

## Shivoham – Mahashivarathri 2020

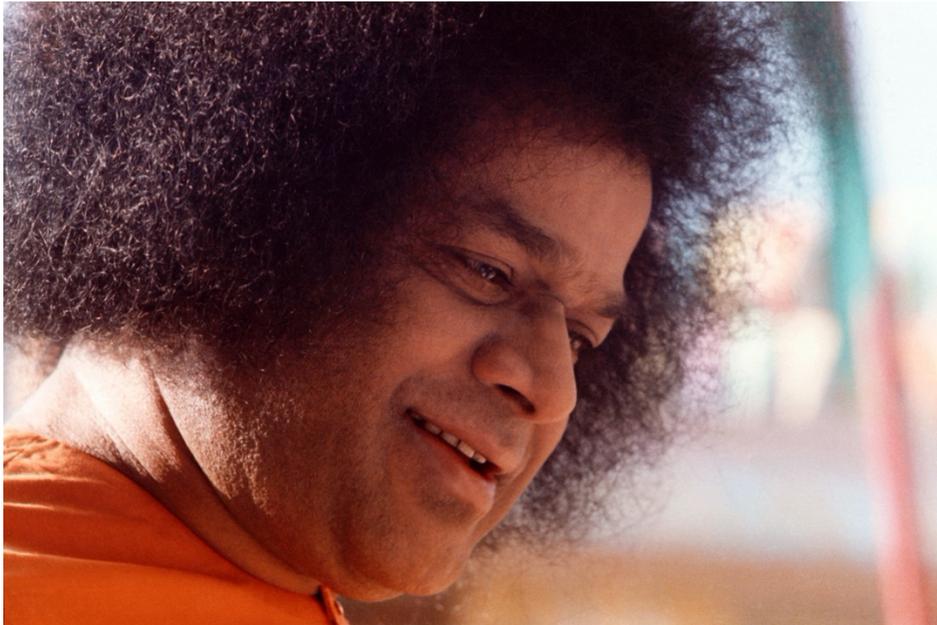


With love and gratitude, I offer myself at the divine lotus feet of our dearest loving Lord, Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba who is *Sarvadevataathitaswarupa* (beyond all divine names and forms).

Dear brothers and sisters, loving Sairam to all of you.

I wish all of you a happy and holy Mahashivarathri filled with love, peace and divine bliss. We are really blessed and fortunate to have been the contemporaries of this living Kali Yuga Avatar, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

## Sathya Sai Baba Reveals His True Identity



In His infinite love and compassion, Swami revealed His divinity in His discourse on May 17, 1968 at the First World Conference in Mumbai. He said, “this is the human form in which all the divine names and forms attributed by man to God are manifest”. That means He is the embodiment of all divine forms. Over many decades, many people have seen in Swami the vision of Shiva, Shakti, Shiva-Shakti, Buddha, Jesus, Rama, Krishna, Hanuman, and many forms and names. All names and forms dwell in Him. So, I would say He is all in one, and He is the one in all. He is the indweller in all beings in the world. That's why we say He is also all in all, and ultimately, He is beyond all. I therefore address Him as *Sarvadevataathitaswarupa*. *Sarvadevataswarupa* means embodiment of all divine forms. *Sarvadevataathitaswarupa* means beyond all divine names and forms.

There was a devotee named Peddabottu. She had composed some lyrics on Swami's glory – how wonderful He is, and that He is Shiva. She wrote at the end *Sarvadevataswarupa*, which means embodiment of all divine names and forms. Next day she came to continue the writing, and she saw that it had been changed to *Sarvadevataathitaswarupa*. That is, He is beyond all divine

names and forms. That is why we say He is All in one, One in all, All in all, and beyond all.

### **Significance of Mahashivarathri**

I want to share with you a few words about the significance of Mahashivarathri, as described by Swami and the Scriptures because this is a very special night – Shivarathri. Shiva means auspicious. This is an auspicious night. It is not just any auspicious night. It is Mahashivarathri – the greatly auspicious night. Every month you have Shivarathri – what is known as *Masa* Shivarathri. The fourteenth day of *Krishnapaksha*, the waning part of the lunar cycle, is called *Masa* Shivarathri. But once a year, in the month of Magha, comes Mahashivarathri. This is very important for spiritual seekers because for us, mind is the cause of bondage and liberation. This is the day the moon is very small, so it is easy to get in tune with God.

As Swami beautifully says – mind is like a Key – you turn it to one side, and it can lock. Turn to the other side, it can unlock. Similarly, when we turn the mind towards God it gives us joy and liberation. If we turn it towards the world, it gives us grief and bondage. This is the day when it is easiest to turn towards God. That is why spiritual seekers all over the world go to a Shiva temple and grandly and joyously celebrate this day as Mahashivarathri, because Lord Shiva is called Maheshwara, the Supreme Lord. He is also called Mahadeva, the supreme Godhead. That is why this day is celebrated as Mahashivarathri.

## Cosmic Dance

There are three things which are attributed to this day. First, this is the day He did the *Tandava* Dance. One of the songs (*Bhajans*) you heard relates to this dance – “*Ananda Tandava Sadashiva*” which means with bliss, He danced. That is why He's also called Nataraja, and also why we sing, “*Nacho Bholanath*”. Dance is His beautiful form, and He's the greatest dancer because the whole world is considered a cosmic dance. There is dance even in atomic particles, and He's the source of all cosmic dance.



## Lingam - *Liyate Gamyate ithi Lingam*

The second important significance of Mahashivarathri is that this is the day Lord Shiva gifted the Lingam to humanity– *Lingodbhava*. God is beyond name, form, attributes, space and causation. He is beyond all, that is *Nirguna, Nirakara*. But for the sake of our redemption, God gave us a form, that is the *Linga*. That is why in all the Shiva temples, they don't worship the form of Lord Shiva but worship the *Linga* itself, which is the representation of the supreme Godhead. This is special about this day. Swami says that the definition of *Lingam* is obtained from *Liyate Gamyate ithi Lingam*. Everything merges into the Lingam and everything goes towards the *Lingam*.

Because He's beyond any specific form, so everything merges into it. *Lingam* is the form that everything in the world merges into. There are many types of *Linga*. Some are made of stone like this *lingam* which Swami materialized and some are made of sand, some are made of wood, and some are made of special metals like iron or steel.

There are two special *Linga*, one is this *Hiranyagarbha Lingam* which Swami brought out in 1999. He did *Lingodbhava* for a few years and said that it comes from Him and it is permeated by Divine Love. This is the source of Divine Love and every one of us has it on the right side, in our spiritual heart which permeates our bodies. You may read about this in the discourse given by Swami on Mahashivarathri 1999. He said that when the Avatar comes, He can crystallize divine love into the *Hiranyagarbha Lingam* that is very special.

The second one is the *Sphatika Lingam* that is made of crystal. It symbolizes purity and Swami gave importance to this *Lingam*. In a town called Chidambaram there is *Akasha Lingam* in the Nataraja temple.



In addition, a *Sphatika Lingam* was placed here by Adi Shankara, the great spiritual master. There are various types of Lingams because for Shiva, this is very important. There are five Lingams called *Panchabhuta Linga*. The *Lingam* not only can be in the form of

a material, but the five elements can also be in the form of *Linga*. First, in Chidambaram, there is *Akasha Lingam* space as *Lingam*. Second, there is another famous place, Srikalahasti, there is *Vayu Lingam* – air as *Lingam*. So, you cannot see this. Third, in Arunachalam (we were singing the Bhajan “*Arunachala Shiva Om*”) there is an *Agni Lingam* – fire as a *Lingam*. Fourth, in a place called Jambukeshara, near Trichi, they have *Jala Lingam* – water as *Lingam*. Fifth, in Kanjeeपुरam, another place in

Tamilnadu, there is *Prithvi Lingam* – element earth as Lingam. Thus, the five elements themselves become *Linga*. So, it doesn't need to be in a form, which is the concept of *Lingam*. Finally, Swami says the *Brahmanda*, the whole universe, itself is a *Lingam*. These are the various manifestations of *Lingam*.

## God and Nature are One

Thirdly, this day is attributed to Parvati *Kalyanam* or marriage. Mother Parvati was married to Lord Shiva on this day. But in a higher spiritual sense, Mother Parvati represents Nature, *Prakriti* and Shiva represents *Brahman*, *Purusha*. So, this represents merging of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*.

We say even Vishnu is separate from Lakshmi, Brahma is separate from Saraswathi. But Lord Shiva is called *Ardhanariswara* – left half of His body is Parvati (why we chant Parvati *Vamabhagam*). The left half of Lord Shiva is Mother, that means Nature. Mother, as Nature, and the Lord have come together. That is why Swami says as long as we think God is separate, Nature is separate, and *Jeeva* is separate, we will never be happy. We should see there is only one thing that exists. God, nature, and man are one. So, that is the special significance of Mahashivarathri.



When we celebrate this day, we should know these spiritual significances. That is why Swami says don't make it only a ritual, whatever ritual we do, we should know the spiritual significance.

## Austerities on Mahashivarathri

Today, two things people practice are vigil and fast. We all are going to be hopefully awake throughout the night and most of us don't eat – we are supposed to have liquids only. But people do it ritually. We should know the spiritual significance of this fasting – called *Upavasa*, which means staying close to God. It's not really fasting by staying away from food. People fast because they're so absorbed in the divine bliss of thinking about Lord Shiva they forget about food and sleep. For most human beings what is dear? First, good food and second is good sleep. We all want to have good food and sleep. But here, something which is dear to us – food and sleep, is sacrificed for the Lord.

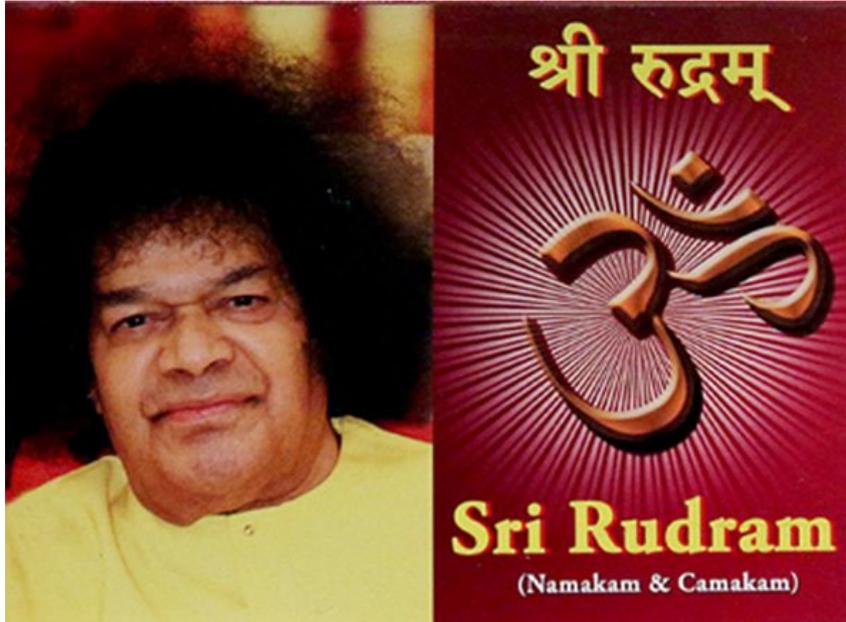
He sacrificed for us, that's why He is called *Halahaladhari* – for the sake of humanity He drank poison which He kept in His throat. So, when He did so much, at least we can sacrifice little things. But Swami says that this should be from the source, not by force. Swami says if you are fasting and thinking, “when am I going to break the fast, when am I going to eat” – then it is better to eat and think about Him rather than fast. The same thing is true about sleep. It should come naturally – you're so happy thinking about the Lord that naturally, you forget about food and sleep.

The second thing that you must have seen are these leaves (Bilva leaves) with which we are doing *Rudrabhisekam* four times during the night, called *Praharas*. The whole day is divided into eight *Praharas* and in the night there are four *Praharas* or four *Jamus* as they are called. The scriptures prescribe that you need to do *Rudrabhisekam* during these *Jamus* – four times in the night. We did *Rudrabhisekam* during one *Prahara* now. We are going to do the second and then the third and then the fourth.

This Rudram is very auspicious and is the most powerful mantra. It's also called the Rudra Upanishad. The Vedas are the scriptures – they are the breath of God. But among them, the Rudram is the most powerful of all the hymns. Actually, it is given in the Krishnayajur Veda – in the middle of the Krishnayajur Veda you will find this Rudram. That is why it is called Rudra Upanishad, Shatarudriyam, Rudraprashna, Srirudram and many other

names, but it mainly sings the glory of Lord Shiva. There are two components: one is Namakam and another is Chamakam. Namakam is 11 *Anuvakas* and Chamakam is also 11 *Anuvakas*.

## The Power of Rudram



The significance of the 11 chapters was beautifully explained by Swami. He said that we are all having problems with 11 things. One is the five *Karmendriyas*, the five organs of action, the five *Jnanindriyas*, the five organs of perception, and the 11th thing is the mind.

These things distract us and cause agitation and pain. When we turn these 11 things towards God, we live in bliss and peace. The same things, when we turn towards the world, it causes bondage, pain and suffering. All that Rudram teaches us is to turn our mind towards God. As I said before, the Rudra Upanishad is the most important of all the Vedas. They say it not only gives you the highest knowledge, which is liberation, but it even gives you worldly pleasures, both physical and mental. It also gives you prosperity. That's why there is one part called Chamakam, where God grants us all the boons we desire. In this Rudram, the eighth *Anuvaka* is the most important. It is like the life force for the Rudram. This is where we chant *Hara Hara*, as we are going to chant soon during Namakam. We should remember that the eighth *Anuvaka* is the most important and why is it so important? Because, it has the greatest, most powerful mantra, *Om Namah Shivaya*. The *panchakshari* mantra is there in the eighth *Anuvaka*. This is the greatest gift to humankind. Of the *Om Namah Shivaya* mantra, the two-letter word, Shiva is the one which gives us liberation. That is the power of the mantra, *Om Namah Shivaya*. We are going to watch a video where Swami Himself chants

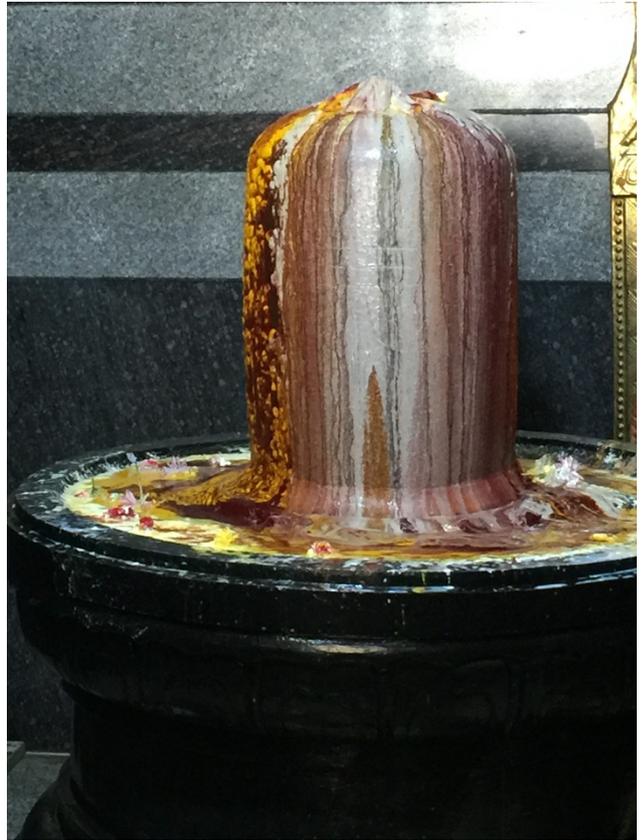
this *panchakshari mantra*, *Om Namah Shivaya*, which we can follow. That is the power of Rudram.

When we chant the Rudram, we should know the meaning. In the case of the Namakam, people think this is the greatest Advaitic Treatise. People talk about socialism and communism for equality, but this is where God shows us that everything is equal. You can actually practice the Rudram from the morning to evening. In the Rudram, we say that when we see a plant, that is Lord Shiva. When we see a branch, that is Lord Shiva, leaves are Lord Shiva, garden is Lord Shiva, forest is Lord Shiva. When we are traveling, and we see stones on the way, that is Lord Shiva. We see the hill, the mountains, that is all Lord Shiva. When we see water, or a pool of water that is Lord Shiva. A lake, a waterfall, a river, or an ocean – that is all Lord Shiva. When we see a dog, a hunting dog, or even the one who takes the hunting dog are all Lord Shiva. And then finally, it comes to human beings. All saintly beings are Lord Shiva. Then it says, He is the greatest Thief. All the thieves are Lord Shiva. So, whenever we see a thief, don't worry, salute them as they are Rudras! Then it says, He is the greatest cheater and a master cheater too. So, when we see a cheater, we should say OK, Lord Shiva is cheating me! He wants you to see the Lord in everything. He is the Carpenter – and He is the one who hunts the birds and is the Fisherman. All kinds of things are manifestations of Rudra. All are nothing but Rudra. Whether it is plants, or inanimate stones, or animals, or different types of human beings – these are all nothing but the manifestation of Rudra. This is the experience we all should have, *Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma*. Whatever you see is *Sarvam Shivamayam* – all are Shiva.

If we have that kind of experience, then everything will be OK, nothing will bother us. If we come across a thief, it is Shiva. Actually, it says that the one who is a charioteer, like the driver of your car, is Shiva. The car is also Shiva and the one who is driving the car or taking you somewhere is Shiva. Then, nothing will bother us. Nothing will affect us because we are thinking of Shiva all the time. That is the power of Rudram. Because, when you chant the Rudram, Lord Shiva is embedded in that.

## **Abhishekam of Lingam**

When we chant the Rudram we also do the *Abhishekam*. I want you to know that it's not mechanical. We will do this *Abhishekam* four times. *Abhishekam* is most dear to Lord Shiva. During the *Abhishekam*, we do in general five things. First, we put milk, and this represents the earth. Then we put curd, it represents the element water. Then we put Ghee, or clarified butter, and this represents the element fire. All these elements are represented. And then we put honey and that represents the element wind or *Vayu*. Like this, all the five elements with which we worship Lord Shiva are here. Then we put sugar. The final mixture is called *Panchamritha* – made of milk, curd, Ghee, honey and sugar.



But there are so many things with which they do *Abhishekam* to Lord Shiva. Sometimes we put Kumkum, or sandalwood paste, or turmeric, or sugar cane water, or coconut water and some people also do *Abhishekam* with gold leaves. They can also do it with flowers, with fruits, with *Durva* grass – there are so many ways to do *Abhishekam* because this is most dear to Lord Shiva.

## **Bhasma – Vibuthi**



We can do *Abhishekam* with *Bhasma*, that is *Vibuthi*. *Vibuthi* is very dear to Lord Shiva. We sang “*Bhasma Bhushitanga Sai Chandrashekhara*”. Shiva is always adorned with these holy ashes, because that is a sign of renunciation or *Vairagya*. Because He doesn't care, He lives in a cremation ground and puts this *Vibuthi* on His body and is very happy. That is why somebody asked Mother Parvati, “How can you like this man? He doesn't wear proper clothes, He has a tiger skin and this ash, there are snakes on His neck, who will like such a man?” But that is the ultimate state – He's the ultimate symbol of renunciation and beauty. That is what Lord Shiva is.

*Bhasma* is something which cannot be changed further. That is the ultimate end result of all things. Here, there are three points which we need to remember when we look at *Bhasma*.

First, let us recollect what happened to Manmatha. We think he's the God of Venus. But Manmatha means the one who churns our mind. When Lord Shiva looked at him, he turned into ash. God in the form of Shiva helps us to destroy our desires. This is why He is called *Manohara* because He destroys desires which is an obstacle for us.

Second, we chant the *Lingaashtakam*. There, we chanted *Ravanadarpavinashaka Lingam* because He destroyed the pride of Ravana, because ego is the greatest obstacle. Ravana was a great devotee of Shiva, but he was very egoistic, thinking “Oh, I am the great devotee.” The greatest

pride is spiritual pride – “I think I'm a great devotee, or I can do vigil, or I know the Rudram”. These are all dangerous signs. Humility is needed. So, that is the second thing He destroyed.

Third, we say in Lingaashtakam is *Dakshasuyagnavinashaka Lingam*. Daksha hated Lord Shiva because of his ignorance. So, when we think of *Bhasma*, we think of three things. He destroys desires, He destroys our ego, and He destroys our hateful feelings, because these are all the obstacles. That is why we need to understand the spiritual significance, then we understand the true significance of Mahashivaratri.

### **The Bilva Leaf - Importance**

I want to tell everyone about the importance of Bilva leaf. This is trifoliate leaf - three parts in this leaf. We chanted the Bilva Stotram. What did we say: "Tridalam", which means trifoliate or three leaves, and Trinetram which means three eyes, of which one is the *Jnana* eye or the eye of knowledge.

We also use the word, *Trishuladharam* which represents the trident He carries. It is the most significant. All the three Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara are supposed to be in the Bilva leaf. That is why it is so dear to Lord Shiva.

But finally, Swami says that we should go beyond the three *Gunas*, that is what worship with the Bilva leaf means.

### **Stories of Shiva's Devotees**

Finally, I would like to conclude with stories because there is no story of God which is complete without stories of His devotees.



## Nandi

The greatest devotee of Lord Shiva is considered to be Nandi. That is why we sing “*Nandiishwara Hey Nataraja*”. What is the uniqueness of Nandi? When you go to any Lord Shiva's temple, we see that Nandi will be facing and looking at only Lord Shiva. He doesn't look this side or that side or at anybody else – only one-pointedly at Lord Shiva - nothing else. Similarly, as spiritual seekers we should have only one-pointed love towards our beloved Lord.



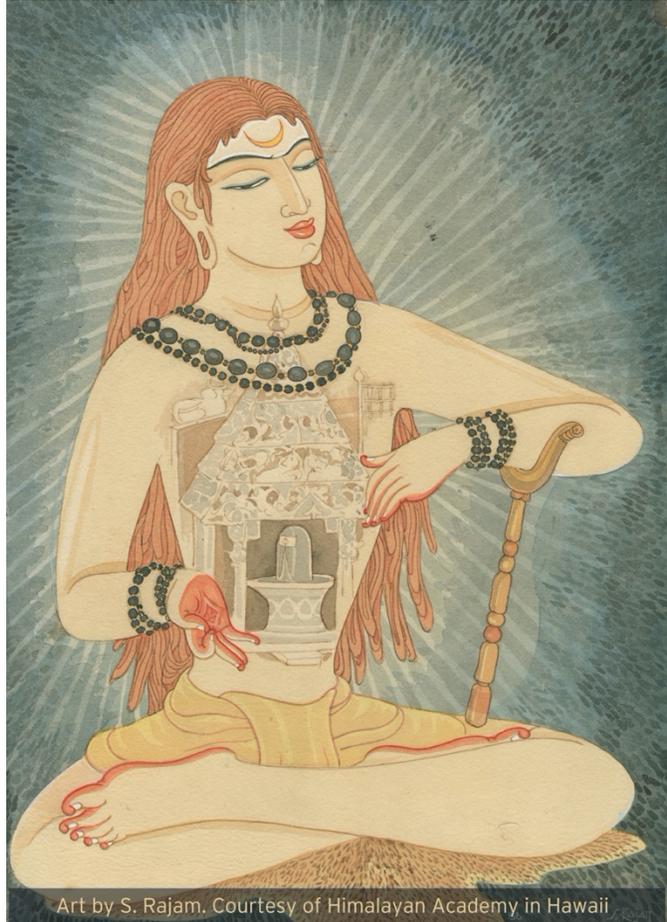
Second thing is whenever Lord Shiva moves about, how does He go? He goes on top of Nandi. We also sing about *Vrisahabha Vahana* in one of the Bhajans. Nandi always wants to serve Lord Shiva. For us also, if we want to have spiritual advancement or spiritual progress, two things are needed. One is one-pointed focus on God and the second thing is to be able to have that longing to serve the Lord. This is the example of Nandi. That is why there are temples even for Nandi. There are big temples for Nandi that I have seen in Nepal, and in Andhra Pradesh there is the Mahanandi Temple. There are temples for Nandi because Nandi is considered to be very close to Lord Shiva.

## Poosalar Nayanar

There is a big book called Periya Purana. We should read this book which is about 63 Shaivite saints who are referred to as Nayanars. There are lots of great saints. We don't have time to go into that, but we should all know about this one great saint in this book called Poosalar. I want to share this story because we are doing these rituals. This man was such a great devotee. He wanted to build a temple for Shiva just as we also want to build a temple for Swami in different places. He also wanted to build temple, but he didn't have enough money. He tried to get money but could not get any money. He was

disappointed, but he thought, "OK, let me build a temple in my heart." So, he worshipped in his heart and placed a foundation stone in his heart. Then, another day he placed a brick and another brick, and so on. By doing that, he finished the temple in his heart. Meanwhile the King of that town was also building a beautiful temple of Lord Shiva. He finished the temple and he chose a date to install the deity. They chose an auspicious time for the ceremony. Then Lord Shiva

comes and tells him in a dream, "No, I can't come on that day. You need to postpone it to another date." He tells the King "Another devotee of mine, by name of Poosalar, is building a temple and I need to go to him." The King was surprised! He thought, "In my kingdom who is this man who could build a temple better than me? I'm the King. I want to go and see this person because Lord Shiva tells me to postpone the date!" So, the King goes to the village and asks, "Who is Poosalar? I want to see the temple he has built." The people said, "Sir, we don't know of



Art by S. Rajam. Courtesy of Himalayan Academy in Hawaii

any temple in the village". The King said, "No, no! I want to meet this Poosalar as Lord Shiva told me that there is a temple." Then, he goes to Poosalar who was shocked and started crying on seeing the King. He was crying because Lord Shiva liked the temple he had built in his heart. He said, "Sir, I didn't build any physical temple. I built a temple in my heart, laying a foundation stone and then adding a brick by brick at a time." The King falls flat at the feet of Poosalar and says, you are the real devotee of Lord Shiva, not me, who built a building with mortar, cement, and bricks and stones.

## Shivoham

This is what Swami wants us to do. This is what, *Manasa Bhajare Guru Charanam*, means. We worship Him in our heart and build a temple in our heart.

The rituals help us to go towards that state but ultimately, the highest worship is mental worship. They say, *Prathamam Pratima Puja* - the first step is doing worship to the idol. Then, *Madhyamam Japa Stotradikam* - next step is doing Japa and singing *Bhajans*. *Uttamam Manase Puja* - the best is mental worship. *Soham Puja Uttamothamam* - finally, we come to the highest stage Soham – I am That. I am *Shivoham*. I am the Lord Shiva. That is the ultimate realisation. By doing all these rituals and pujas, we need to realise that truth.

I pray to Lord Shiva, Sai Shiva, to bless all of us with love and purity so that we can realise this truth in this very lifetime.

Jai Sai Ram.

[\*A talk by Dr. Narendranath Reddy, on Mahashivarathri Day, February 21, 2020\*](#)