

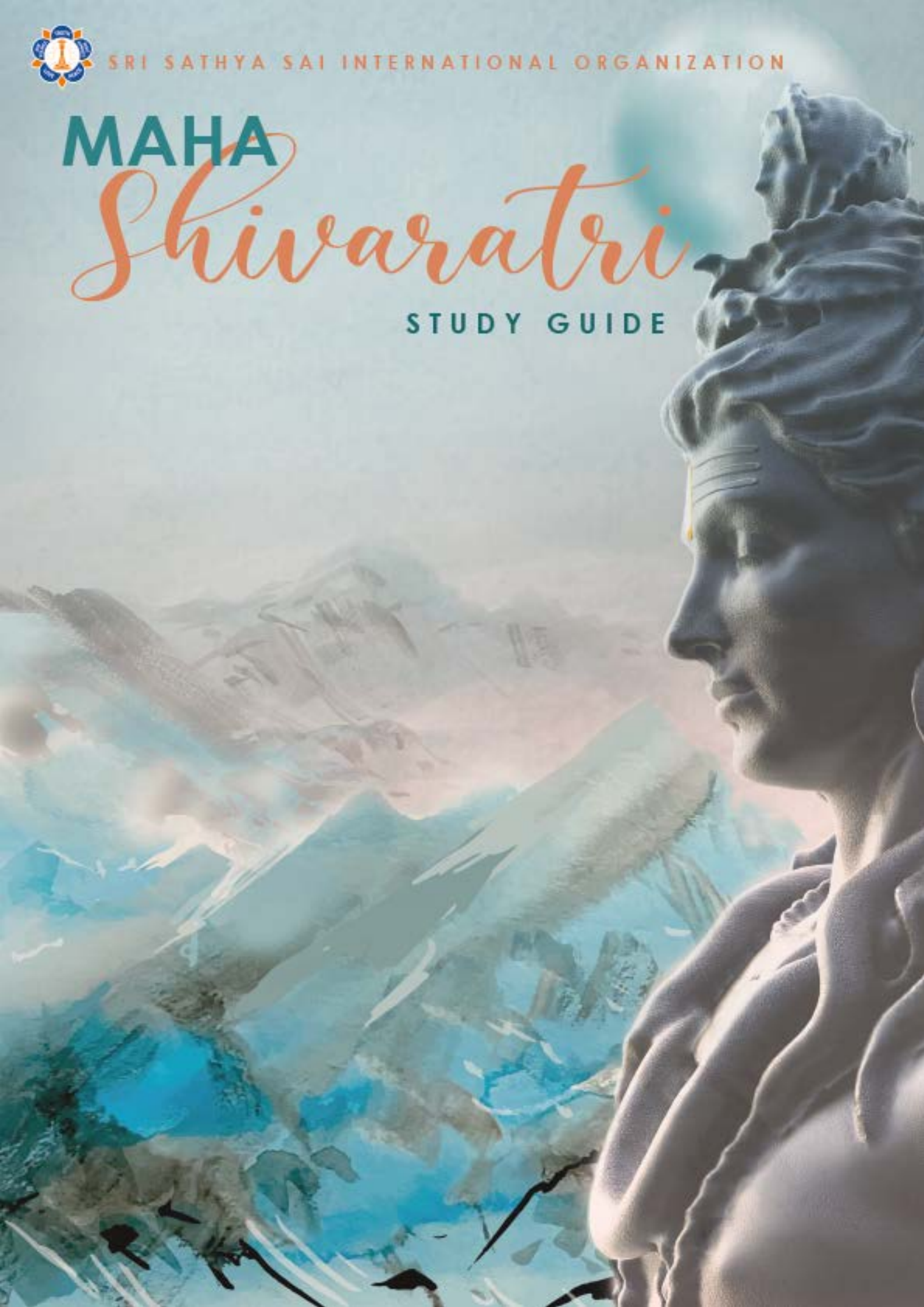


SRI SATHYA SAI INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION

MAHA

Shivaratri

STUDY GUIDE



Met liefde en dankbaarheid aangeboden aan de lotusvoeten van

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

ter gelegenheid van Maha Shivaratri 2022



INNER SIGNIFICANCE OF SHIVARATRI

Many stories are told in the Sastras to explain the origin and significance of the Maha Shivaratri Festival. Bharat, the name for this land used from ancient times, means 'the land of those who have Rati (Love) towards Bha (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 Lingam (Shiva representation in egg-shaped stone) emerges from the Avatar, are held to be specially significant for the individuals witnessing it and for the world which is thereby blessed.

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 bilva tree on the look-out for animals to kill, and without any intention to worship, unknowingly dropped some of its leaves on a Lingam that lay beneath, does not make clear why this day is especially sacred. Another story is that this is the day on which Shiva danced the Tandava (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 Halahala 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 Tandava with all the Gods and Sages. All this they say, happened on the same day and so, Shivaratri, was held in commemoration of this occasion.

February 1969 – Maha Shivaratri

QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to you to make a day in your life "holy"?
2. What is one story about Shiva that inspires you to live a holier life?
3. How is the incident of consuming 'Halahala poison' related to our day to day living?

AIM OF ALL SADHANA IS TO ELIMINATE THE MIND

We have not only the Maha Shivaratri once a year, we have a Shivaratri every month, dedicated to the worship of Shiva. And, why is the Ratri (the Night), so important? The night is dominated by the Moon. The Moon has 16 kalas (fractions), and each day or rather 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. The Chandra (Moon) is the presiding deity of the mind; the mind waxes and wanes, like the Moon. The Purusha Suktam says: *Chandrama manaso jatah*, i.e. out of the Mind of the Purusha (Supreme Being), the Moon was born.

It must be remembered that the chief aim of all sadhana (spiritual striving) is to eliminate the mind, to become A-manaska. Then only can maya (illusion) be rent asunder and the Reality revealed. 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 cognisance. On the night of 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.

Shiva alone has to be meditated upon that night without the mind straying towards thoughts of sleep or food. This has to be done every month; once a year, on Maha Shivaratri a special spurt of spiritual activity is recommended, so that what is savam (corpse) can become Shivam (God), by the perpetual awareness of the Divine Indweller.

February 1969 - Maha Shivaratri

QUESTIONS

1. How do you nurture within yourself of a "perpetual awareness of the Divine Indweller"?
2. What is one type of sadhana that seems best for you to practice to help you reduce and eventually eliminate your dualistic mind ("manas")?

SHIVARATRI IS AN AUSPICIOUS NIGHT

Man is endowed with infinite potencies. All that you experience by way of seeing, hearing and the like are reflections of the Inner Being. The significance of this experience has to be properly understood. Today is Shivaratri, the night of Shiva. You experience the night every day. These are ordinary nights. They are nights of darkness. But Shivaratri is an auspicious night. How is it auspicious? There are sixteen aspects for the mind. The moon is the presiding deity for the mind. Of the sixteen phases of the moon, today in the fourteenth day of Margasirsha month, fifteen of the phases are absent. On this day it is possible to get full control of one's mental faculties.

Hence it is considered an auspicious day. Auspiciousness consists in diverting the mind towards God. This calls for getting rid of the inherited animal tendencies in man. This is the occasion to recognise the omnipresence of the Divine in all beings and in all objects. It follows that whomsoever you adore or condemn, you are adoring or condemning God. You must follow the injunction: Help ever, hurt never.

February 17, 1996 – Spiritual Significance of Shivaratri

QUESTIONS

1. Shivaratri is always associated with both mind and the moon. What is the connection between the two?
2. How do you, in a practical way, divert your mind towards God – especially when worldly concerns seem to take over your awareness?

SYMBOLISM AND THEIR MEANING

Lingam Is The Form Symbol Of God

Just as Om is the sound symbol of God, the Lingam is the visible symbol of God, the most meaningful, the simplest and the least endowed with the appendages of attributes. Lingam means, that in which this jagat (world of change) liyate, i.e. attains laya (mergence or dissolution). All forms merge in the Formless at last. Shiva is the Principle of the Dissolution of all names and forms, of all individuals entities. So, the Lingam is the simplest sign of emergence and mergence.

Live In The Constant Presence Of Shiva

Every form conceived in the Scriptures has a deep significance. Shiva does not really ride a bull. The bull is the symbol of Stability standing on four legs, Satya, Dharma, Santi and Prema (Truth, Righteousness, Peace and Love). Shiva is described as having three eyes, eyes that see the Past, the Present and the Future. The elephant skin which forms His cloak is a symbol of the bestial primitive traits which His Grace destroys. In fact, He tears them to pieces and they become totally ineffective.

His Four Faces symbolise Santam (Equanimity), Rudram (Terror), Mangalam (Grace) and Utsaham (elevating energy). While adoring the Lingam on this Lingodhbhava day (the day of emergence of the Lingam from Sai's body) you must contemplate on these truths of Shiva that the Lingam represents. It is not this night alone that you should spend in the thought of Shiva; your whole life must be lived in the constant presence of the Lord. Endeavour: that is the main thing; that is the inescapable consummation for all mortals.

Resolve, on this Holy Shivaratri, in the Presence of Shiva Sai, to visualise the 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, He and I (Sah and Aham) will draw nearer and closer, until the feeling of separateness will fade away - and the Soham will be transformed into OM, the Prandava, the Primal Sound, the Fundamental Symbol of God. That OM is the true Reality behind this relative apparent reality of the world.

February 1969 – Maha Shivaratri

QUESTIONS

1. How does the symbolism of Shiva's form (4 legs, 3 eyes, 4 faces, etc.) teach you about the nature of the "constant presence of the Lord"?
2. Relate the inner significances of each symbol to everyday living and how these messages can bring us closer to God.
3. When you assert "SoHam" with every breath, how does this diminish your feeling of separateness from God and all that exists?

When Desire Is Destroyed, Love Reigns Supreme

The Vibhuti abhisheka (anointing with sacred ash) has a potent inner meaning which Swami wants you to grasp. The Vibhuti is the most precious object, in the truly spiritual sense. You know that Shiva burnt the God of desire or Kama, called Manmatha (for he agitates the mind and creates the mental confusion) into a heap of ashes. Shiva adorned Himself with that ash, and thus He shone in His Glory, as the conqueror of desire. When Kama was destroyed, Prema (Love) reigned supreme. When there is no desire to warp the mind, Love can be true and full.

What greater offering can you give God to glorify Him than the ash signifying your triumph over tantalising desire? Ash is the ultimate condition of things; it cannot undergo any further change. The Vibhuti abhisheka is done to inspire you to give up desire and offer Shiva the ashes of its destruction as the most valuable of all the prizes 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.

February 20, 1974 – The Shiva in All

QUESTIONS

1. What relationship do you see between your worldly desires and the symbols of Vibhuti (Holy ash)?
2. In moments when you experience/celebrate, "There is no desire to warp the mind [and] Love can be true and full," what then motivates you in your life? (Do you stop acting in life?)
3. How should we live as per the inner significance of the Vibhuti?

SIGNIFICANCE OF LINGAM

Have The Deliberation First

Step by step, you reach the end of the road. One act followed by another leads to a good habit. By listening you get prodded into action. Resolve to act, to mix only in good company, to read only elevating books, to form the habit of remembering the Lord's name (*namasmarana*) and, then ignorance will vanish automatically. The divine bliss that will well up within you by the contemplation of the Personified Bliss (*anandasvarupa*) will drive out all grief, all worry.

Shiva laughed when He took a good look at the chariot that was provided for Him when He started out to slay the Tripura, i.e. the demons of the three bodies, the gross, the subtle and the causal (*sthula, sukshma and karana*). Vishnu, the Charioteer, was in yogic sleep, the unmoving earth was the chariot, and the two wheels were the sun and the moon, two spheres which never revolved in unison! That laughter laid the demons low; there was no more need to proceed against the demons. How did the evil forces that dwelt in the three bodies die? They could not exist where there was Divine Bliss; for, they are products of grief.

Develop Ananda; then evil impulses and tendencies will vanish, for they will not get any foothold in the heart. Move forward towards the Light and the shadow falls behind; move away from it and you have to follow your own shadow. Go every moment one step nearer to the Lord and then the shadow of illusion (*maya*) will fall back and will not delude you anymore. Be steady, be resolved. Do not commit a fault or take a false step and then repent! Have the firm deliberation first; that is better than regret after the mistake has been made.

Arjuna had this wise deliberation, he saw the consequences even before the battle began and wanted Krishna to advise him what to do. But Dharmaraja, the eldest brother, had sorrow after the war was over, repentance after the loss incurred. Reason out and discriminate. Above all, you must take every step in spiritual practice or in worldly life only after careful deliberation to choose what will be for your good.

Who invited you all here? There was not even a little notice in print, but yet you have come here in thousands. You attach yourselves to Me. I am unattached. I am attached only to the task for which I have come. But of one thing be assured. Whether you come to Me or not, you are all Mine. This Sai Mata (Mother Sai) has the love of a thousand mothers towards Her children; that is why I do so much lalana (fondling) and palana (protecting).

Whenever I appear to be angry, remember, it is only love in another form. For, I have not even an atom of anger in me; I just evince My disappointment that you do not shape as I direct. When I direct you along a line of action, reflect on My advice; you have full liberty to do so; in fact, I shall be happy if you do so; I do not like slavish obedience. If you feel that it will help you to reach the goal, follow it; if not, go to some other place; but, let Me tell you one thing: Wherever you go, you meet only Me; I am everywhere.

Have you heard the story of the rabbit that had borrowed from Mother Earth four paisa? It thought that if it moved into a new region it would be free from the obligation. So, one day it ran as fast as its legs could carry it to go very far away from the place where the amount was originally received. At last, it sat down in great relief and said to itself, "Now no one will ask me to repay." What was its surprise when from the ground underneath it heard a voice, "Mother Earth is right under your feet, here. You cannot escape from me, however far you run!"

So too, you cannot run away from Me. I will demand good conduct, good habits, good thoughts, good company, wherever you go seeking for refuge! And what reason have you to leave? Only those who ignore the joy, the consolation, the courage, the love and the blessing they have received here, will do so. Only those who believe the ear and not the eye, will do so. In a short time, you will be witnessing the emergence of the Lingam that is formed within Me; the auspicious time for the emergence of the Lingam (*Lingodbhava*) is approaching; you see it and you receive the blessings; but, yet, there will be some among you who will doubt it and deny it. That is the karma of such; what else can they do?

(Here, Baba stopped the discourse; the movements started, first in the region of the abdomen, then the chest and the throat; Baba swayed from the side; leaned on the table; drank water; and finally, after about twenty minutes, an egg-shaped Lingam emerged from His mouth. Holding it between the thumb and forefinger of His right hand, Baba discoursed further about it).

Ah! This is the Brahmaanda Lingam, the Symbol of the Universe! Inside it the stars and the planets revolve; the entire universe is represented herein, and over the egg-shaped Lingam there is an eye imprinted, the eye of the One Eternal Witness. You are indeed blessed, the merit of many births has brought you here to see this great phenomenon, this rare creation. Remember that years of worship or ritualistic vows and fasts, may not give this unique chance which you now have had. Use this good luck to hear only good advice, to select good company and to strive more earnestly to reach the Goal.

February 11, 1964 – Brahmaanda Lingam

QUESTIONS

1. How do we get rid of evil impulses?
2. What is the difference between Arjuna and Dharmaraja?
3. What is the significance of the Brahmaanda Lingam?

Lingam is the Symbol of the Beginningless and Endless

The Lingam is just a symbol, a sign of the beginningless, the endless, the limitless, for it has no limbs, no face, no feet, no front or back, no beginning or end. Its shape is like the picture one imagines the Formless (*Nirakara*) to be. As a matter of fact, lingam means that in which all forms and names merge (*liyate*) and that towards which all names and forms proceed (*gamyate*). It is the fittest symbol of the All-pervasive, the All-knowing, the All-powerful. Everything is subsumed in it; everything starts from it and ends to it.

From Lingam arises *jangam* (the universe), from *jangam* arises *sangam* (brotherhood, spiritual fraternity) and as a result of *sangam*, one realises the *lingam* (attributeless Atma). Thus, the circle is completed - from the Beginningless to the Beginningless. This is the lesson that emergence of the Lingam (*lingobdhavam*) teaches. The physical body that is inhabited by Atma is but a vesture worn for this particular sojourn! Many a vesture has this soul worn, though its reality is eternal!

February 1971 – Shivaratri: its significance

QUESTIONS

1. How does the lingam enable you to shift from your dualistic thinking (*manas*) to your unitive knowing (*buddhi*) about every being's Oneness with the Source of all creation?
2. "From *Lingam* arises *jangam* (the universe), from *jangam* arises *sangam* (brotherhood, spiritual fraternity) and as a result of *sangam*, one realises the *lingam* (attributeless Atma). Thus, the circle is completed - from the Beginningless to the Beginningless." What does this mean?

Significance of the Emergence of Lingam (*Lingodbhava*)

Understand the true meaning and inner significance of Shivaratri. The Golden Hiranyagarbha Lingam is present in everybody's spiritual heart (*hridaya*) and is on the right side of the body. The principle of Hiranyagarbha permeates My whole body. It assumes a form when I will it. Whoever has seen this Lingam at the time of its emergence will not have rebirth. One should see its form as it emerges. In order to sanctify your lives, such sacred manifestations have to be shown to you every now and then. Only then can you understand the divinity in humanity. This Lingam will not break even if it is dropped from a height with force. This is the symbol of immortality (*amrttattvam*). It is changeless. You cannot see such a manifestation anywhere else in the world. It is possible only with Divinity. This is the manifestation of changeless Divinity.

For the past twenty years, devotees did not get the opportunity to witness Lingodbhava. The reason was that thousands of devotees used to gather in the Poornachandra Hall to witness this grand spectacle. Since the Poornachandra Hall cannot accommodate large gatherings, there used to be stampedes. As a result, devotees were put to a lot of inconvenience. In order to avoid this, Lingodbhava was discontinued.

Not only this; three types of Lingams emerge. They are *bhur*, *bhuvah* and *svaha*. *Bhur* refers to materialisation (body), *bhuvah* to vibration (*prana*), and *svaha* to radiation (*Atma*). I often say, you are not one, but three: The one you think you are (physical body), the one others think you are (mental body), the one you really are (*Atma*). On every Shivaratri, all the three Lingams used to emerge. Even now, the other Lingams had started to emerge, but I prevented them, because there are many things to be told to you. In the future, you will be a witness to many more manifestations of Divinity. Understand that this bliss can be experienced only in the proximity of the Divine and nowhere else.

February 15, 1999 – Manifesting Divinity in Lingodbhava

QUESTIONS

1. What is the relevance of Swami's manifestation of the lingam to how you lead your daily life?
2. What is the inner significance of Swami's saying that the lingam is "the symbol of immortality (*amrttattvam*)"?

INTENSIFY SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Spiritual Endeavour Is An Inescapable Task For All

You must learn the significance not only of My name but even of yours. You are all given names redolent with divine fragrance, and you should draw inspiration and strength from them. Swami Abhedananda said this evening at the meeting that he would prefer to be called Sathya Sai “Charanananda” (Bliss of being at the Feet of Sai) and that he had written to Me about that desire a fortnight ago. But his name teaches that he should not posit any distinction between him and Me. It must be an non-distinct (abheda) relationship. He has to practise unity, non-distinction. This is what I wrote to him; “Learn the lesson your present name teaches, that is enough.” So too, accept your names not as labels or means of identification or distinction but as guides for conduct, as focuses for spiritual endeavour.

Endeavour. That is the main thing, that is the inescapable task for all mortals. Even those who deny God to day will have one day to tread the pilgrim road, melting their hearts out in tears of travail. If you make the slightest effort to progress along the path of liberation, the Lord will help you a hundred-fold. Shivaratri conveys that hope to you.

The moon, which is the presiding deity of the mind, wanes, until on the fourteenth day after full moon, it is just a tiny curve of glimmering glow. The mind too must be starved into that condition, so that the person becomes free. Spend all the days with Shiva and the conquest of the mind is easy. Spend the fourteenth day of the waning moon with Shiva, reaching the climax of spiritual effort on that final day, and success is yours. That is why all the fourteenth days of the dark half of every month are called Shivaratri (Shiva's nights); that is why the fourteenth day of the Magha month is called Maha Shivaratri.

This is a day of special dedication to Shiva, and since so many of you here and elsewhere pray to Shiva, the lingam is emanating from Me for you all to receive the grace and the bliss of the great moment of Lingodbhava (Emergence of the lingam).

March 04, 1962 – Spend Your Days with Shiva

QUESTIONS

1. How can we intensify our spiritual quest?

Judge Your Own Spiritual Practices Unaided

Some have come to Me and asked this very question: "We have been engaged in this spiritual practice for years now; we have written the name of God thousands of times, we have repeated it ceaselessly for many years, but we have not succeeded! Why have we not reached the goal?" I want each one of you to search within yourself for the answer. Examine your own effort and achievement and judge your own spiritual practices, unaided by Me. Have you yearned, have you pined, have you wept for the Lord as Tyagaraja did, for example? Have you shed tears of contrition tears of exultation while repeating His name, so full of sweetness and beauty, while visualising His form, so full of loveliness and charm?

You might have wept, but who knows for what, who knows the impulse that swept you into that sadness? Were they tears shed out of fear or greed or pride – or because the Lord was not near? A little child sits with a book of the Upanishads on its lap and turns over the pages, intent on the printed lines and watching the curious types, deliberately, slowly and with great care. A monk does the same. Can you equate the two and say they are both engaged in the same act? The child is unaware of the treasure it holds in its hand; the monk gets into immediate contact with the spiritual power the lines convey.

Find out for yourself whether your spiritual practices have also been purposeful and sincere, wakeful, and worthwhile. In his poem, Rama Sharma sang of Saisa, the Sai as Isa or Isvara, or Shiva Sai, as he is fond of addressing Me. He spoke of the great, well-nigh immeasurable, indescribable joy of merging with Shiva Sai and of the devotion and love necessary for that consummation. When he was describing it all, I could see that you were thrilled. The exhilaration out of which that song was born and the joy he himself experienced while reading it before us is a sure means of attaining that goal, let Me assure you. Whoever has the enthusiasm, the steadfastness, the determination to reach the goal will certainly succeed. Cultivate that faith in ultimate success; never despair or cavil or doubt. That is My advice to one and all. Success is your birth right, and you must get it sooner rather than later.

March 04, 1962 – Spend Your Days With Shiva

QUESTIONS

1. How do you know if your spiritual practices are purposeful and sincere?
2. Each day, how could you add 30 minutes for deeper spiritual reflection or practice – to help you reach the goal "sooner rather than later"?

God Is All Love At All Times

Even if you are not able to conceive the idea of God, you must be able to know what love is by experience, is it not? You have experienced the love of your parents, of a friend, of a partner, of a brother or sister, or toward your own children. That love is itself a spark of God, who is all the love in all the worlds at all times. Call upon your mother and the love she bears toward you and, even if your physical mother cannot come to your rescue, the Supreme Mother herself will certainly hurry toward you.

There is a fine story to illustrate this: One dark night, when Shiva and Parvati were journeying through the sky, they saw a man perched on the branch of a tree, about to fall on the ground through sheer exhaustion of limbs. Parvati pleaded on his behalf and wanted Shiva to save him, but Shiva preferred that She should save him instead! Meanwhile, the fall became imminent, so they decided that if while falling the man shouted "amma" (mother), Parvati would hasten to arrest his fall, but if he shouted, "appa" (father), Shiva would help and see that no bones were broken. The man fell, but he shouted neither amma nor appa but ayyo (sigh of misery)! So he had to be left severely alone!

March 04, 1962 – Spend Your Days with Shiva

QUESTIONS

1. What is the moral of the story about Shiva and Parvati, and how can you put that teaching into practice?
2. How do you distinguish between worldly love and Divine Love? What are some qualities that make them different?



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