clean and sustaining food.</p> <p>- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 12, #4 (1973-74)</p> <p><b>Fasting and night long bhajans:</b> On this night there is just a minute part of the mind left to be conquered and that can be done by keeping vigil and dwelling on the Glow of God. The vigil that is prescribed is symbolic of the eternal vigil one has to observe, while the rite of fasting is symbolic of divesting the senses of the pleasures they crave for. The night-long <i>bhajan</i> (congregational singing of devotional songs) is significant of the lifelong consciousness of the Divine Presence that every one should cultivate. The rites and vows laid down for <i>Shivarathri</i> being absent on other nights of the year, their observance on this day comes as a reminder that they are useful.</p> <p>- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 14, #1 (1978-80)</p>
Chant / Song	<p><b>Song: Shivaya Namah Shiva Shivaya Namah</b>  <i>Shivaya Namah Shiva Shivaya Namah Shiva Shivaya Namah Om</i>  <i>Namah Shivaya</i>  <i>Shivaya Namah Shiva Shivaya Namah Shiva</i>  <i>Shivaya Namah Om Namah Shivaya</i></p> <p><b>Meaning:</b> Chant “Shivaya Namah Shiva” every moment of your life. Salutations to Lord Shiva.</p> <p>- SSSIO Sai Rhythms – Shivaya Namah Shiva Shivaya Namah  - <a href="https://sairhythms.sathyasai.org/song/shivaya-namah-shiva-shivaya-namah">https://sairhythms.sathyasai.org/song/shivaya-namah-shiva-shivaya-namah</a></p>
Story	<p><b>Story 1: Shivarathri Festival At Shrishailam:</b> <i>Shivarathri</i> is celebrated in all Shiva temples, Shrishailam is a particularly famous temple of Shiva. There is a fine story told about this festival at Shrishailam. At the foot of the Shrishailam range of hills there is a village, where a boy of nine years named Bala Ramanna, attended primary school. He learned from his friends at school that their sisters and brothers-in-law were coming to their homes in order to attend the <i>Shivarathri</i> celebrations on the Shrishailam Hills. Ramanna came home and wanted that his mother should send his sister and brother-in-law too to the festival. His mother told him that he had no sister and, therefore, no brother-in-law. But he would not listen. He said he must have a sister and a brother- in-law like his friends. So his mother just to quieten him, said, "You have a sister and a brother-in-law, but they are in the temple on the Shrishailam. Their names are Bhramaramba and Mallikarjuna." She gave him the names by which Shiva and His consort are known - <i>Bhramaramba</i> meaning 'bee' and <i>Mallikarjuna</i> meaning the 'white jasmine.' These names are very apt, because the consort draws inspiration, instruction and wisdom from the Lord even as the bee draws its sustenance from the jasmine flowers.</p>



When he was told that his sister was in the temple on the Shrishailam,. Ramanna insisted that he would go and invite his sister and brother-in-law to come home and stay there for some time. He wanted to take some presents for them, but his mother said that they were far too rich and that younger members of the family should not present anything to the elders. The mother sent the boy with a neighbour who was going to the temple to see the festival. She gave him some money so that he could get presents for the boy. Ramanna hastened up the hill and rushed into the temple, crying "Sister...Brother-in-law," and fell at the feet of the idol of Bhramaramba. He held the idol in embrace and began dragging it, wanting it to accompany him. He clasped the idol of Mallikarjuna and would not leave it. At last the priests in the temple drove him away as a mad boy.

Then in despair, he climbed a high rock and threatened to jump from that height unless his sister and her husband came with him. Just then he heard a loud voice from the temple "Brother-in-law!... Ramanna! .... Don't jump! .... We are coming with you..." and soon Lord Shiva and His consort presented themselves before him and accompanied him to his cottage in the valley below. The mother and son were so overwhelmed with Divine Bliss that they merged in the Divine phenomenon and were seen no more. This story has added to the sanctity of the shrine of Bhramaramba and Mallikarjuna at Shrishailam.

Bala Ramanna had unadulterated faith, so he was able to dedicate his pure self to the Lord and reach the Goal. You must always exalt low things to a higher level by infusing them with higher meaning. Ramanna believed the stone image to be God; he did not bring God down to the level of a stone image. You may worship a picture as God, but you should not posit God as a picture. Wood, stone or mud may be assumed to be Divine, but Divinity should not be limited to wood, stone or mud.

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 14, #1 (1978-80)

### **Story 2: Devotion of Markandeya**

Markandeya was born as the result of a boon granted by *Easwara* (Shiva) to his parents. *Easwara* asked his parents whether they wanted a virtuous son with a short life span or a son not so virtuous but who would live long. The parents opted for a virtuous son. Accordingly, Markandeya was born. He was one of good thought, good behaviour, and good conduct. *Easwara* informed his parents that he would live only for sixteen years. Nevertheless, the parents were overjoyed as they had been blessed with a virtuous son.

Years rolled by and Markandeya entered his sixteenth year. Remembering the words of *Easwara*, his parents became grief-stricken. His mother would often shed tears thinking of the imminent death of her son. Markandeya could not understand the cause of her grief and wondered why she was shedding tears.



One day, he found his parents steeped in sorrow. On enquiry, they revealed that his death was imminent as per the Divine Will, and that was the cause of their sorrow.

Markandeya felt sorry that *Easwara's* Will was not revealed to him till then because of which he had wasted the precious time allotted to him. He did not want to waste time any longer. He had an early bath, went to the temple of *Easwara*, and started chanting the sacred *Siva Panchakshari Mantra, Namah Sivaya*, with all sincerity and devotion. He lost himself in the contemplation of *Easwara*. He did not expect any reward for his prayers. He considered it his primary duty to contemplate on God.

The following day was supposed to be the last day of his earthly sojourn. Hence, he remained in the temple. Since he had not returned home, His parents went to the temple and sat at its entrance. They were shedding tears, thinking of the impending end of Markandeya's life. As willed by the Lord, Markandeya left his mortal coil the moment he completed his sixteenth year. His parents were in a sea of sorrow. As Markandeya left his mortal body in the external world, his *jiva* (soul) reached Lord Siva in the divine world. The Lord was immensely pleased with the sincere devotion of Markandeya. He said, "Markandeya! Today marks the completion of your sixteenth year. You have come to Me in a happy frame of mind. You have bowed down to My Will with implicit faith and obedience. I am pleased with your devotion."

As *Easwara* was speaking to Markandeya in this manner, Mother Parvati intervened and said, "Oh Lord! Why don't You send him back to his parents, since he has obeyed Your command implicitly." *Easwara* wanted Parvati also to accompany Him. Together they infused life into the body of Markandeya.

The parents' joy knew no bounds when they noticed some movement in Markandeya's body. He got up and said, "My dear mother and father, Lord *Easwara* and Mother Parvati have brought me back to life. I will stay with you as long as you want me. Let us entertain noble thoughts and undertake good deeds. I will discharge my duties as your son and give you happiness."

Accompanying his parents, Markandeya went home. The people of the village were struck with wonder when they came to know that Markandeya was brought back to life by Lord *Easwara* and Mother Parvati. Markandeya narrated to them in detail all that had happened in the divine world.

God responds to the prayers of devotees and comes to their rescue only when they have purity of heart. One with a pure heart can even alter the *sankalpa* (will) of God. The story of Markandeya bears ample testimony to this. Markandeya had no desires. He made sacred use of the time granted to him. It is the primary duty of devotees to cultivate noble thoughts and perform sacred



	<p>actions. Markandeya remained a <i>chiranjeevi</i> (immortal), served his parents, and gave them immense happiness. In the normal course, God's Will cannot be altered. But, sometimes God does change His <i>sankalpa</i> in answer to the prayers of a devotee who is sincere and pure at heart. The devotee has the power to change the Will of God. Devotion does not mean mere vocal expression of prayers; one should have purity of heart.</p> <p>- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 37, #25 (2004)</p>
Activity Suggestions	<p><b>Activity 1:</b> Bring a small Shiva Lingam to class and have children do <i>Abhishekam</i> with water/<i>vibhuti</i></p> <p><b>Activity 2: Making idols</b> The students make idols of Lord Shiva in class using clay or playdoh; the idols can be decorated with beads and gems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SSSIO-USA SSE SOuL Activities – All “This” is permeated by the Divine</li> <li>- <a href="https://sathyasai.us/education/activities/all-this-is-permeated-by-the-divine">https://sathyasai.us/education/activities/all-this-is-permeated-by-the-divine</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Activity 3:</b> Enact or role play the stories of Markandeya</p> <p><b>Life Application:</b> Chant <i>Mrutyunjaya Mantra</i> every day and take <i>Vibhuti</i> every day.</p>