

Maha Shivratri—Ancient Festival Has Relevance Today  
*By Brahma Kumari Sister Kiran*

In 2015, February 17th falls on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the last month of the Indian calendar. Around the world, devotees of Shiva bathe upon arising, perform ceremonies of worship, fast all day, and remain awake all night chanting and singing. They are celebrating the festival of *Maha Shivratri* or the Great Night of *Shiva*, the Great God.

This day of religious significance commemorates, as such festivals always do, someone great who once did something; something great that once occurred. Time's passage has left clues about this being and these events only in the form of legends. Such clues point, as do legends and scriptural stories of all faith traditions, to timeless and universal spiritual truths significant to all people everywhere. What significance might this festival hold for us, living on this third Tuesday in February 2015?

While space in this column does not permit full description of the legends, in essence they describe the advent of God. The name *Shiva* has three intrinsic meanings: Point, Seed, and the "One who benefits all." The Upanishads describe Shiva as being "minutest of the minute", the One who, in the midst of chaos recreates the world; the Benevolent Being from whom everlasting peace is attained by those who know Him.

This Great God appears at midnight, the time of greatest darkness—which symbolizes the darkness of ignorance, injustice, irreligiousness, chaos and violence. In one legend, He manifests as an endless form of light, proving Himself to be more unlimited than any other being. This corresponds to God's appearance as Light in virtually all faith traditions, and references His unlimited capacity for love, truth and wisdom.

The legends indicate that He does wondrous things when He appears. He grants release from suffering to a soul who worships Him *inadvertently*, indicating how easy He is to please; He saves the world by drinking the poison which is about to engulf it; He brings to a parched, senseless earth the life-giving waters of the Ganges, the river of wisdom. He weds Parvati, symbolizing God's reunion with souls who are regenerated following the destruction that ensued when irreligiousness and defamation of God reached their peak.

We are living today—even in this relatively serene, lovely urban environment—in dark, treacherous times. It is a good day to cleanse ourselves of selfishness and greed by inwardly cultivating simplicity and generosity; a very good day to count our blessings and fast from anger, arrogance and desire. Though the world seems close to being engulfed by poison, let us remember that the night is darkest just before the dawn. Let us meditate on the redeeming Light of truth, love and mercy, pray for the advent of the Seed of wisdom and claim peace from the Benevolent Being—remembering that God rewards even inadvertent attempts of the sincere heart to stay “awake.”

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