

Maha Shivaratri

Maha Shivratri is a Hindu festival celebrated every year in reverence of Lord Shiva. It is also known as padmarajathri. Alternate common names/spellings include *Maha Sivaratri*, *Shivaratri*, *Sivarathri*, and *Shivaratri*. Shivaratri literally means *the great night of Shiva* or *the night of Shiva*. It is celebrated every year on the 13th night/14th day of the Maagha or Phalguna month of the Hindu calendar. Since many different calendars are followed by various ethno-linguistic groups of India, the month and the Tithi name are not uniform all over India. Celebrated in the dark fortnight or Krishna Paksha (waning moon) of the month of Maagha according to the *Shalivahana* or *Gujarati Vikrama* or Phalguna according to the *Vikramaera*. The festival is principally celebrated by offerings of Bael or *Bilva/Vilvam* leaves to Lord Shiva, all-day fasting and an all-night-long vigil. In accordance with scriptural and discipleship traditions, penances are performed in order to gain boons in the practice of Yoga and meditation, in order to reach life's summum bonum steadily and swiftly. A week-long International Mandi Shivratri Fair held at Mandi in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh every year is one of the major tourist attractions in the state.

Rituals of Maha Shivratri

From the very early morning, Shiva temples are flocked by devotees, young and old, who come to perform the traditional Shivalinga worship (puja) and hence hope for favours from the god. Devotees bathe at sunrise, preferably in the Ganga, or any other holy water source (like the Shiva Sagartank at Khajurao). This is a purificatory rite, an important part of all Hindu festivals. Wearing a clean piece of clothing after the holy bath, worshippers carry pots of water to the temple to bathe the Shivalinga. They offer prayers to the sun, Vishnu and Shiva. Women pray for the well-being of their husbands and sons. An unmarried woman prays for a husband like Shiva, who is considered to be the ideal husband. The temple reverberates with the sound of bells and shouts of "Shankerji ki Jai" meaning 'Hail Shiva'. Devotees circumambulate the linga, three or seven times, and then pour water over it. Some also pour milk.

According to the Shiva Purana, the Mahashivaratri worship must incorporate six items:

- Bathing the Shiv Linga with water, milk and honey, and Wood apple or bel leaves added to it, representing purification of the soul;
- The vermilion paste applied on the Shiv Linga after bathing it, representing virtue;
- Offering of fruits, which is conducive to longevity and gratification of desires;
- Burning incense, yielding wealth;
- The lighting of the lamp which is conducive to the attainment of knowledge;
- And betel leaves marking satisfaction with worldly pleasures.

Tripundra refers to the three horizontal stripes of holy ash applied to the forehead by worshippers of Lord Shiva. These stripes symbolise spiritual knowledge, purity

and penance (spiritual practice of Yoga), so also they represent the three eyes of Lord Shiva.

Wearing a rosary made from the rudraksha seed of the rudraksha tree (said to have sprung from the tears of Lord Shiva) when worshipping Lord Shiva is ideal. A rudraksha seed is a mahogany-like color, sometimes black, and sometimes may have traces of sacred sandalwood powder, turmeric, kumkum, or holy ash if the rosary was used in worship ceremonies or anointed.



Lord Shiva

Legends

We are celebrating Mahashivratri, because; there is a legend associated with Samudra Manthan (churning of ocean), a process in which the asuras (demons) and the gods joined hands to churn out amrut(nectar) from the depths of the ocean, using a mountain and a snake as a rope. Among many things that came out, a pot of poison came out of the ocean. This poison was so potent that it has the power to destroy the whole universe. Upon the request of gods, Shiva drank the Halahala to eliminate its destructive capacity. Shocked by his act, Goddess Parvathi strangled his neck and hence managed to stop it in his neck itself and prevent it from spreading all over the universe supposed to be in Shiva's stomach. However the poison was so potent that it changed the color of His neck to blue. For this reason, Lord Shiva is also called Neelkanta.

Pralaya (the Deluge)

Another version relates that the whole world was facing destruction and Goddess Parvati worshipped her husband Shiva to save it. She prayed for the jivs (living souls) remaining in se -- like particles of gold dust in a lump of wax – during the long period of pralaya (deluge) night, that they should, upon becoming active again, have His blessings, but only if they worshipped Him just as she did. Her prayer was granted. Parvati named the night for the worship of Ishwar by mortals *Maha-Sivaratri*, or the great night of Shiva, since *Pralaya* is brought about by Him.om shiv

The Lord Shiva's Favourite Day

After creation was complete, Parvati asked Lord Shiva which devotees and rituals pleased him the most. The Lord replied that the 13th night of the new moon, during the

month of Maagha, is his most favourite day. Parvati repeated these words to her friends, from whom the word spread over all creation.

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