

SHIVA RATRI FESTIVAL

February 2014

Huntsville, Alabama

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Om Namah Shivaya! Explaining 'Shiva Ratri' to America born Nepali children.

We Nepalese have many festivals to enjoy. One of the very interesting and celebrated festivals is 'Shiva Ratri' or the 'night of Shiva.' The festival is about honoring and worshipping Bhagwan Shiva \ Mahadeva.

It is celebrated on the 14th moon day of Falgun month of Bikram Sambat. This year it is on Thursday, February 27th. Devotees observe fasting, meditate and keep sleepless vigil 'Jagram' during the night. Bela \ Bilva \ Aegle Marmelos leaves and water are offered to Shiva. Youngsters also enjoy the festival. Big bonfires are lit in the night. All kinds of food are roasted and cooked in the fire. People walk around in the night wishing well to the people observing 'Jagram', and distribute sweets\food.

Pashupati Nath and other Shiva temples are crowded with devotees, including naked Sadhus with 'Chilum', from all over the world. Just for information, Bhagwan Shree Pashupati Nath is the God of life, not of animals. In old Sanskrit 'Pashu' is life, and animals are also life. You may see Shiva's trident and three horizontal lines in the foreheads of the devotees representing the three levels of consciousness. People also may wear 'ash' in the forehead, representing 'our life and world as we know of is limited, but there is more beyond.'

Divine Shiva created, loves, protects and teaches the secret of the world. There are many legends associated with the celebration, to illustrate Shiva's nature and love. After the creation of the universe Shiva was very pleased and performed 'Tandav' dance on this day. The divine dance is the continuous cycles of creation, continuation and culmination. The universe, including us, is the dance. Another legend goes that once all got together and churned 'Manthan' the ocean. Many good things came out of the ocean, which were promptly picked up. However, it also produced a very potent poison called 'Halahal', which started to poison the earth. But nobody could stop it and they ran to Shiva for protection. To protect the world Shiva drank the poison. It turned his throat blue - 'Neel Kantha.' Another legend gives the day as the auspicious wedding day of Bhagwan Shiva and Sati Devi.

However, it is not Shiva's birthday, as some mistakenly say. Divine Shiva has no beginning and no end. There is an interesting legend from 'Devi Bhagwat Puran.' Bhagwan Shiva was getting married to Devi Parvati. As a part of the ceremony the presiding priest asked the name of Shiva's father. There was discomfort in the air. To avoid the discomfort the priest was told to consider Bhagwan Vishnu as the father. Who is the grandfather? Bhagwan Brahmaa. Who is the father of Brahmaa? Shiva himself.

Shiva 'Auspicious one' means who fills our heart with joy. Shiva is also known as the God of destruction, not who destroys, but who proves to us in concrete term that we are not annihilated after our death after all. The correct simile is the 'medicine of head ache.' It does not give head ache, rather relieves. Shiva neither prescribes believing in heaven and hell, nor uses the associated greed and fear as carrot and stick to force certain code of conduct. Shiva provides empirical way 'meditation techniques' to ascertain ourselves.

Mother Goddess Parvati asks her beloved Shiva, "What is your reality?" What is this wonder filled universe? What is this life beyond form pervading forms? How may we enter it fully, above space and time, names and descriptions?" This is a conceptual question, expecting similar

answer. Instead, Shiva teaches the technique: “Breath in, stop, breath out, stop. Be aware of self and nature at all times.” Then he further teaches 112 meditation techniques. Any of the spiritual systems around the world is some combination of the 112 techniques described, including Buddhist ‘Vipassana’ meditation technique.

Shiva taught ‘Adwaita Darshan’ or ‘Non-dual’ view of the world. The world ‘Samsar’ as we see is only partial and changing. There is larger and universal reality – ‘Brahman.’ The Samsar is a subset of Brahman (not to confuse with God of creation ‘Brahma’ or ‘Bahun’ caste). The whole universe, everything and everyone including our egos, are part of the Brahman. Deep down within our ego is the soul, which is Brahman indeed. But our person ‘ego \ life form’ cannot understand its true reality due to the creative force ‘Maya.’ Like an actor deep into the acted character, that we may forget our real identity. Shiva teaches, “Yes, an acted character will end, but not the actor.” A character may meditate to go within. But ultimately it is for actor, not the character, to realize own nature and that the character is only an act. The meditation is the process of such realization. This revelation makes Shiva the ‘God of destruction - of ignorance.’

We are limited and the universe ‘Brahman’ is unlimited. Thus, we cannot understand it in totality. However, we may understand two fundamental aspects of the universe – ‘Consciousness’ and ‘Nature.’ They are represented by Shiva and Parvati in human forms and by ‘Lingam’ and ‘Yoni’ in symbols. They are also depicted by up and down pointing triangles, which come together as hexagon, a symbol of knowledge. Though usually misstated they are not male and female anatomies. Anatomies in Sanskrit are ‘Shishna’ and ‘Bhaga’, with related English word ‘Phallus.’ Phallus is used as the symbol of nature’s regenerative power. It is ‘Yashin’ pole of the ‘Indra Jatra’ festival in Nepal and ‘Christmas tree’ in Europe, which is a Christian adaptation from earlier Pagans.

Adwaita Darshan or ‘Non-dual’ view stipulates that subject and object are one and the same. Consider an eye (subject) sees a garment (object). We may argue that behind the eye there is brain, then mind, then consciousness and so forth. Similarly, behind the garment there is cotton, then organic compound, then energy and so forth. Our limited mind can perceive only part of the continuums. However, Shiva reveals that ultimately both are the same – one, not two. Yes, one is looking at one self. Yes, the universe is conscious, self-conscious, and ‘I’ is a small part of it. The whole creation with its diversity is the manifestation of one. The way of meditation leads ‘I’ to realize of being one with the universe, a paradigm shift.

Buddha teaches the same. However, Buddha’s teaching is the spiritual breakthrough, not as something new, but as the ‘empirical’ confirmation. Shiva’s teachings are given as a belief, beyond our intellect. But Buddha proved it empirically ‘Tathagat’ and taught an empirical method ‘Vipassana’ to proceed without depending on others or beliefs ‘Appo deepo bhava.’ Usually both Shiva and Buddha are depicted meditating. They are not saying, “We will meditate and you worship us.” Rather they are demonstrating, what we should be doing.

Divine Shiva and mother goddess Parvati reside in Kailash Mountain by the lake Man Sarovar in Tibet, close to NW Nepal border. His teachings spread far and wide around the world. He is known as Shiwa Okar in Tibet, Shiva Omkar in Nepal \ India, Daikoku in Japan. His teachings are in many scriptures including in Veda, Tibetan Bon Po, South Indian Agama, Kirati Mundhum. The original Dharma in both north and south of Himalayas, Tibet and Nepal \ Kirat, is Shiva Dharma, which is known as Bon Po in Tibet.

Mountain Kailash in Tibet, the abode of Shiva \ Parvati has interesting geography. Three major rivers Brahmaputra 'Tsangpo', Sindhu 'Indus' and Ganga flow from this region. If whole Tibet is considered then there are four more major river systems Salween, Mekong, Yangtze and Huang He flow out. These are not mere water bodies but the links of communications, commerce, arts and Dharma. They do link far and wide major civilization groups along with the teachings of Shiva.

The most important feature of the festival is for us to meditate to realize what we actually are. In the ego level, it is to understand our vices and discipline to give them up. It is the practice to see beyond what is visible. No matter how situation may look bad, realizing that it always does change. Shiva reveals that after all we are all one, part of one universe. All 'I' have to do is to **“Meditate to realize it.”**

Reference:

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2. Introduction to Vigyan Bhairav Tantra Meditations: Mahasatvaa Ma Ananda Sarita, UK
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Shree Pashupati temple, Kathmandu valley



Shiva temple in Java, Indonesia



Shiva in Sanga, Kathmandu valley, 143 feet tall.



Shiva temple in Quanzhou, China



Daikoku \ Shiva, Japan

