



Significance of Mahasivarathri

(Transcription of the Video Message given by Dr. Narendranath Reddy)

With love, reverence and gratitude I offer my humble Pranams to our dearest, sweetest, loving Lord, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Lord Sai Shiva.

Dear brothers and sisters!

Loving Sai Ram to all of You!

I wish all of you happy, holy and auspicious Mahasivarathri filled with divine bliss.

It is an important festival for all spiritual seekers and also for Sai devotees. During the Mahasivarathri festival, for many decades, millions of seekers have thronged through the portals of Prasanthi Nilayam to be with their Lord Sai Shiva and celebrate the festival with joy and festivity. He is Shiva Himself and how blessed and fortunate we are because in His infinite compassion and Love, on July 6, 1963, Swami declared that He is Shiva and Shakti. He also confirmed this - you can read this in His discourse. In November 1958, Swami revived a young girl who was lifeless, and brought her back to life and declared that He is the *Jodi Adipalli Somappaya*. This is one of the 108 names of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba (as Shiva). It means that He is Shiva & Shakti - come again. So, it is beautiful to hear from the Lord Himself that He is an embodiment of Shiva and Shakti. One of the early priests in Prasanthi Nilayam, Sheshagiri Rao, when he saw Swami for the first time, he saw him as Shiva with snakes around His neck. And he lost consciousness and went into bliss for three days. And, many of you know Gandikota Subramanya Sastri who spread the message of Sai Gayatri to the world. When he asked Swami, "Who are You?", Swami materialized a beautiful picture which shows that Sai and Shiva are one.

I want to share another beautiful incident that happened in 2005. We had an international medical conference where about 1,000 delegates from many parts of the world came to Prasanthi Nilayam. During the final day of the conference some of the doctors were speaking. One of the doctors, Dr. Venkat Sadanand who is a neurosurgeon said, "I offer everything I have, and myself at Your divine lotus Feet. Please reveal your true form." And Swami in His infinite love and compassion told him, "I am Shiva" and materialized a beautiful lingam with a gold chain and said, "This is my true form." Shiva and lingam are same – there is no difference. And Swami has done many things which relate to the Leelas of Lord Shiva, like materializing vibhuti and giving vibhuti packets. He also did



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vibhuti Abhishekam for Lord Shirdi Sai many times, and brought out lingams many times, materializing by waving His hand, and also bringing lingams out of His mouth. This confirms how blessed and fortunate we are to be with Lord Shiva who is our Sai. At this time, it is very important for us to remember what Lord Shiva, who is our Sai Shiva, said about Mahasivarathri. Sivarathri comes every month on the 14th day of the dark half of the month (*Krishnapaksha*) when the moon is waning. On the 14th day, only a thin sickle of the moon is seen (extinct the following day). This is *Masa* (monthly) Sivarathri. But Mahasivarathri comes once a year – during the dark half of the month in the month of *Magha* (February – March). The important message is “*chandrama manaso jaathab*” – Moon is the presiding deity of the mind - and the mind is responsible for bondage and liberation- “*Manaeva manushyanam karanam bandhamokshayob*”. Turn the mind toward the Lord, you are free and liberated, but turn the mind towards the world, you are bound. That is why this night is very important when every trace of the mind can be annihilated. This is called *manolaya* – when the mind will be dissolved and turned completely towards God.

As per numerology, in the word Sivarathri, “Si” denotes 5, “Va” denotes 4 and “Ra” denotes 2, which add up to 11. This corresponds to the 11 Rudras which are represented by 11 anuvakas (verses) of Namakam and Chamakam which we chant. Swami said that these 11 Rudras represent our 5 *Karmendriyas* (organs of action), 5 *Jnanendriyas* (organs of perceptions) and the mind. If we use them for the Lord, doing good deeds, being absorbed in Him, then He will make us shed tears of bliss and joy. The same 11 Rudras, namely, the 5 *Karmendriyas*, the 5 *Jnanendriyas* and the mind, when turned towards sensual enjoyment and turned to the world will make us shed tears of sorrow and grief. The choice is ours. That's why Mahasivarathri is important, being God-intoxicated, thinking about the Lord, singing His glory. Along with Mahasivarathri comes specific items and significant events. One is *Lingodbhavam* (emergence of the Lingam). What is the significance of the Lingam? Swami says Lingam means “*Leeyate Gamyate iti Linga*”, that is, in which everything in the world merges and becomes one. God has beautiful names, beautiful forms, and beautiful attributes – *Saguna Sakara*. God is also *Nirguna Nirakara* – attributeless, formless and nameless. God has shown that Omkara is a verbal symbol of *Nirguna Nirakara* and the Lingam is a visual form of *Nirguna Nirakara* Brahman – attributeless, formless, Brahman. This is the significance of the Lingam. Swami has materialized Lingams many times.

The second aspect of Lord Shiva is vibhuti, or holy ash, the *bhasma*, with which He smears His body. Swami kindly gave vibhuti many times to his devotees. What is the significance



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of vibhuti? Vibhuti means Glory of God. Everything in the world is transitory and finally ends in one thing, that is ash. But ash cannot be desecrated or degenerated. Leaves, flower, water can change, and get spoiled – but not ash. That is the significance of vibhuti. We have experienced that the holy ash, or vibhuti of Swami, cures our physical ailments, mental afflictions. It also gives prosperity and the ultimate goal of life, liberation itself. That is the significance of vibhuti.

The third aspect of this Holy Shivaratri is the observance of fasting and vigil. What is the purpose? When you are intoxicated with the Divine, singing His glory, thinking about Him, remembering His stories, you forget hunger and sleep. We should not be in such a state of being hungry and sleepless and forget God, thinking of food and sleep. I will give you a personal anecdote. Once, the day before Mahasivarathri about 12 years ago, Swami told me to come for lunch to His house, along with my family, on the day of Mahasivarathri. My family and friends laughed at me and said, why would Swami make you eat on Mahasivarathri day. I said this is the instruction from the Lord. Lo and behold, He called us on that day, and we had lunch with Swami. Here is the message for us. Swami is not interested in rituals but is interested in the spiritual. What is the purpose of fast and vigil? To be with the Lord. When you are able to have lunch with the Lord, what can be better? It is important to always remember the inner spiritual significance of rituals.

Another thing is Bilva leaf which is used to worship the Lingam. During the festival when we worship Lord Shiva, we use two things: *Abhishekam* when we put water, honey and milk etc. and then we put the Bilva leaf, which is very dear to Lord Shiva. It is unique, since it is trifoliate. It represents the 3 Gunas; *sattva, tamas and rajas*. It also represents 3 Kalas; past, present and future, 3 Lokas; *bhur bhuvah svaha*, 3 states; waking, dream and deep sleep, 3 bodies; gross, subtle, and causal (*Sthula, Sukshma and Karana Sariras*). So, all these are represented in the Bilva leaf, all three states. When you offer it, you are supposed to go beyond the three states. Lord Shiva is beyond the three Gunas, three Kalas, three Lokas and three bodies – and we become one with Him. That is the significance of Bilva leaf worship. But Swami says if you don't get Bilva, and cannot do Abhishekam, we do not need to worry, because we can offer the body itself sanctified with good deeds as the Bilva leaf, and our tears of devotion as Abhishekam.

In conclusion, I would like to share the main message of Mahasivarathri, as taught by Swami.



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Firstly, Lord Shiva is the embodiment of sacrifice and service and our Swami is the same. Lord Shiva drank the *Halahala* poison which could destroy all the worlds and humanity. He not only took the poison and kept it in His throat to protect the world and humanity, but also placed the moon on His head and gave us the water of Ganges, for the benefit of mankind. Thus, He showed what sacrifice is, by removing the negativity and giving us the positive. That is what we should learn from Lord Shiva. The second thing is simplicity. He wears a tiger skin and has ashes all over the body and snakes around His neck. He is an exemplar of simplicity, sacrifice and service for a spiritual seeker.

The next message Swami gives is the unity and harmony in Shiva's family. Shiva's family is called *Adikutumbam* (First Family). Each member of His family, Lord Shiva, Mother Parvathi, and His two sons Ganesha, Subramanya are worshipped as a chosen deity by many spiritual seekers. The beauty about this family as Swami says is unity and harmony. What is the vehicle of Lord Shiva? It is the bull, Nandi. What is the vehicle of mother Parvathi? It is a lion. What is the vehicle of Lord Ganesha? It is a mouse. What is the vehicle of Lord Subramanya? It is a peacock. And Lord Shiva wears snakes. All these are inimical to each other – bull, lion, mouse and peacock. But still they live in harmony. Lord Shiva himself is the example of harmony and unity. He has a third eye with fire and on His head, He has Ganga water. Water and fire cannot go together but He lives in harmony with them. That is the message of unity in diversity, and harmony in the family.

Finally, another important message Swami gave us is to see divinity in everything, everywhere, forever. As I was telling, the Rudram represents 11 Rudras, with Namakam and Chamakam having 11 Anuvakas. In all of them the main message is to see the oneness – whether it is a plant, a tree or a forest – the same Rudra resides in all. Whether a stone, hillock or mountain, the same Rudra resides. Whether it is lakes, rivers, oceans, waves, foam – the same Rudra resides. Whether it is saint, thief, hunter, worker, carpenter, jeweller, or any kind of professional – the same Rudra resides. This is the message of the Lord. To see the same – *Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma – Isa Vasya Idam Sarvam – Vishwam Vishnu Mayam Jagath* – we chant Rudram to experience the oneness.

Let us spend this wonderful festival of Mahasivarathri remembering Him, remembering His stories, singing His Glory, and thus sanctifying our life. I pray to our Lord Sai Shiva to shower His choicest blessings and grace so that we can move forward towards the supreme goal, namely, to realize our true nature and that we are embodiment of the divine Atma.