



The Symbolism of Mahashivaratri

Mahashivaratri celebrates the union of Lord Shiva and Goddess Uma. In the Hindu tradition, Shiva represents the Divine Self residing in the heart of every human being, while Uma symbolizes the intuitive wisdom inherent in each soul. When the individual soul unites with this inner intuition, it experiences the true essence of this Divine Wedding—symbolizing liberation from the cycles of birth and death, limitation, and suffering. While this story arises from Hindu symbolism, its deeper meaning—the spiritual evolution of the soul and its ultimate fulfillment—is universal and is expressed in a variety of ways across all religions and spiritual traditions.

It is due to the profound significance of Shivaratri that this day is held in great esteem by the majority of Hindus, especially the *sanyasins* and spiritual aspirants. While the masses adore Shiva for the fulfillment of their desires, and for the promotion of prosperity and happiness in their lives, the *sanyasins* adore Him for the attainment of Enlightenment, which provides the realization of a higher order in which the soul participates fully in the eternal harmony of existence.

Lord Shiva is that Divine aspect of the Supreme Self who performs the function of destruction—the apex of renunciation. The world-process is, in fact, a blend of these three functions: creation, sustenance, and destruction. While Brahma creates and Vishnu sustains, the Divine Shiva destroys. Accordingly, the Non-dual Di-

vine Self is figuratively worshipped as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

Destruction and the Path of the Aspirant

For spiritual aspirants, the term “destruction” symbolizes the removal of the veil of spiritual ignorance, which gives rise to the cycles of birth and death. Through the grace of Shiva, the seeker works to dissolve the gross impurities of the mind—such as anger, hatred, greed, and egoism—as well as the subtler tendencies of inner attachments and unconscious egoistic inclinations that quietly influence thoughts and actions. In this process, the aspirant gradually clears the inner landscape, creating space for wisdom, clarity, and the direct experience of the Divine Self. When the night is “destroyed” it heralds the advent of a glorious day!

Understanding Renunciation

Shiva is best adored when a person promotes the spirit of renunciation in their daily life. For most people, however, the term “renunciation” sounds a note of pathos and sadness. Their minds become puzzled and confused by the ideals of renunciation. They think, “How can one renounce this world that abounds with wondrous spectacles of nature such as sublime mountains, green valleys, gardens with multicolored blooms, and placid lakes that reflect the gorgeous blue sky? How can a person renounce the expressions of beauty and love in human personalities, and in the varied expressions of life?” Renunciation seems to be a death-blow to all expressions of inner sensitivity.

However, this is a gross misinterpretation. In fact, the spirit of renunciation is the key to increasing joyousness, mental peace, intellectual clarity, vital strength, and abundant creativity in life. You do not renounce green forests, redolent

flowers, or sublime spectacles of nature. Rather, renunciation does not diminish life; it releases the egoistic vision that causes dependence, attachment, and pain. You renounce your mental limitations and therefore begin to discover a Divine Majesty expressing Itself through the wondrous objects and conditions of the world.

Similarly, you do not renounce your relatives and friends; you begin to serve God in them. You do not see only a physical being before you; you perceive God operating through their form. Thus, you are not limited by the fleeting charms of youth and the transient promises of your friends and relatives. You are focused on the permanence of the Divine. You renounce the illusive mist to behold the radiant sun. You renounce the heap of copper coins to possess an unlimited storehouse of shining gold. You renounce your ego-sense and embrace the intuitive vision of universal life—a direct experience. Thereby, you realize your true identity—the Non-dual Self, sustaining and supporting all that exists.

Renunciation Is for All

Renunciation is not confined to outer forms or religious orders. It is a subtle, natural movement of the soul turning toward God as one advances on the spiritual path.

It is true that the order of *sanyasa* is a glorious expression of Hindu culture, and as such, should be honored by those sincere aspirants who are able to dedicate their entire life to the pursuit of the wisdom of the scriptures and to the dissemination of the spiritual values of life. The contribution that a *sanyasin*, effulgent with the fire of the love of God, gives to the world in terms of harmony and prosperity, far exceeds the contributions given by great politicians, heroic generals, and benevolent world leaders.

However, the practice of renunciation is not dependent upon any external mode of life, or upon entering into a religious order. It is the

universal principle of spiritual evolution, internal progress, and spiritual growth. You live to outgrow the limitations of the senses, mind, ego, and intellect, and to commune with the Divine Self. Reflect again and again upon the profound statements of Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita: “*Anityam Asukham Lokam. Imam Prapya Bhajaswa Mam.*”—“Having entered a world that is impermanent and unable to provide lasting fulfillment, turn your awareness toward the Divine.”

The Pursuit of Lasting Fulfillment

The Upanishads are never tired of emphasizing that genuine and permanent happiness cannot be found in the limited objects, relationships, and conditions of the world. “*Yo Vai Bhuma Tat Sukham. Nalpe Sukham Asati.*”—“True fulfillment is found only in the Infinite; it does not exist in what is limited.” This line (from the Chandogya Upanishad) is not moralizing or dismissing the world. It points out why satisfaction in finite objects fades: not because they are wrong, but because they are limited. Lasting fulfillment requires alignment with what has no boundary.

Consider yourself a stranger in this world. You travel through the varying conditions of life like a tourist. Reflect and meditate upon this fact: “Nothing exists as it appears to the unenlightened mind; and nothing belongs to the ego within a human being.” Therefore, do not allow your mind to be continuously engrossed from morning until night with the transient objects and situations of the world. Find time for prayer, reflection, and the practice of meditation upon the Divine. Lift your vision far beyond the clouds of desires and expectations for what is perishable.

Learn to relax and recognize that the world is upheld by the wisdom of God. There

is no need to live under the constant strain of ego-driven desires and opinions or the pressure of self-imposed demands. Beneath the shifting experiences of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, a Divine meaning quietly unfolds. That meaning is revealed through surrender to the Divine Will and the stillness of a tranquil mind.

Practical Guidance for Spiritual Growth

Adapt to life’s changing conditions with discernment rather than inner struggle. While it is helpful not to resist circumstances unnecessarily, there are times when outer conditions must first be addressed before inner clarity can unfold. Wisdom also knows when to act, change direction, or step away. When life becomes more balanced, the mind naturally settles, making space for the deeper purpose of existence—the gradual unfolding of Self-realization.

Every situation is planned for your spiritual advancement, and you will be able to perceive it if you pay attention and reflect. This attitude will help you avoid worry, grief, and bitterness within your mind. Thus, you will experience increasing contentment and mental peace—an expanding awareness of the Divine behind all conditions of life.

Cultivate steadiness and understanding in the face of life’s fluctuations. The world is a conditioned expression of the Self and, by its very nature, cannot be flawless at every moment. It is purposely designed that way so that we turn our attention to what transcends this world and is perfect. Rather than resisting or resenting life’s challenges, learn to meet them with clarity, patience, and inner intelligence. With this shift in perspective, difficult situations become opportunities for growth, reflection, and refinement of awareness. Within the larger movement of Divine order, what appears

as adversity often serves to loosen karmic limitations and deepen the soul's wisdom, resilience, and inner strength.

Develop an understanding of the Law of Karma. The cycles of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, meeting with loved ones and parting from them—all arise from the workings of karmic law. You are the architect of your own destiny. Rather than being controlled by the negative consequences of past actions, focus on creating positive karmas through a conscious and optimistic attitude, thereby transcending past limitations. With this perspective, you will align yourself with the infinite resources of the Self, drawing upon boundless energy, strength, and inner resilience.

Cultivate non-violence and universal love, for the two are inseparable. True non-violence means refraining from causing harm in thought, word, or deed. As you come to see that the sense of separation between yourself and others—or between yourself and the world—is rooted in the conditioned mind, the illusion behind anger, hatred, and violence naturally becomes apparent. With this understanding, you begin to transform inner patterns: anger is softened by love, pride gives way to humility, and mental turbulence settles into quiet surrender to the universality of the Self within.

Live in *satsanga* (association with sages or people, books, etc., that are spiritually inspiring). Promote this positive association both within yourself and in your surroundings. By the practice of *japa*, prayer, meditation, study of scriptures, and reflection, you awaken the stream of Divine Love within your heart and create a sublime inner atmosphere. By joining a group of other sincere seekers, studying under the guidance of a spiritual preceptor, and serving humanity for the sake of everyone's spiritual upliftment, you cultivate external *satsanga*. Allow yourself to be a source of joyousness and strength to others, and avoid spreading the contagion of misery, grief, infatuation, and egoistic illusions.

The Culmination: Living in Renunciation

Let the spirit of renunciation gradually enter your day-to-day life. Release inertia, egoism, and the quiet pressures born of spiritual ignorance of your essential divinity, and allow these to fall away naturally as your understanding deepens. You were born to discover your essential nature. As your vision widens, the fleeting objects and changing conditions of the world lose their power to bind, and what is enduring begins to shine forth. With this growing spirit of renunciation, nurture all that is true, good, and beautiful—within yourself and within the world you inhabit. In this way, Self-realization dawns gently, revealing the true fulfillment toward which the soul has always been moving.

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