

Lord Shiva, the Lord of Destruction and Peace

In the Hindu male trinity - Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh [Shiva] - Lord Shiva is the Lord of Destruction. Some time ago I asked a pandit who is the Lord of Peace and he replied, "Lord Shiva". How can the Lord of Destruction also be the Lord of Peace? It took a few years of sadhana [spiritual practice] and the guidance of Guruji, Pujya Swami Chidanandji Saraswati and the spiritual masters for me to consciously 'destroy or let go that which was preventing me from discovering the Peace within' to understand and know that Lord Shiva, the Lord of Destruction is also the Lord of Peace.

We pray to Lord Shiva to destroy, dissolve or transform all that is preventing us from being at peace and discovering the truth that we are. We prefer to stay in our comfort zone even though we want change. Lord Shiva's destruction makes room for new creation and a new way of life. Only with Lord Shiva's grace and blessings will our sadhana result in our ego surrendering to the divinity within; in the release of our attachments to the detachment of unconditional love; and, the strength to recognize and let go our ignorances. Just as the leaves of summer age and fall in the autumn to provide the rich soil for spring's blossoms, we too need to release old habits, beliefs, attachments, desires, etc. that are no longer serving us so we can blossom into the peace and joy that we are.

Through our sadhana Lord Shiva supports us in 'destroying' our ideas, grudges and pain of the past that we usually bring into our present. We call our old habits discipline; our beliefs and ideas of yesteryear we call our virtue and truth. We must allow that which is "old" within us to be dissolved to make room for who we are becoming. Like the tree that gladly allows the Divine Painter to turn her green spring leaves red and yellow in the Fall and then releases them to the ground as the winter frost sets in, similarly to be free, peaceful and joyful we need to be able to let go. We know change is constant but it is natural to resist change. By embracing change and the cycle of life we can have a more peaceful, rich, fulfilling, content and divinely joyful life.

You may pray to Lord Shiva for guidance on making that change within. You may pray to Lord Shiva every day; or, on Mondays; or, on the night before each new moon which is known as ShivaRatri - the Night of Shiva. Choose what works for you. Your prayer can be simply reciting the mantra "Om Namah Shivaya" in meditation, or, listening to Shiva bhajans to elaborate puja, abhishek, dance meditation, silent or guided meditation on Lord Shiva.

The night before the new moon of the Hindu month of Magha [February or March] is known as MahaShivaRatri - the Great Night of Shiva. On this MahaShivaRatri it is believed that the Universe is in alignment to help us receive the Grace of Shiva. Devotees fast all day having water and a little milk, yogurt and fruits to prepare themselves to receive the blessings of Shiva during this Great Night of Shiva. Devotees pray to Shiva, the Lord of Destruction to help them destroy all that is keeping them from the peace that is within. And, in the process of this destruction they discover the Shiva that is the Lord of Peace. During MahaShivaRatri, devotees

perform pooja, abhishek, sing bhajans and kirtan, meditate and dance with Lord Shiva. It is customary to stay up all night or at least to past midnight. The best time to meditate during MahaShivaRatri is around midnight. It is important to keep our spine straight as we meditate upon the mantra of Lord Shiva - 'Om Namah Shivaya'. We allow the Grace of Lord Shiva to flow through us to heighten our perception and have a taste of a larger, more profound way of being. With sincere deep meditation in silence, song and dance we surrender to the Divine and become one with Lord Shiva.

On this Great Night of Shiva - this MahaShivaRatri - let us not only pray to Lord Shiva but let us also emulate His qualities. He is known as Neelkantha the 'blue throat One'. Lord Shiva swallowed the poison which emerged during the churning of the ocean between the devas [those with good qualities] and the asuras [those with not so good qualities]. How do we emulate Lord Shiva as Neelkantha? In our lives there may be 'poison' erupting in our families, workplaces, communities. Do not react with poison, but as the poison is directed towards us, accept it, let it sit in our throat without taking it all in. We mediate upon Lord Shiva for guidance and allow Him to show us how to transform that poison into nectar so when we speak it will be sweet kind words in response.

On this Great Night of Lord Shiva - this MahaShivaRatri - as we remember the story of the churning of the ocean we realize that we too have the devas and the asuras within. There is the constant battle between the positive and negative energies within each of us, between what we want to do and what we should do for our own benefit and the benefit of others. We might want to emulate Lord Shiva and sit in silent meditation to become aware of the truth of who we are - this combination of divine and devilish qualities. In mediation, listen to the guidance of Lord Shiva as He destroys that which is keeping us from knowing the peace and divinity that we are.

On this Great Night of Lord Shiva - this MahaShivaRatri - as we remember the story of the churning of the ocean we realize that for change to happen we have to constantly 'churn the ocean'. Whenever we want to accomplish something we have to take action. This constant action will churn the doubts, insecurities, obstacles, etc. If we stop the churning that is all we will know and believe. However when we continue to churn, the 'nectar' of faith, confidence, opportunities emerge guiding us to our goal. On this Great Night of Lord Shiva - MahaShivaRatri - we remember that our only goal of this human life is moksha - freedom and liberation - to cross the ocean to Oneness with the Divine. As we continue to churn the ocean we must stay focused on the goal of moksha, accept that poison will come and know that with the Grace of Lord Shiva, we can transform the poison into nectar for ourselves and the world.

This Great Night of Lord Shiva - MahaShivaRatri - is especially auspicious for winning the battle within, that battle between the divine and devil that is within each of us; between right and wrong; between the choice of poisonous harsh words and actions and sweet compassionate words and actions; between stress and peace; between death and immortality. Let us perform our pooja, meditations, songs and dance on this Great Night of Lord Shiva - this MahaShivaRatri -

with full faith that the divine nectar will emerge with the Grace of Lord Shiva - the Lord of Destruction who is also the Lord of Peace - to destroy all that is keeping us from the peace that we are. Om Namah Shivaya!