



Shraddha. Saburi.

SAI SANDESH

The Official Monthly Newsletter of

OM SAI MANDIR

A NON PROFIT ORGANIZATION

45-11 Smart Street * Flushing, NY 11355 * Tel. (718) 461-0454

www.omsaimandir.org * info@omsaimandir.org

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Love All. Serve All.

Mar 2008

Volume 5, Issue 3





MAHASHIVARATRI CELEBRATIONS

**THURSDAY, MARCH 06, 6.00 PM TO
FRIDAY, MARCH 07, 6.00 AM**

*The celebrations include an all-night vigil, all-night bhajans,
and all-night abhishekam*

You are cordially invited with family and friends.



Phase 1 Abhishekam: 6 PM to 8.30 PM

1. Ganesh & Sai Baba Maha Abhishekam: 6 PM to 6.45 PM

3. Shiva Maha Abhishekam: 6.45 PM to 8.30 PM

(Followed by Alankaram, Rudram, Arati, and Mahaprasad)

Phase 2 Abhishekam: 9 PM to 11.30 PM

Shiva Maha Abhishekam Followed by Alankaram, Arati, and Prasadam

Phase 3 Abhishekam: 12 A.M. to 2.30 A.M.

Shiva Maha Abhishekam Followed by Alankaram, Arati, and Prasadam

Phase 4 Abhishekam: 3 A.M. to 5.30 AM

Shiva Maha Abhishekam Followed by Alankaram, Arati, and Prasadam

To sponsor pujas or for more information call 1.718.461.0454

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SIGNIFICANCE OF MAHASHIVARATRI By The Sai Sandesh Team

The Shiva that is worshipped on Mahashivaratri is not restricted to the deity with a name and form assigned to Him--He is essentially the formless God depicted in His supreme state of bliss. The infinite manifests in the form of Shakti (nature) for the purpose of creation and Shiva and Shakti (nature) are one.

Donned in elephant skin, Lord Shiva is often depicted as a three-eyed deity engrossed in deep meditation. The three eyes symbolize God's knowledge of the past, present, and future--and God alone has all three. The elephant skin indicates that powerful bestial traits in man can be destroyed by the grace God. He makes them powerless, tears them to pieces, and skins them to make them ineffective. His four faces symbolize shaantham (peace), roudhram (fierceness), mangalam (auspiciousness), and utsaaham (determination). Meditating on Shiva in this form can help one rid of even the least traces of delusion.²

The origin. Shastras (traditional scriptures) attribute the origin of Mahashivaratri (the night dedicated to Shiva) to various stories. Some ascribe the holiness of this day to its being the birthday of Lord Shiva. The Lord being the one without a beginning or an end can, in reality, have no birthday. Another story commemorates the salvation attained by a hunter who sat on a bilva tree on the look-out for animals to kill, and without any intention to worship, unknowingly dropped some of its leaves on a Linga that lay beneath. This story, however, does not make clear why this day is especially sacred. Another story describes this occasion as the night on which Shiva danced the taandava (cosmic dance) in the ecstasy of His innate nature, with all the gods and sages sharing and witnessing cosmic consummation.

To obtain amrita (divine nectar granting immortality), the ocean was churned in ancient times. A byproduct of this effort was the emergence of haalahala (deadly poison) that threatened to destroy the entire creation. To save His devotees, Lord Shiva consumed this poison, but the heat emanating from the poison was so intense, it was unbearable even for Shiva. To serve the Lord, Ganga flowed uninterruptedly on His matted locks, but this gave Him only partial relief. (It is for this reason that abhishekam [ritual bathing ceremony] is performed on Shiva incessantly. The ritual pouring, it is believed, is very pleasing to the Lord.) When Ganga couldn't give relief, the moon was placed on

His head. This was of great help and Shiva then danced the taandava dance. All these events, it is said, happened on the same night and so Mahashivaratri was held in commemoration of this occasion.¹

The Significance. Shivaratri falls not just once a year, but once every month. Then why is this Mahashivaratri so important? 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. Chandramaamaso jaathah-out of the manas of the Purusha (Supreme Being), the moon was born.

In a like manner, during the dark fortnight of the month, sadhana (spiritual activities) 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 Chathurdhasi, 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 dhyaana (ritual worship, one-pointed repetition, 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.

The Lingam. Lingam is the symbolic form of the Godhead. Lingam means that in which this jagath (creation) attains laya [mergence]; that into which this jagath goes. The three gunas (primordial qualities) are represented by the three-tiered peetha (platform); the lingam above symbolizes the goal of life. Lingam means a symbol, the symbol of creation, the result of the activity of the three gunas and of the Brahman (supreme reality) which permeates and gives it meaning and value. The worship of the Lingam must be done with faith in its symbolic significance.²

SIGNIFICANCE OF MAHASHIVATRI CONTINUED ...

Emergence of the Linga from Swami. Swami in His Mahashivaratri discourse, once said: "This is a day dedicated to the Shiva that is in each of you. From the Himalayan ranges down to Kanyakumari, the entire country is resounding today to the authentic declaration "Shivoham," "Shivoham" and to the adoration, "Om Namah Shivaya." Since thousands pray here and elsewhere, in lakhs and crores, the Linga is emanating from Me, so that you may derive the bliss that pervades the world through Lingodhbhava (emergence of Linga).

The manifestation of the Linga is a part of My nature. The Linga emerges as a result of prayer and grace. You have to recognize in this event, a glimpse of Divinity, a sign of infinite grace. Just as Om is the sound symbol of God, the Linga is the form symbol or the visible symbol of God, the most meaningful, the simplest and the least endowed with the appendages of attributes. All forms merge in the formless at last. Shiva is the principle of destruction of all names and forms, of all entities and individuals. The Linga is the simplest sign of emergence and merger.

Shivaraathri and Numerology. Based on numerology, every letter of the alphabet has a specific numerical value. "Si" bears the value 4. "Va" has the value of 5, "Ra", a value of 2. When the values of the three are combined, you have a total of 11. This eleven represents the eleven Rudras (negative or destructive principles).

Role of Rudras in man's life. What are the functions of these Rudras? The Rudras, in association with the buddhi (the intellect), enter the minds of people and cause them various types of difficulties and worries. Of these difficulties, three types are predominant in the world. They are aadhibhouthika, aadhyaathmika, and aadhidaivika. Aadhibhouthika refers to difficulties caused by the five elements (ether, air, fire, water and earth) and the five sheaths (relating to food, life, mind, awareness and bliss). These sufferings are caused by human beings, animals, insects or other creatures. Aadhyaathmika refers to sufferings caused by vaatha (wind), pittha (bile), and kapha (phlegm). Aadhidhaivika refers to the calamities caused to man by floods, drought, storms, earthquakes, and similar natural disasters. The eleven Rudras are the cause for all these sufferings. The whole world is permeated by the Rudras. Only Aadhidhaivika has an element of security. Whatever emanates from Rudra is fraught with fear. The name itself testifies to the dangerous power implicit in it. Rudhram means that

which induces fear. The eleven Rudras are dreadful in form. These dreadful entities enter the minds of human beings and subject them to all kinds of afflictions. While the Rudras are inflicting sufferings on mankind in various ways, by the control of the senses, if humans turn their minds towards God and devote themselves to Godly pursuits, they will find their path to moksha (liberation).³

Rudras and sense-control. The Mahashivaratri festival has been designed to subdue these Rudras. With sense control the Rudras can be controlled. Control of senses is, however, not easy. Even if evil impulses from external sources are controlled, those arising from within cannot be easily controlled. But if, at least on one night out of 365 days in a year, the senses are brought under control, then peace may be experienced and the quest for liberation may be initiated. When the entire night is dedicated to the chanting of the Lord's name, one's mind, speech, and senses all get centered on God. This is a form of sense control. When this is done, people can realize the Supreme.

The Lord is experienced as Sath-Chith-Aananda. Sath is Being, that which is eternally present. Chith is awareness (or consciousness). Chith is like water. When sath (as sugar) is combined with chith (as water) you have neither sugar nor water, but syrup. The combination of sath and chith results in aananda (Bliss). When the unchanging, eternal Divinity unites with the changing and inert prakrithi (nature), you have aananda. The significance of Mahashivaratri is that it is an auspicious occasion when sath-chith-aananda can be experienced.

Let us resolve, on this holy Shivaratri, in the Presence of Shiva Sai, to visualize Shiva as the inner power of all. With each breath, you are even now, asserting "Soham," "I am He," not only you, but, every being that breathes, every being that lives, everything that exists. It is a fact which you have ignored so long. Believe it from now on. When you watch your breath and meditate on that magnificent truth, slowly, the I and the He will draw nearer and closer, until the feeling of separateness will fade away-and the Soham will be transformed into OM, the pranava, the primal sound, the fundamental formula for God. That Om is the swaswarupa--the reality behind this "relative reality."

1. Shivaraathri Day Discourse, February 1969.
2. Prashanthi Nilayam, Mahashivaratri, July, 02, 1959.
3. Discourse, March 11, 1994.

OM SAI MANDIR'S 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.
SAHASRANAM, BABA'S 108 NAMES, ETC.: Daily
ANNADAN (FOOD SERVICE): Daily at the Mandir
ANNADAN (FOOD SERVICE) FOR HOMELESS
BROTHERS AND SISTERS: Every Saturday at 1 P.M. Call
718-461-0454

PUJA SPONSORSHIP

Archana: \$11
Abhishekam: \$51
Satyanarayana Vrata: \$81
Vahana Puja: \$15
Annadan: \$251
To sponsor pujas, call (718) 461-0454.

UPCOMING EVENTS

March

Thursday, March 06: Mahashivaratri - All-night vigil + Pujas
Fri, Mar 21: Holi/Holika Poornima

April

Monday, Apr. 07: Ugadi/Gudi Padwa/Cheti Chand
Sunday, Apr. 13: Tamil New Year
Monday, Apr. 14:
1. Sri Ram Navami
2. Baisakhi
3. Vishu (Malayali New Year)

EKADASHA RUDRA ABHISHEKAM

Daily from 8.30 AM to 11.30 AM

Rudra Abhishekam - Daily

For the welfare of humanity, Ekadash Rudra Abhishekam is being performed daily (eleven times) from 8.00 AM to 11.30 AM. All are welcome to attend this historic event.

Devotees' Experiences: Baba Shows Me the Way By A Sai Devotee, New York

In 2006, I visited Puttaparthi to attend the Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam. It was an experience that one cannot describe adequately in words. One afternoon, I wanted to visit the Kalpa Vriksha (the wish fulfilling tree blessed by Swami) and do meditation there.

Unfortunately, I did not know how to reach there, so I was wandering around a hill within the ashram itself. I did know the tree was not in the ashram's premises.

Just then, a middle-aged man appeared there and without my disclosing, asked me if I wanted to visit the Kalpavriksha. He then gave me the directions to go there. He also gave me a picture of Swami and asked for two rupees in exchange. He claimed to be a heart patient--it was much later that I realized He was a heart doctor, a divine doctor who treats many broken hearts.

At first, I refused to accept the picture from a stranger but on seeing that it was my favorite, I accepted it and gave him the two rupees he had requested.

God's maya is so powerful, little did I realize it was Baba Himself guiding me to the wish-fulfilling tree. The fact that He had asked for two rupees (a symbolic token often asked by Sai Baba of Shirdi), gave me my favorite picture (the one in Om Sai Mandir), and also gave me directions even without my asking--all of these were signs that it was Baba Himself, but I couldn't see through the veil of maya.

When I called my guru that night, it was revealed to me that the person I had met was none other than Baba Himself. I chided myself and visited the spot again but could never find the man who claimed to work there everyday--yes, He does work there but not in that form.

Strange are the ways of God. He blesses us in so many mysterious ways and forms--all forms are His, all names are His, all living creatures are His manifestations. What a wonderful lesson I learnt that day: God is in everyone.

Sai Ram.

A Sai Devotee, New York

IN SEARCH OF HAPPINESS BY THE SAI SANDESH TEAM

Ask any person about the reason behind their involvement in certain activities or works and pat will come the response: "I am hoping it will make me happy." From work to vacations to social engagements, one central theme--the desire to be permanently happy--drives all our actions. Yet, there isn't a single person who can claim to be completely happy. All our efforts produce temporary satisfaction, but never permanent joy. Isn't that an irony? Securing happiness, it appears, is like trying to hold water in our palms--it just slips away through the cracks of our fingers.

Where is happiness

Swami illustrated the story of an old man who lost his needle in his own house, but out of ignorance went in its search outside. After spending extreme lengths of time, he couldn't find his needle outside but when he finally decided to search for it in his own house, he was amazed to find easily. We are all like that--always trying to find happiness in the external world, when true happiness, our own inner self, has been our constant companion through countless births.

It is an irony that we continue our old ways without inquiring into the reasons for our grief. We move from activity to activity, relationship to relationship, and disappointment to disappointment with the fond hope of securing lasting joy. How tired and frustrated we feel when our attempts give us moments of gaiety, neatly packaged like wrapping paper over an unopened box of sorrow. Even while going through sorrows, we fail to grasp the hidden message: true joy is within us, not outside.

Why unhappiness

Making us unhappy, it is our mind that constantly weaves countless thoughts and desires and causes misery. When we offer this mind to God and center all our thoughts around Him, He will surely release us from its vagaries. We are not helpless or weak, within us is the infinite power of God. Why should we give room to weakness when our true self is all-powerful?

Swami asks us to evaluate our lives. We will then realize we suffer for only a quarter of our life--the rest is happiness. Yet, even this short time appears unbearable. The desire to avoid pain keeps us on a constant emotional roller coaster--we are elated with good things and become despondent in tough times. By acting thus, we are allowing external situations to control us and not vice versa.

How to escape sorrows

It is only through constant practice of equanimity--remaining unaffected by circumstances--that we can remain in bliss regardless of what happens around us. Prahalada was one devotee who had achieved this state even when he was a mere child. At the orders of the demon, Hiranyakashyapa, Prahlada was subjected to unbearable torments, such as being thrown from the top of a hill, subjected to harassment from terrifying demons, thrown in blazing fire, and many unmentionable atrocities. Even at that tender age, he bore all these inflictions with a smile on his face, bliss in his heart, and the incessant chanting of his favorite mantra "Om Namo Narayana". Can we compare our troubles to the ones faced by this tender child? It was God's name that protected this child, and constant chanting of God's name is all we also need to tide through our lives.

Molded and purified

The painful circumstances are like the purifying fire. A slab of gold when passed through a furnace becomes malleable and worthy of molding into precious ornaments. Our essence is like pure gold and when we pass through painful situations, we are molded into worthy instruments for the Divine. During the time of Shirdi Sai Baba, Kashinath came to Him in search of enlightenment. Baba asked him to stay in Shirdi for four years, during which he was subjected to numerous difficulties. When he would complain to Baba about this, the latter would revert: "The more you suffer now, the better it is for your future. I am with you." Kashinath was transformed from an ordinary human being to a great master, Upasani Maharaj, within a short span of four years. He was molded into a perfect master by being subjected to the fire of innumerable trials, tribulations, and tests.

Although we worry so much for our sufferings, the span of human life is nothing when compared to cosmic time. In fact Swami says that when compared to cosmic time, our life on earth is not even an infinitesimal fraction of a second. If such be the case, what difference does it make whether we live in a hut or a palace. True and permanent happiness comes from loving God and from realizing our own inner self and only turning inwards can save us from unhappiness and free us from all our shackles permanently.

GREATEST SIN

SOURCE: OKA CHINNA KATHA

Once Jesus was walking along the streets of a city. It was a slum area. He saw a young man rolling in dirt, dead drunk. He went to him, sat by his side and woke him up. The young man opened his eyes and saw Jesus. Jesus asked him: "Son! Why are you wasting your precious youth in drinking?" The young man replied: "Master!, I was a leper. You cured me of my leprosy. What else can I do?" Jesus heaved a sigh and walked away.

In another street he saw a man madly pursuing a beautiful woman. Jesus caught hold of him and asked him: "Son! Why do you desecrate your body by indulging in such a sinful act?" The man replied: "Master! I was really blind. You gave me vision. What else can I do?"

Jesus trudged along another street. He saw an old man crying bitterly. Jesus approached him and gently touched him. The old man wiped his tears and looked at Jesus. Jesus questioned him: "Why are you weeping old man?" The old man said: "Master! I was nearly dead. You granted me life. What else can I do except weep in this old age?"

In times of difficulty and distress, we cry out for God's help. But when God, out of His boundless love and compassion, responds to our prayer, we ignore Him and fall back into our self-centered life. One must guard oneself against this greatest sin of ingratitude towards God.

DIVINE WISDOM

The Lord has endowed man with the body and so, every limb and every sense organ is worthy of reverent attention. Each must be used for His Glory. The ear must exult when it gets a chance to hear the wonderful glories of God. The tongue must exult when it can praise Him. The human body has been given to you for the grand purpose of realising the Lord within. If you have a fully equipped car in good running condition, would you keep it unused in the garage? The car is primarily for going on a journey; get into it and go! Only then is it worthwhile to own it. So too, with the body. Proceed towards the goal. Learn how to use the faculties of the body, senses, intellect and mind for achieving the goal, and march on.

- BABA

GOD DOES EVERYTHING FOR THE BEST

SOURCE: OKA CHINNA KATHA

There was once a Minister to a King who was in the habit of declaring 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. How can this be for the best? The King immediately committed the Minister to prison. Even then the Minister said calmly "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. 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 realised 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."

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