



Sabka Maalik Ek

# SAI SANDESH

The Official Monthly Newsletter of  
**OM SAI MANDIR**

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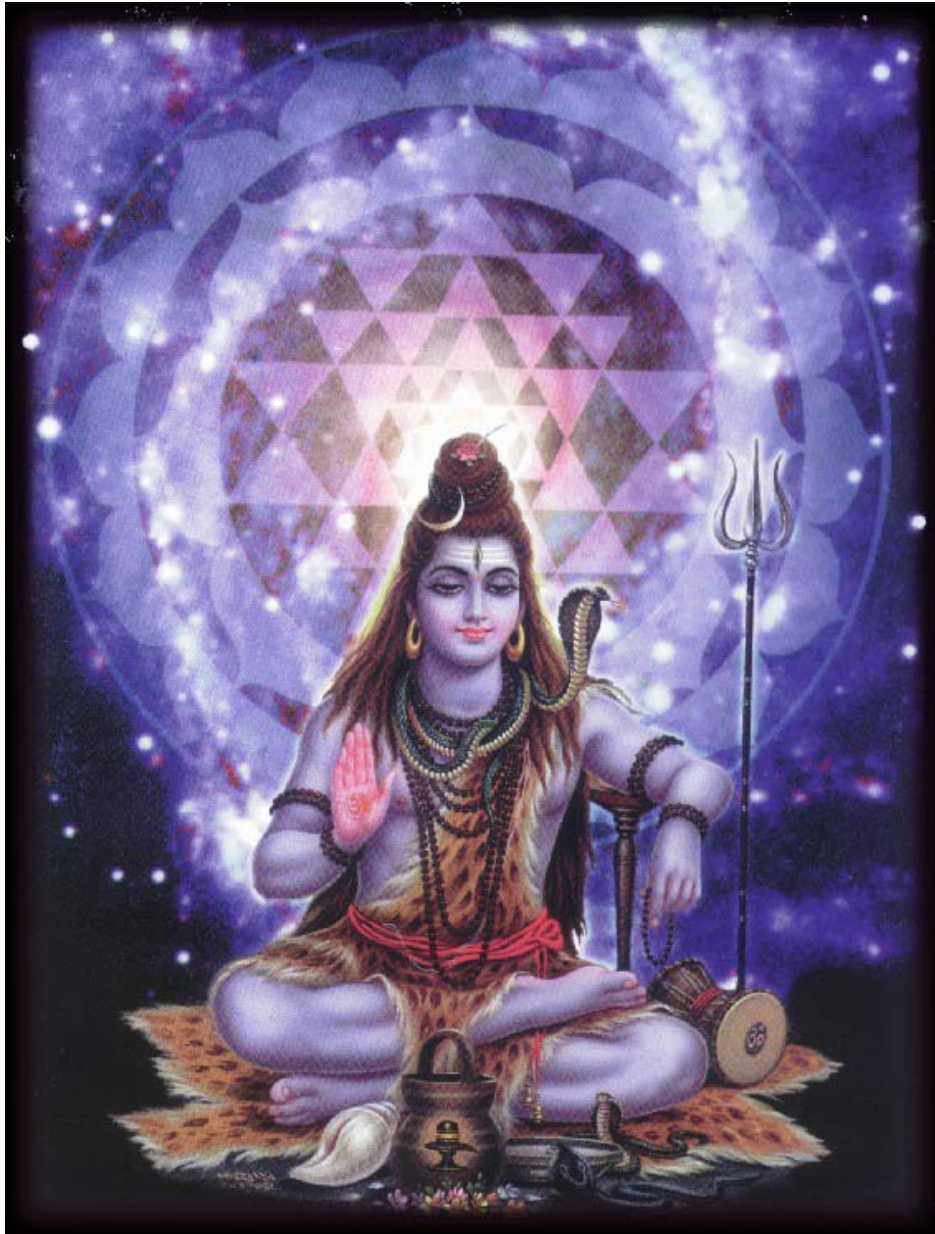
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Love All, Serve All

## MAHASHIVARATRI SPECIAL ISSUE



(Image Credit: [http://www.shaivam.org/gallery/image/shiva/shiva\\_mandala.jpg](http://www.shaivam.org/gallery/image/shiva/shiva_mandala.jpg))

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## THE DIVINE GARDENER

BY THE SAI SANDESH TEAM

A young boy, on his way to school, would cross a beautiful garden everyday. The garden was home to the choicest variety of the most exquisite flowers, fruits, and vegetables. Apart from the visual scenery, there was something very captivating about the garden. An aura of selfless love and bliss enveloped the entire ambience; the place was as if paradise on earth, a place embodying the very definition of peace. The matchless beauty mesmerized the little one's heart. With each passing day his curiosity grew exponentially. Unlike other kids, he did not want to play in the garden; rather, his only desire was to discover the person behind all this beauty.

One day he left for school much earlier than his usual time and hid behind the bushes, curiously expecting someone to show up. Within a few minutes, an elderly man, all frail and gray, slowly walked out of a nearby house. His gentle mannerism, peaceful smile, and loving countenance reminded the lad of his own grandfather. The old man walked very slowly, as if avoiding the careless trampling of small bushes and insects across the path. No sooner had he entered the garden, he began his work.

His wrinkled hands carefully plucked out the weeds, watered the plants, reinforced plant supports, and performed all that was required to maintain the place. After a few hours of toiling, a divine radiance lit his face and he looked at his creation with utmost satisfaction. As he walked through the garden, he gently touched all the plants and lovingly spoke to them in a language that the boy could not comprehend. Once his work was done, the man sat on a stone, quietly observing the garden from afar. Within minutes the boy realized they were not alone. Butterflies swarmed to the flowers in their quest for nectar. Birds and animals of all sorts came to the garden, each to fulfill its own needs. Even humans enjoyed rest under the shade of trees. Seeing all this, the elderly man shed tears of joy.

By now the boy had forgotten all about school. At the sight of an old man in tears, the compassionate youngster could hold it no longer. He accosted the gardener, saying, "Sir, why do you cry? Are you sad because so many people visit your garden? Or, are you afraid they will spoil all your hard work?" The old man slowly

lifted his head and wiped his tears to get a clear view of the little questioner. "No, my child. These are tears of joy," replied the gardener, "I feel great joy when I see so many souls reaping the benefits of my work." He continued: "I get inspired by God. The Lord has planted all of us in this garden called earth. With great care, He removes the weeds (of hatred, desire, and ignorance), clearing our path for growth; waters us (with His infinite grace); distributes sunshine (the warmth of His love); and takes great care to ensure our continued spiritual growth. After doing this work everyday, just like me, He sits and watches us with great joy. He is eagerly waiting for us to become like the flowers that share nectar with unknown butterflies (share our love and bliss with fellow-beings) or like the fruits and vegetables that satisfy the hunger of many (selfless sharing with the needy) or like the trees that give shade, protecting all from the scorching sun (being compassionate and helpful to the suffering souls). God experiences even more joy when little ones like you make an attempt to see the power behind all this creation. He knows that you are hiding in the bushes of this world, trying to get a glimpse of His reality. He is anxiously waiting for you to trust Him enough to come out of the thick bushes of worldly desire and speak to Him the way you would to your own."

The old man stopped speaking to look at the little boy, who was now in tears. The gentle gardener lifted the little one and placed him on his lap, wiping the tears that covered his beautiful blue eyes. Bliss permeated the environment, as if their selfless love and mutual admiration had made a deep impact on Mother Nature. Hours had passed and it was now time for the boy to return home to his anxious mother. The lad gave a big hug to his new teacher and bade goodbye, promising to return for more. An illuminating glow shone on the boy's face as he recollected the teachings imparted by his gentle benefactor. He smiled at the thought that although he had missed school that day, he had learned lessons that he would remember for the rest of his life.

## BEACON LIGHTS

### SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

BY THE SAI SANDESH TEAM



A contemporary of Shirdi Sai Baba, Ramakrishna Paramahansa (February 18, 1836 to August 16, 1886) is one of the greatest saints that sanctified mother earth. Much of the modern day spiritual renaissance can be attributed to the work

of this great master and his zealous disciples, Vivekananda being the foremost among them.

**The early years.** Born in the village of Kamarpukur (now Hoogly district of West Bengal), Ramakrishna was christened Gadadhar Chattopadhyay. His parents, Khudiram and Chadramani, were very poor, earning barely enough to sustain themselves. Despite the poverty, young Gadadhar was a magnetic lad who attracted the young and old alike. From his very childhood he was averse to formal education and the reckless pursuit of money and even at that young age, he would associate with local monks and listen to religious expositions and debates with rapt attention.

**The mother's call.** As the family's financial condition worsened, Ramkumar, Gadadhar's elder brother, in addition to serving as a priest, started a Sanskrit school. Despite his efforts, the income generated was not enough to support the family's growing needs. During the same time, Rani Rashmoni, a rich woman from Calcutta, founded a temple at Dakshineswar. She requested Ramkumar to serve as the priest of the temple of Kali, a request to which the struggling priest gladly acceded. After some persuasion and initial reluctance, Gadadhar, too, joined hands in his brother's career, an act that later proved to be a clear manifestation of divine will, a call from the divine mother Kali.

**Devotional fervor.** Ramakrishna was no ordinary priest. He would spend hours decorating the mother's image and would often wave her *arati* for hours at a stretch. Though many found this behavior bizarre, the truly spiritual recognized the devotional fervor and piety of the

young priest. He refused to see the mother as a stone image; instead, he considered Her to be a real person, his own divine mother. *"Mother, you've been gracious to many devotees in the past and have revealed yourself to them. Why would you not reveal yourself to me, also? Am I not also your son?"* was a constant prayer that Ramakrishna offered to the mother. The prayers slowly transformed into intense yearning and constant weeping for the mother. Often entire nights were spent weeping for a vision of the mother. It is said that once he could bear the separation no longer and threatened to end his very life if the mother did not reveal herself. In such a state, Ramakrishna grabbed a sword and was about to strike himself when the gracious mother appeared.

The vision was just one among the series of visions that the mother was to grant him. She would often instruct him in these visions; mystic truths about different religions were made known to him very early on. He had realized that all religions, though outwardly different, share a common goal: God. As a result, he did not restrict himself to any particular religion. He practiced different religions and ultimately reached the same goal through each, in essence setting an example for mankind that there is only one religion: the religion of love.



Soon word spread about this saintly lad and many came to offer their respects to him. Once the divine mother sent Totapuri, a practitioner of *advaita* to Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna remarked to Totapuri in despair, *"It's no good. I will never be able to lift my spirit to the unconditioned state and find myself face to face with the Atman."* He [Totapuri] replied severely: *"What do you mean you can't? You*

must!" Looking about him, he found a shard of glass. He took it and stuck the point between Ramakrishna's eyes saying, "Concentrate your mind on that point." [...] The last barrier vanished and his spirit immediately precipitated itself beyond the plane of the conditioned, lost in samadhi. After the departure of Totapuri, Ramakrishna reportedly remained for six months in a state of absolute contemplation. For six months at a stretch, Ramakrishna remained in that state from which ordinary men can never return; generally the body falls off, after three weeks, like a sere leaf.<sup>1</sup>

**Marriage.** About this time gossip mongers got to work and spread rumors that Gadadhar had gone crazy. Advice givers pressured his parents to arrange marriage so as to bring him back to senses. What an irony—the one who was destined to bring the whole world to its senses was claimed senseless by social fanatics. Instead of objecting to marriage, Ramakrishna actually mentioned the name of one village Jayrambati, three miles to the north of Kamarpukur as being the village where his would-be bride awaited him in the house of one Ramchandra Mukherjee. Sarada, the bride, all of six, was found and given in marriage to the Paramahansa. She became his first disciple and learnt all that was to be learnt from this great sage. Impressed by her advanced state, Ramakrishna declared her to be the veritable Tripura Sundari Devi and performed puja to her just the way he used to worship the mother. (After Ramakrishna's departure from this world she became a spiritual force in her own right, a guru that initiated hundreds on the path to liberation.)

**Later life.** Gadadhar soon came to be recognized as Ramakrishna Paramahansa. At this stage, he began instructing others for a span of fifteen years. Toward the end of his life, he had developed throat cancer and attained Mahasamadhi at a Garden House in Cossipore on August 18, 1886, leaving behind a legacy of sixteen young disciples, headed by Swami Vivekananda.

**Teachings.** Though practically illiterate, the saint taught even scholars. Such is the power of God. He taught the basic principle that though different religions praise God in different ways and forms, the reality is only one. This one God is the master of all. Ramakrishna also taught his devotees the two sides of *maya* (illusion); namely, *avidyamaya* (the dark forces) and

*vidyamaya* (the higher forces). While *avidyamaya* traps human beings and causes repeated births, *vidyamaya* helps the devotee rid of this cycle. The primary tenets of his teaching were: oneness of God, divinity of human beings, harmony of religions, and that the causes of bondage were lust and greed.



(Image Credit: <http://www.vivekananda.org/archive/photogallery.asp>)

heights by Ramakrishna's disciple, Swami Vivekananda, a spiritual legend in his own right.

### The Ramakrishna Mission.

Now a world order the mission was started by the Paramahansa himself through the distribution of *gerua* (saffron) cloth of renunciation to his direct disciples. This initial work was taken to great

1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramakrishna\\_Paramahansa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramakrishna_Paramahansa)

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

### DAILY ARATIS:

Kakad Arati	8.00 A.M.
Madhyana Arati	12.00 P.M.
Dhoop Arati	6.00 P.M.
Sheja Arati	8.00 P.M.

### SPECIAL BHAJANS:

Every Thursday	7.00 P.M.–8.30 P.M.
Every Sunday	2.00 P.M.–3.00 P.M.

**STOTRAS (CHANTING SAHASRANAM, BABA'S 108 NAMES, ETC.):** Daily.

**ANNADAN [FOOD SERVICE]:** Daily at temple  
**ANNADAN [FOOD SERVICE] FOR HOMELESS BROTHERS AND SISTERS:** Every Saturday at 1 p.m. 29<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. Call 718-461-0454.

## PUJA SPONSORSHIP

Archana.....	\$11
Abishekam.....	\$51
Satyanarayana Vrata.....	\$81
Vahana Puja.....	\$15
Annadan.....	\$251

**To sponsor pujas, call: (718) 461-0454.**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### February

Mahashivaratri: Sunday, February 26, 2006

### March

Tuesday, Mar. 14: Holi

Thurs, Mar. 30: Ugadi/Gudi Padwa

## MAHASHIVARATRI



### The origin.

Scriptures attribute the origin of Mahashivaratri to more than one cause. Contrary to popular belief, it is not the birthday of

Lord Shiva, for the Lord has neither birth nor death. One story commemorates the salvation attained by a hunter, who unknowingly performed puja using *bilva* leaves on this day. Another describes the occasion as the night when the Lord consumed *Halabala* (poison) to save the universe. Yet another, speaks of this as the night when the Lord performed a cosmic dance. All this, it is said, happened on the same night and so, Mahashivaratri, was held in commemoration of this occasion.

When He consumed the Haalahala (poison) that emerged from the churning of the ocean and threatened to destroy the universe, the heat of the fumes were unbearable even for Him. So, Ganga flowed uninterruptedly on His matted locks; but, that gave Him only partial relief. (It is for this reason that *abhishekam* (ritual bathing ceremony) is performed for Shiva regularly.)

**The Significance.** In reality, Shivaratri falls not just once a year, but once every month. Night is dominated by the moon. The moon has 16 *kalas* (fractions of divine glory), and each night, during the dark fortnight, one fraction is reduced, until the entire moon is annihilated on new moon night. From then on, each night, a fraction is added until the moon is full circle on Full Moon Night. Chandra (moon) is the presiding deity of the mind and hence the mind waxes and wanes like the moon. In a like manner, during the dark fortnight of the month, *sadhana* has to be done to eliminate each day a fraction of the mind, for, every day, a fraction of the moon too is being taken out of cognizance.

On the night of Chaturdhasi, the 14th day, the night of Shiva, only a fraction remains. If some special effort is made that night, through more intensive and vigilant *sadhana*, like *puja* or *japam* or *dhyana* (ritual worship, one-pointed repetition of

holy names, and meditation), success is ensured. God alone has to be meditated upon that night without the mind straying toward thoughts of sleep or food. This has to be done every month; once a year, on Mahashivaratri, a special spurt of spiritual activity is recommended so that what is *shavam* (corpse) can become Shivam [God], by the perpetual awareness of its divine indweller. The chief aim of all *sadhana* is to eliminate the mind. It is only then that *maaya* (illusion) will be dispersed and the reality revealed.

## DEVOTEES' EXPERIENCES

### SWAMI SAVES US FROM FREEZING

It was those wonderful student days when we used to serve Swami in the mandir all night. One chilly winter night a friend and me were sleeping in the mandir. Unfortunately, the heating wasn't on that night and the only blanket that was available could not keep us both warm. All our attempts to stay warm had turned futile. It was one of the coldest nights and the temperatures had dropped far below normal winter temperatures.

At that time a thought came to me that if we are feeling cold, Swami might be feeling be cold too. We could not bear the thought of letting Swami suffer, so I went and put the only blanket we had around Swami's idol.

Wonder of wonders, the minute we put the blanket around Baba the entire room became warm, as if it were summer.

We spent the rest of the night sleeping peacefully, in the warmth of Swami's grace.

Please share your experiences with the readers of Sai Sandesh.

Send us your articles, experiences, poems, suggestions, etc.

saisandesh@omsaimandir.org

## GOD DOES EVERYTHING FOR THE BEST

There was once a minister to a king who was in the habit of declaring that whatever happened was for one's good. One day the king cut his finger while slicing a piece of sugar cane. Seeing the bleeding finger the minister said as usual, "God does everything for the best." The king flew into a rage and said, "Here I am suffering with the pain of a bleeding finger and you say God does everything for the best. Enough of your philosophy. Is this the way of consoling me? How can this be for the best when the pain is intense and real?" The king immediately committed the minister to prison. Even then the minister said calmly, "Even this sentence is for my best." A few days later, the king went alone for hunting in a forest. When the hunting expedition was over, the king was resting under a tree. Just then the servants of a certain tribal chief of the forest seized the king, bound his hand and foot. The king questioned them, "Why do you bind me? What are you going to do with me?" The tribesmen replied, "We are going to sacrifice you at the altar of our goddess Kali. It is the custom to offer her a human sacrifice once a year. The time has arrived. We have been looking out for a human being. We are fortunate in having found you." The king remonstrated: "Let me go, I am the king of the realm, you cannot kill me for the sacrifice." The tribesmen laughed and said: "We are glad that this year's sacrifice would be unique and our goddess will be highly pleased because we are going to offer as sacrifice a great personage." The king was carried and duly placed on a sacrificial altar. Things were ready for the death blow; the priest noticed the bandage on his left hand forefinger. They removed the bandage only to find that a portion of it was cut. The priest said: "This man is not acceptable as a sacrifice to our goddess. A man with a defect in his body is not fit for sacrifice. Set him free."

The king remembered the words of the minister uttered when his finger was cut, "God does everything for the best." He realized that the injury to his finger alone had saved him from death. He at once hurried home and went straight to the prison to set the minister free. He said, "I seek your forgiveness for the rash and cruel treatment accorded to you." The minister said, "Your majesty; you have done no harm. There is nothing to forgive." The king once again

questioned, "Why did you say that my sending you to prison is for your good?" The minister replied, "If I had not been confined in prison, I would have accompanied you when you went for hunting. I would have been in your company. When the tribesmen came to know that you were unfit for sacrifice, they would have chosen me and offered me as a sacrifice. So God does everything for the best."



### MAHASHIVARATRI 2006

MAHASHIVARATRI CELEBRATIONS  
WILL BE HELD FROM SUNDAY,  
FEBRUARY 26, 6.00 P.M. TO  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 6.00 A.M.

AN ALL NIGHT VIGIL WILL BE  
HELD IN ADDITION TO FOUR  
PHASES OF SHIVA ABHISHEKAM  
AND ALL-NIGHT BHAJANS

ALL ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND  
WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL  
1.718.461.0454

## TEMPLE JOURNAL



CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS, DECEMBER 25, 2005



SANKRANTI CELEBRATIONS, JANUARY 14, 2006

**AN APPEAL**

Devotees are requested to generously contribute toward the development of the temple. Devotees can make their checks payable to: **Om Sai Mandir**

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