

Group 2

MAHA SHIVARATHRI

Maha Shivarathri is one of Saivism's most unique festivals. Unlike other festivals, this festival is celebrated throughout the night and is a festival of fasting rather than feasting. People usually fast during the day and, at sunset, begin their special prayers to Lord Shiva.

According to our Hindu Calendar, Maha Shivarathri usually comes on the 14th day after the Full Moon in the Tamil month of Masi. This year it was celebrated on the 26th of February.

The Symbol of Lord Shiva, is the Shiva Lingam. It is a form to represent the formless and it is worshiped with great splendour during Maha Shivaratri.

There are many stories about the Shivalingam that are told to us children during Shivarathri, and here is one of them:

Once upon a time, a hunter worshipped Lord Shiva unknowingly on Shivaratri night. He did this by dropping Vilva leaves on a shiva linga at the base of a Vilva tree in which he was hiding to escape from a tiger. For this he was forgiven all of his sins. So think what can be achieved if you observe Shivarathri with faith and with knowledge! Indeed, it is said that worship offered on Shivarathri Day is equal to a whole year of normal worship!

The night's worship is divided into four jaamams and the whole night is spent performing prayers and poojas to Lord Shiva. 11pm to 1am is a special time during Maha Shivarathri and is called the Lingothbava Kaalam.

Devotees chant the "Panchaachara Mantra" recite the Shivapuram and sing Thevarams and other devotional songs dedicated to Lord Shiva.

Religious rites and ceremonies are repeated for every Jaamam and worship continues throughout the night. Lord Shiva is worshiped with intense devotion and the prayers are concluded at day-break with a simple meal to break the fast.

Shivarathri, if observed annually, with faith and devotion, will help to grant us perfect spiritual peace.

Om Namah Shivaya...