

***Shivratri*: The Dawn – Confluence of Light and Darkness**

Shivratri is one of the most auspicious festivals of India. It commemorates the incarnation of God Shiva. *Shivratri* is composed of two words: *Shiv*, meaning a “benefactor” and *ratri*, meaning “night.” *Shiv* also signifies the form of God as a point of light, which is incorporeal, infinite, and immortal. *Ratri* puts the emphasis on the night. In today’s world the birth of any human being is celebrated as the birth “day,” even if the time of birth of the baby is in the middle of the night. However, God Shiva’s birth is remembered as birth “night,” and is observed as a time of transformation.

The deep spiritual significance of *Shivratri* focuses on the “time” that God Shiva descends on earth. Even though it is referred to as “night,” it is actually a transitional time of day and night, commonly called the “dawn.” This “dawn” is understood as the meeting of two ages, “*Kaliyug*” (Iron or age of ignorance), and “*Satyug*” (Golden or age of truth). On the one hand, this time is described as one of extreme darkness when the state of the world is very critical, and on the other hand, it is an auspicious time when a new world order emerges. A time described as “*Gyan surya pragata, agyan andher vinaash,*” which means “When the Sun of Knowledge rises, then the darkness of ignorance is dispelled.”

As the festival of *Shivratri* approaches, I find myself pondering on the question: Who is that Spiritual Sun, powerful enough to bring about such a colossal change in the world, and how can this magnanimous task of world transformation actually happen? So bear with me as I dive a little deeper to explore this phenomenon and how it relates to my spiritual practice as I live in our world today.

There is a very famous *shloka* (verse) in the *Bhagwatgita*: “*Yada yada hi dharmasya glanirbhawati bharat, abhyuthannam adharmasya tadatmanam srijamyaham.*” The literal meaning is, “Whenever there is decay of righteousness, and there is exaltation of unrighteousness, then I Myself come forth; for the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, and for the sake of firmly establishing righteousness, I am born from age to age.” Looking at the deteriorating conditions in all sectors of society around the world, we can easily appreciate that “the time” has come when God’s intervention is necessary to bring about a transformation in this world. If *Shivratri* is the time that this intervention takes place and God Shiva is already on earth performing the dance of creation, sustenance, and destruction, then how do we human beings recognize the presence of God and the subtle dynamic of changes that are happening as a result? Do we recognize this as the outpouring of books on the subjects of mindfulness, peace of mind, purity of intentions, unconditional love, and gross national happiness? Do we recognize this as a call to mitigate our carbon footprint by changing our lifestyle and diet and re-establishing a relationship of regard with Mother Nature? If God is in the process of bringing about a revolutionary change in this world at this very moment, what is stopping us from getting on board and jumping on His bandwagon?

I suppose the first step that I took was one of understanding the process. As promised, God has now descended from His Supreme Abode at the end of *Kaliyug* and is performing a divine dance of world transformation through the subtle acts of the Trinity -- Brahma (creation), Vishnu (sustenance) and Shankar (destruction). As God Himself is incorporeal and does not have a physical or subtle form, He uses a human being to impart the spiritual teachings.

As a student of the Brahma Kumaris, I understand that these teachings are the study of Raja Yoga, and the human being through which the teachings were imparted was Prajapita Brahma.

The study and practice of Raja Yoga is a process of the opening of the third eye. There is a saying that when the third eye of Shiva opens, then all impurities in the world are burnt into ashes. Something similar to the phoenix rising from the ashes to liberation in life. The third eye is the awakening of divine insight which God Shiva imparts through knowledge to the souls and restores them to their original divinity and self-sovereignty. The method of practice is “*Manmanabhav*,” which means to be in the remembrance of only One. When this practice is truly imbibed, it cleanses the soul and liberates it from sins, negativities, and impurities. This practice is called a purification process.

Shiva, the Supreme Soul, fills the aprons (intellects) of souls with the treasures of wisdom, spiritual power, and divine virtues. But for the intellect to hold God’s treasures, it is required to be like a golden vessel. It needs to develop “*preet*,” love for the Truth. So God Shiva begins the process of purification by showering unlimited love on souls so that they can cultivate all relationships with Him, but in particular the relationships of Father, Teacher, and *Satguru* (Supreme Guide). Savoring the spiritual attainments experienced in being in relationship with God, the soul realizes the most important lesson that is vital to this time: “Consider the self to be a soul, seated in the center of the forehead, and remember only God, the Supreme Soul, the Purifier, the Remover of Sorrow and Bestower of Happiness.”

This is the message that I would like to share with all at this benevolent time of *Shivratri*. The message is simple to understand, and the practice is easy to

do. The right time is now, and the right place is exactly where you are. Every moment spent in the remembrance of One gives value to time. Every thought created in the awareness of being with One transforms the attitude, vision, and action, impacting the world in wondrous ways.

On behalf of the Brahma Kumaris, I wish you a very meaningful and significant *Shivratri*.

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