

Shiva-ratri: The Night Of Lord Shiva
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Some people believed that the Shiva-ratri was the night on which Lord Shiva was born others disputed it saying Shiva had no parents; so he was not born of any parents. However, everybody must agree that Shiva appeared on this very night before the devotees to meet whatever desires they had in their minds. Shiva had such power he could meet the demands of anybody if s/he could please him with whatever the means s/he had.

I knew an interesting story about what Shiva could do with his unlimited and indefinite power. the story goes like this:

Once a devotee had been in such profound devotion to Lord Shiva, he could not even sense not to mention notice Lord Shiva standing before him. After several minutes of waiting for the devotee to open up his eyes, in his thunderous voice, Lord Shiva said, "Get up my child and see who has been standing before you but you did not notice keeping him standing for so long. Open up your eyes before it became too late."

The unusual high-pitch sound Lord Shiva gave in his voice pierced through the thick ears of the devotees, and penetrated deep into his mind concentrated on Lord Shiva, and suddenly he woke up from the slumber to the mundane surface life. He saw the amazing figure of Lord Shiva wearing the silky serpents around his neck, and limbs, and holding a trident in his right hand, and an organic water pot in his left hand. He wore a tiger skin around his waist to cover his private part not to embarrass the humans in the Hindu world.

In a split of a second, the devotee prostrated at the feet of Lord Shiva, and he said, "My lord you have been so generous to take a trouble to visit such an humble and innocent man that had nothing but devotion to the lord. My lord, you had brightened my destiny that had been out of track in my life for so long."

Lord Shiva said, "Get up my devotee. You had done more than enough to be deserved for anything you wished for in your life. Now, it is my duty to meet whatever a wish you have in your mind. Speak out your wish and you will have it. Don't keep me waiting for long. I have many things to do."

The man looked up and saw the tall figure of the lord, and noticed the dazzling face of Lord Shiva that had been emitting the light that could produce by not less than a thousand suns. He blinked the momentarily blinded eyes to see Lord Shiva against the so bright light coming out of the lord's face."

He slowly getting up with his hands clasped at his chest, and bowing to the lord, he said, "My lord, I don't need anything, and any riches. I don't need any physical strength. I don't need even a long life most of the mundane people wish for."

In an irritating tone Lord Shiva said, "Then, tell me what is your wish. Don't keeping me standing for long before you. I have millions of if not billions of devotees in my Hindu world to take care of. Let me show my appreciation to you for your deep devotion to me, and then go."

The devotee wanted to keep Lord Shiva before him as long as possible not expressing his desire. He knew that Lord Shiva would instantly disappear after meeting his wish. It was once in a lifetime experience to have Lord Shiva before anybody.

The devotee could not keep Lord Shiva any more than he wanted as the clock has been ticking fast to speak out his desire for the lord to meet and then evaporate from the human Hindu world. He needed to say what his desire was and the lord would meet it. With his clasped hands, the devotee said, "My lord I have no desire other than the power I want is 'anything I touch would turn into ash in a moment.'

Lord Shiva said, "Be it so." Lord Shiva was about to vanish when the devotee started off going after the lord to test how effective the boon he had received from the lord.

Lord Shiva had no time to disappear. He had to run from the destructive power he had bestowed on his devotee. Lord Shiva ran as fast as he could. Then he flew over the rivers, mountains, valleys, and went into the clouds to save him from the destruction his devotee had been trying to cause him.

The sudden and fearful flight of Lord Shiva had cause tremendous waves that went through the Hindu cosmic world and shook everything there including the palace and certainly the throne of Indra: the heavenly monarch reigning the Hindu world. Indra did not know how the Hindu world had been shaken so uncontrollably.

Indra immediately flew to Baikuntha: the heavenly abode of Lord Vishnu. Seeing the fearful eyes of Indra, getting up from his cozy thirteen-serpent-braided-into bed floating on the cosmic ocean, Lord Vishnu said, "What is the matter, why are you so trembling and shacking from fear? Be cool, and have a cool water to calm down your heavily breathing for a minute and tell me what has been your concern.'

Indra said, "My lord, you must know the Hindu cosmic world has been shaking so long without any quakes and tremor."

"Yes, I know. I felt the tremor. I saw some waves in my ocean that humans call tsunami. We are in the Hindu heaven. Nothing could harm us. Calm down and sit next to me signaling his spouse Laksmi to make a slot for Indra.

As Indra was about to sit, a single jump of Lord Shiva almost capsized the huge serpent bed making Lord Vishnu concerned with the massive tremor. Lord Vishnu closed his eyes and looked through the Hindu world. He saw Lord Shiva had been frantically running away from a mundane fellow. Then, Lord Vishnu went into his transcendental means to check what is really happening. He understood that a mundane creature having the power he received from Lord Shiva to turn one and all into ash with a single touch by his hand had been chasing Lord Shiva.

Then, Lord Vishnu thought that it was really a grave situation, and a serious concern for him. He figured out how to get rid of this disgusting creature, and save Lord Shiva from running away from such a mortal. Lord Vishnu eyes were brightening with the thoughts that the mortals possessed with very weak minds, and they could be easily lured to women, and wine. So, Lord Vishnu transformed himself into a young beautiful woman, and flew down to the Hindu world.

Lord Vishnu as a beautiful woman came between Lord Shiva and the former devotee chasing the lord. The beauty of the woman spontaneously brought the mortal to a halt. He was looking at the woman surprisingly.

The woman said, "What are you looking for?" The woman pretended to be shy and innocent.

The mortal was standing motionless not knowing how to approach a young woman suddenly appearing before him. He was blinking to clear up his eyes to see the woman standing before him was really a woman. He had forgotten the boon he had received from Lord Shiva and even forgotten that he had been going after him to test his boon on Lord Shiva.

By the time, the woman started off dancing telling the mortal that she wanted to demonstrate how keenly she could dance. The mortal was even more perplexed to see such a gorgeous woman dancing in such a wonderful way. The woman offered the man with such unique power to destroy by his single touch to dance together.

The mortal was surprised to the offer of the woman to dance. He thought that if this woman wanted why not to dance. Thus, they began to dance.

Lord Shiva had a chance to take a moment to disappear from the human Hindu world, and then enter into the cosmic Hindu world where his heavenly abode was.

However, before doing so, Lord Shiva took a rest on the top of the icy mountain and looked behind and saw the mortal dancing with a beautiful woman. Lord Shiva was surprised how came the woman from nowhere in between the mortal and him.

Lord Shiva took another moment and closed his eyes to see the woman. He saw Lord Vishnu in the woman dancing with the mortal. Then, Lord Shiva knew that Lord Vishnu was the master of tricks and he was dealing with this mortal turned into the monster that almost destroyed Lord Shiva.

After several hours of dancing, the woman asked the mortal to just follow the dancing of her. The mortal agreed on that. After several actions of different dancing moves, the woman turned to the action of touching the head. Forgetting his touch would transform his body into ash, the mortal touched his head, and instantly turned him into ash. The mission completed, and achieved the objective of Lord Vishnu. The mortal had been known as the 'Vash-ma-sur' means the monster that could turned everything into ash by his single hand touch since then.

Thus, Lord Vishnu saved the Hindu world from destruction. That happened on the night we call 'Shiva-ratri.' Hindus believed that Lord Shiva would show up on this night in all the Shiva temples. Millions of devotees and believers visit the Shiva temples elsewhere in the world on this night and the next whole day.

Lord Pashupati: one of the many names of Lord Shiva at Gaushala in Kathmandu had been one of the attractions for the Hindus. Certainly, Nepal had other famous Hindu shrines like Muktinath in the Mustang District and several other Hindu holy places spread all over Nepal but Pashupati at Gaushala and Dolesvore Mahadev also the name of Lord Shiva in Bhaktapur had been the most important shrines for the devotees of Lord Shiva to visit. Mahadev means god of gods.

Hundreds of even thousands of ascetics some of them wearing only loin clothes others even without them come to Pashupati four days before Shiva-ratri and leave Pashupati four days after Shiva-ratri. They visit Dolesvore Mahadev in Bhaktapur.

Symbolism of Lord Shiva

Ganga

Symbolism: The end of ignorance and the dawn of knowledge and peace

His matted hair

Symbolism: Unison of mind, body and spirit

Serpent

Symbolism: Controlling one's ego

Blue throat

Symbolism: Suppression of the evil (anger)

Ash smeared on his body

Symbolism: Everything is temporary, even our own body

Kamandalam

Symbolism: Removal of all the evil from the body

Trishul

Symbolism: Control of mind, intellect and ego

Third eye

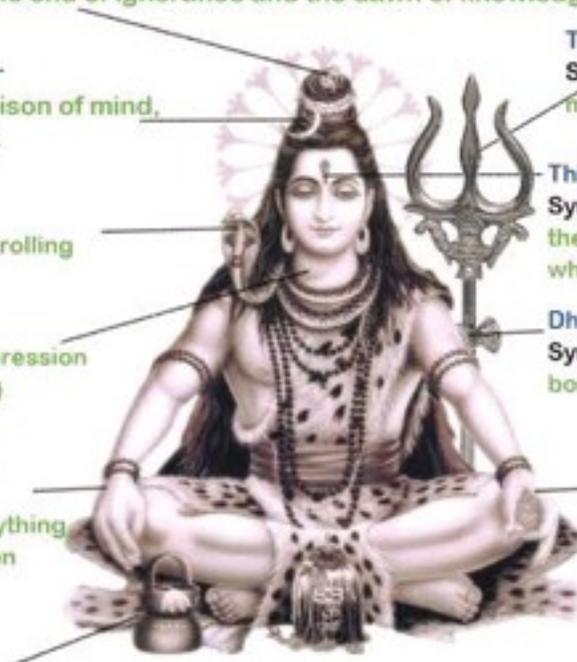
Symbolism: Seeing with the mind's eye, beyond what's visible

Dhamru

Symbolism: Ridding your body of all desire

Meditative pose

Symbolism: Calmness



Syoti

THE HealthSite

(Source: Facebook)



The Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) provides the ascetic visitors with food, firewood for keeping burning a small bonfire for twenty four hours a day for the ascetics to keep warm and smeared their bodies with ash. Smearing their bodies with ash, ascetics keep themselves warm and free from the germs and insects attacking their naked bodies.

Ascetics had been mostly from India, as they did not need any travel documents and the visa for Nepal for coming and staying on in Nepal as long as they wanted but the PADT paid them for foods and firewood only for eight nights. Then the PADT paid them for the return bus tickets. Some ascetics had demanded air tickets in the past but the PADT did pay only for the bus travel.

Other devotes coming to Pashupati from elsewhere had to cover their expenses for their visit by themselves.

The Nevah community domiciled elsewhere in Nepal had their unique tradition of celebrating the Shiva-ratri. The Malla monarchs had authorized the common folks to collect taxes from the passersby and from other business people to buy firewood, peanuts and corn. They make a bonfire to keep them warm on the Shiva-ratri night and then they roast peanuts and corn in a clay pot on the bonfire. They eat the cereals as the blessings from Lord Shiva. They tried to remain awake on the Shiva-ratri night for watching Shiva to appear before them.

Writing in the 'gorkhapatra' of March 5, 2016, Shreekrishna Maharjan said that the Nevah community had the tradition of collecting firewood going from one house to another on the day for making bonfire on the Shiva-ratri night. While going from one house to another, the Nevah people chant "Ganesh is in confusion, while Mahadev is in cold (Ganedyo ya ekula, mahadyo ya chikula, si-ni-kya fone-ti) ", please give us a few pieces of firewood."

According to Maharjan, the Nevah community makes a bonfire at every temple at all neighborhoods on the Shiva-ratri night. I knew that even a household makes a small bonfire on the backyard on this night of Lord Shiva, and roast corn, peanuts, and soybeans in a clay pot, and distribute these cereals to all as the blessings from Lord Shiva. Everybody tried to keep awake on this night anticipating Lord Shiva would appear out of the blue.

Maharjan also wrote that the devotees that had taken the month-long fasting and making offerings to the Svosthani deity and Madhav Narayan at Nadi River commonly known as Salinadi River in Sakhu starting on the full moon day of Poush (Dec-Jan) and ending on the full moon day of Magha (Jan-Feb) would complete their month-long religious rituals on the Shiva-ratri night making a bonfire at the temple to the Jyotir-lingay-svore Mahadev in Sakhu, and taking the blessing from the Mahadev: another name of Lord Shiva, and then going to the Tantric goddess Vajra-yogini also in Sakhu, and making offering to the goddess.

Another interesting piece of the story Maharjan told was about the locals of Sakhu making a secret offering called 'gupti-puja' at the ancient crematory also called 'lapsi-fedi-saghu' crematory on the Shiva-ratri night. This secret offering is actually fire worship performed at the crematory. They offer a pair of serpents, a pair of birds, and a pair of fishes. One of the serpents is sacrificed to the fire, another released in a river. Similarly, one of the birds, and one of the fishes is sacrificed to the fire and another released.

A male goat is also sacrificed to the fire. The head is tossed to the fire and burned down to ash. The locals believed that it was the emulation of Lord Shiva cutting off the head of Dacchhe-prajapati, and tossing the head in the fire Dacchhe had made for performing fire worship. Lord Shiva did so raging at Dacchhe for insulting Satidevi: the daughter of Dacchhe given in marriage to Lord Shiva following the trick played by Lord Vishnu. Satidevi took off her life throwing herself in the fire not being able to tolerate the insults inflicted by her father Dacchhe at Lord Shiva and herself.

The blessing from this fire worship is brought to the devotees that had taken a month-long fasting at the Salinadi River, and then were making a bonfire at the Jyotir-lingay-svore Mahadev on the Shiva-ratri night.

The Nevah community believed that Lord Shiva taking the Tantric form of Bhairav guards the crematory and saves the souls of the dead people from the evil. For Tantriks, the Shiva-ratri night is the most auspicious night to perform Tantric offerings to the Tantric deities and to obtain the Tantric power.

The Nevah community has a numerous 'guthis' to make offerings to Lord Bhairav on the Shiva-ratri. Guthi is an association of the like-minded community members set up to perform several social rites and rituals. They have unwritten rules and regulations they strictly follow. They have the sense of the rule of law.

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