

Shivaratri

By

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Introduction

This falls on the 13th (or 14th) day of the dark half of Phalgun

(February-March). The name means "the night of Shiva". The ceremonies take place chiefly at night. This is a festival observed in honour of Lord Shiva.

Shiva was married to Parvati on this day.

People observe a strict fast on this day. Some devotees do not even take a drop of water. They keep vigil all night. The Shiva Lingam is worshipped throughout the night by washing it every three hours with milk, curd, honey,

rose water, etc., whilst the chanting of the Mantra Om Namah Shivaya continues. Offerings of bael leaves are made to the Lingam. Bael leaves are very sacred as, it is said, Lakshmi resides in them.

Hymns in praise of Lord Shiva, such as the Shiva Mahimna Stotra of Pushpadanta or Ravana's Shiva Tandava Stotra are sung with great fervour and devotion. People repeat the Panchakshara Mantra, Om Namah Shivaya. He who utters the Names of Shiva during Shivaratri, with perfect devotion and concentration, is freed from all sins. He reaches the abode of Shiva and lives there happily. He is liberated from the wheel of births and deaths. Many pilgrims flock to the places where there are Shiva temples.

The Story of King Chitrabhanu

In the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, Bhishma, whilst resting on the bed of arrows and discoursing on Dharma, refers to the observance of Maha Shivaratri by King Chitrabhanu. The story goes as follows.

Once upon a time King Chitrabhanu of the Ikshvaku dynasty, who ruled over the whole of Jambudvipa, was observing a fast with his wife, it being the day of Maha Shivaratri. The sage Ashtavakra came on a visit to the court of the king.

The sage asked, "O king! why are you observing a fast today?"

King Chitrabhanu explained why. He had the gift of remembering the incidents of his previous birth.

The king said to the sage: "In my past birth I was a hunter in Varanasi. My name was Suswara. My livelihood was to kill and sell birds and animals. One

day I was roaming the forests in search of animals. I was overtaken by the darkness of night. Unable to return home, I climbed a tree for shelter. It happened to be a bael tree. I had shot a deer that day but I had no time to take it home. I bundled it up and tied it to a branch on the tree. As I was tormented by hunger and thirst, I kept awake throughout the night. I shed profuse tears when I thought of my poor wife and children who were starving and anxiously awaiting my return. To pass away the time that night I engaged myself in plucking the bael leaves and dropping them down onto the ground.

"The day dawned. I returned home and sold the deer. I bought some food for myself and for my family. I was about to break my fast when a stranger came to me, begging for food. I served him first and then took my food.

"At the time of death, I saw two messengers of Lord Shiva. They were sent down to conduct my soul to the abode of Lord Shiva. I learnt then for the first time of the great merit I had earned by the unconscious worship of Lord Shiva during the night of Shivaratri. They told me that there was a Lingam at the bottom of the tree. The leaves I dropped fell on the Lingam. My tears which I had shed out of pure sorrow for my family fell onto the Lingam and washed it. And I had fasted all day and all night. Thus did I unconsciously worship the Lord.

"I lived in the abode of the Lord and enjoyed divine bliss for long ages. I am now reborn as Chitrabhanu."

Spiritual Significance of the Ritual

The Scriptures record the following dialogue between Sastri and Atmanathan,

giving the inner meaning of the above story.

Sastri: It is an allegory. The wild animals that the hunter fought with are lust, anger, greed, infatuation, jealousy and hatred. The jungle is the fourfold mind, consisting of the subconscious mind, the intellect, the ego and the conscious mind. It is in the mind that these "wild animals" roam about freely. They must be killed. Our hunter was pursuing them because he was a Yogi. If you want to be a real Yogi you have to conquer these evil tendencies. Do you remember the name of the hunter in the story?

Atmanathan: Yes, he was called Suswara.

Sastri: That's right. It means "melodious". The hunter had a pleasant melodious voice. If a person practices Yama and Niyama and is ever conquering his evil tendencies, he will develop certain external marks of a Yogi. The first marks are lightness of the body, health, steadiness, clearness of countenance and a pleasant voice. This stage has been spoken of in detail in the Swetaswatara Upanishad. The hunter or the Yogi had for many years practised Yoga and had reached the first stage. So he is given the name Suswara. Do you remember where he was born?

Atmanathan: Yes, his birthplace is Varanasi.

Sastri: Now, the Yogis call the Ajna Chakra by the name Varanasi. This is the point midway between the eyebrows. It is regarded as the meeting place of the three nerve currents (Nadis), namely, the Ida, Pingala and the Sushumna. An aspirant is instructed to concentrate on that point. That helps him to conquer his desires and evil qualities like anger and so on. It is

there that he gets a vision of the Divine Light within.

Atmanathan: Very interesting! But how do you explain his climbing up the bael tree and all the other details of the worship?

Sastri: Have you ever seen a bael leaf?

Atmanathan: It has three leaves on one stalk.

Sastri: True. The tree represents the spinal column. The leaves are threefold. They represent the Ida, Pingala and Sushumna Nadis, which are the regions for the activity of the moon, the sun and fire respectively, or which may be thought of as the three eyes of Shiva. The climbing of the tree is meant to represent the ascension of the Kundalini Shakti, the serpentine power, from the lowest nerve centre called the Muladhara to the Ajna Chakra.

That is the work of the Yogi.

Atmanathan: Yes, I have heard of the Kundalini and the various psychic centres in the body. Please go on further; I am very interested to know more.

Sastri: Good. The Yogi was in the waking state when he began his meditation.

He bundled up the birds and the animals he had slain and, tying them on a branch of the tree, he rested there. That means he had fully conquered his thoughts and rendered them inactive. He had gone through the steps of Yama, Niyama, Pratyahara, etc. On the tree he was practising concentration and meditation. When he felt sleepy, it means that he was about to lose consciousness and go into deep sleep. So he determined to keep awake.

Atmanathan: That is now clear to me; you certainly do explain it very well.

But why did he weep for his wife and children?

Sastri: His wife and children are none other than the world. One who seeks the Grace of God must become an embodiment of love. He must have an all-embracing sympathy. His shedding of tears is symbolical of his universal love. In Yoga also, one cannot have illumination without Divine Grace.

Without practising universal love, one cannot win that Grace. One must perceive one's own Self everywhere. The preliminary stage is to identify one's own mind with the minds of all created beings. That is fellow-feeling or sympathy. Then one must rise above the limitations of the mind and merge it in the Self. That happens only in the stage of Samadhi, not earlier.

Atmanathan: Why did he pluck and drop the bael leaves?

Sastri: That is mentioned in the story only to show that he had no extraneous thoughts. He was not even conscious of what he was doing. All his activity was confined to the three Nadis. The leaves, I have said before, represent the three Nadis. He was in fact in the second state, namely, the dream state, before he passed into the deep sleep state.

Atmanathan: He kept vigil the whole night, it is said.

Sastri: Yes, that means that he passed through the deep sleep state successfully. The dawning of day symbolises the entrance into the Fourth state called Turiya or superconsciousness.

Atmanathan: It is said that he came down and saw the Lingam. What does that mean?

Sastri: That means that in the Turiya state he saw the Shiva Lingam or the

mark of Shiva in the form of the inner lights. In other words, he had the vision of the Lord. That was an indication to him that he would realise the supreme, eternal abode of Lord Shiva in course of time.

Atmanathan: So it appears from what you say that the sight of the lights is not the final stage?

Sastri: Oh no! That is only one step, albeit a difficult one. Now think of how the story continues. He goes home and feeds a stranger. A stranger is one whom you have not seen before. The stranger is no other than the hunter himself, transformed into a new person. The food was the likes and dislikes which he had killed the previous night. But he did not consume the whole of it. A little still remained. That was why he had to be reborn as King

Chitrabhanu. Going to the world of Shiva (Salokya) is not enough to prevent this. There are other stages besides Salokya. These are Samipya, Sarupya and finally Sayujya. Have you not heard of Jaya and Vijaya returning from Vaikunta?

Atmanathan: Yes, I have understood now.

Lord Shiva's Assurance

When creation had been completed, Shiva and Parvati went out to live on the top of Mount Kailas. Parvati asked, "O venerable Lord! which of the many rituals observed in Thy honour doth please Thee most?"

The Lord replied, "The 14th night of the new moon, in the dark fortnight during the month of Phalgun, is my most favourite day. It is known as Shivaratri. My devotees give me greater happiness by mere fasting than by

ceremonial baths and offerings of flowers, sweets and incense.

"The devotee observes strict spiritual discipline in the day and worships Me in four different forms during each of the four successive three-hour periods of the night. The offering of a few bael leaves is more precious to Me than the precious jewels and flowers. My devotee should bathe Me in milk at the first period, in curd at the second, in clarified butter at the third, and in honey at the fourth and last. Next morning, he should feed the Brahmins first and, after performing the prescribed ceremonies, he can break his fast. O Parvati! there is no ritual which can compare with this simple routine in sanctity."

Parvati was deeply impressed by the speech of Lord Shiva. She repeated it to Her friends who in their turn passed it on to the ruling princes on earth.

Thus was the sanctity of Shivaratri broadcast all over the world.

The two great natural forces that afflict man are Rajas (the quality of passionate activity) and Tamas (that of inertia). The Shivaratri Vrata aims at the perfect control of these two. The entire day is spent at the Feet of the Lord. Continuous worship of the Lord necessitates the devotee's constant presence in the place of worship. Motion is controlled. Evils like lust, anger, and jealousy, born of Rajas are ignored and subdued. The devotee observes vigil throughout the night and thus conquers Tamas also. Constant vigilance is imposed on the mind. Every three hours a round of worship of the Shiva Lingam is conducted. Shivaratri is a perfect Vrata.

The formal worship consists of bathing the Lord. Lord Shiva is considered to

be the Form of Light (which the Shiva Lingam represents). He is burning with the fire of austerity. He is therefore best propitiated with cool bathing.

While bathing the Lingam the devotee prays: "O Lord! I will bathe Thee with water, milk, etc. Do Thou kindly bathe me with the milk of wisdom. Do Thou kindly wash me of all my sins, so that the fire of worldliness which is scorching me may be put out once for all, so that I may be one with Thee-the One alone without a second."

At the Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, the Shivaratri festival is celebrated in the following manner.

1. All spiritual aspirants fast the whole day, many of them without taking even a single drop of water.
2. A grand havan is performed for the peace and welfare of all.
3. The whole day is spent in doing the Japa of Om Namah Shivaya and in meditation upon the Lord.
4. At night all assemble in the temple and chant Om Namah Shivaya the whole night.
5. During the four quarters of the night the Shiva Lingam is worshipped with intense devotion.
6. Sannyas Diksha is also given on this day to sincere seekers on the path.

Offer this inner worship to Lord Shiva daily: "I worship the jewel of my Self, the Shiva residing in the Lotus of my heart. I bathe Him with the water of my pure mind brought from the river of faith and devotion. I worship Him with the fragrant flowers of Samadhi-all this so that I may not

be born again in this world."

Here is another formula for the supreme worship of the Lord: "O Shiva! you are my Self. My mind is Parvati. My Pranas are your servants. My body is your house. My actions in this world are your worship. My sleep is Samadhi. My walk is circumambulation of you. My speech is your prayer. Thus do I offer all that I am to you.

SIVA -THE MYSTIC NIGHT

by Swami Krishnananda

A talk given on 22nd of February, 1973, a week before Maha-Sivaratri.

We conceive God as glory, as creativity and as austerity. Vishnu is glory and magnificence; Brahma is creativity force; and Siva is austerity and renunciation. You might have heard it said that God is the embodiment of six attributes of which renunciation is one. You will be wondering how can God renounce things. He is not a Sannyasin (renunciate). He is not an ascetic like a Vairagin (a dispassionate person) or a Sadhu. What is he going to renounce? How do you conceive Siva as an austere Yogin or a renunciate? What does He renounce? The all-pervading Almighty, what has he to give up or abandon? Here is the secret of what renunciation is! It is not renunciation of anything, because there is nothing outside Him; renunciation does not mean abandonment of an object. If that had been the definition of renunciation, that cannot apply to God. God does not renounce or abandon any object, because all objects are a part of His Cosmic Body. Then how do you represent God as an embodiment of Vairagya (dispassion)? Bhagavan, who is

endowed with 'Bhaga' or glories of a sixfold nature, is also an embodiment of Vairagya. Do you identify Him with a Sannyasin, possessing nothing? No, never. God is the possessor of all things. Then, how can you call him a renunciate, a Sannyasin or a Vairagin? The secret behind the concept or the consciousness of Vairagya, renunciation is here, in the identification of this attribute with God. It is only when we interpret things in terms of God that things become clear. Otherwise, we get confused, we cannot know what goodness is, we cannot know what evil is, we cannot know what virtue is, unless we refer all these values of life to the concept of God in His Perfection. The only standard of reference for us in all matters of life's value is the existence of God. So, the concept of renunciation, which has been very much misused, also gets rectified, clarified and purified when it is understood with reference to the existence of God-whose special manifestation, in this context, is known as Lord Siva.

God does not renounce anything. Then, in that case what is renunciation, in this context? It is the freedom from the consciousness of externality. This is called Vairagya. How can you abandon things? All things are there in front of you, like trees in a forest, stones in the jungle. There is nothing like abandonment of things, because they are internally related to you.

Nobody can renounce anything, because everything in this world is connected to everything else. Then what is Vairagya? Vairagya is not renunciation of any object; it is impossible. Everything clings to you. But the idea that things are outside you, makes you get attached to them. This false

attachment is Raga and its absence is Vi-raga. The condition of Viraga is Vairagya. As God has no consciousness of externality, because everything is embodied in Him, there cannot be a greater renunciate than God. And in as much as this Consciousness of God is the highest form of Wisdom, He is the repository of Jnana.

In our religious tradition, Lord Siva is represented as an aspect of God, the Almighty. He presents before us the ideal of supreme renunciation born of Divine Realisation. Renunciation born of Divine Realisation, not born of frustration, not born of an escapist attitude, not born of defeatism, but born of an insight into the nature of things, a clear understanding of the nature of life and the wisdom of existence in its completeness. This is the source of Vairagya or renunciation. You do not want anything, not because you cannot get things, but because you have realised the interconnectedness of things, and the unity of all purpose in consciousness. All desires get hushed, sublimated and boiled down to the divine Being only when this realisation comes. God does not possess things. Possession is a relationship of one thing with another thing. But, God is super-relative. That is why we call Him as the Absolute; He is not relative. Anything that is related to something else comes under the category of relative. God is not related to anything else, because He is All-comprehensive. And, thus, in His all-comprehensive Absoluteness, which is height of wisdom conceivable, there is also the concomitant character of freedom from the consciousness of externality, and therefore, as a corollary, freedom from attachment to

anything. Thus Lord Siva is the height of austerity, Master Yogin, portrayed as seated in a lotus-pose, as the king of all ascetics; not that He has the desire for self-control but He is what is self-control itself. He does not practise self-control. Self-control itself is symbolised in the personality of Lord Siva. Such a wondrous concept of a glorious majestic picture of the Almighty, as Lord Siva, is before us for adoration during the Maha Sivaratri.

We observe fast during the day and vigil during the night. The idea is that we control the senses, which represent the out-going tendency of our mind, symbolised in fast, and we control also the Tamasic inert condition of sleep to which we are subject everyday. When these two tendencies in us are overcome, we transcend the conscious and the unconscious levels of our personality and reach the superconscious level. While, the waking condition is the conscious level, sleep is the unconscious level. Both are obstacles to God-realisation. We are shifted from one condition to another. We are shunted, as it were, from waking to sleep and from sleep to waking everyday. But the super-conscious is not known to us. The symbology of fast and vigil on Sivaratri is significant of self-control; Rajas and Tamas are subdued, and God is glorified. The glorification of God and the control of the senses mean one and the same thing. Because, it is only in God-Consciousness that all senses can be controlled. When you see God, the senses melt, like butter melting before fire. They cannot exist any more. All the ornaments become the solid mass of gold when they are heated to the boiling point. Likewise,

in the furnace of God-consciousness, the sense-energies melt into a continuum of universality.

In the famous Rudra-Adhyaya or the Satarudriya of the Yajur-Veda, we have a majestic, universalised description of Lord Siva, a chant which we are accustomed to everyday in the temple. Only those who know what Sanskrit is, what the Vedas are and what worship is, can appreciate what this Satarudriya chant also is. It is one of the most powerful prayers ever conceived by the human mind. It is filled with a threefold meaning. According to the culture of this country, everything is threefold,-objective, subjective and universal. Everything in the world, from the smallest to the biggest, has an objective character, a subjective character and an universal character.

Objectively you are something, subjectively you are another thing and universally you are a third thing. It all depends upon from what point of view you interpret a particular thing, person or object. When you objectively interpret a thing, it looks one thing; when you subjectively analyse it, it is another thing; and from the universal point of view, it is something third altogether. Likewise, this Mantra, the Satarudriya of the Yajurveda, a hymn to Lord Siva, has an objective meaning, a subjective meaning and a divine, supreme, supramental, universal meaning. Objectively, it is a prayer for the control of the forces of nature. Subjectively, it is a prayer for self-control and the rousing of the spiritual consciousness.

Universally, it is a surge of the soul towards God-realisation. It has an Adhiyajnika, Adhibhautika, Adhidaivika and Adhyatmika meaning, as we usually

put it. It has a tremendous meaning. The Vedas, the Mantras of the Vedas, are filled with such threefold or fourfold meaning. Hence it is difficult to understand the full meaning of any Mantra of the Veda. "Ananta Vai Vedah"-Infinite is the meaning of the Vedas. The meaning of the Veda is infinite. It has no end at all. It is mathematics, it is chemistry, it is physics, it is Ayurveda, it is psychology, it is metaphysics, it is philosophy, it is spirituality, it is meditation, it is love, it is ecstasy.

You will find everything in every Mantra of the Veda. All depends upon how you look upon it, how you feel it. A person can be a father, he may be a brother, he may be a son, he may be a friend, but all the while he is one and the same person. Attitudes are different on account of various relationships connected. So the Rudra Adhyaya is before us, a majestic prayer for world-peace, international-peace, subjective peace, universal peace and God-Consciousness.

It is difficult to chant this Veda Mantra called the Satarudriya, because it requires a training, as in music, for example. Everybody cannot sing. It requires a tremendous training for years together. Likewise, the chanting of the Mantras of the Veda requires training for years together, not for a few days only. Just as one who does not know how to sing, will make a jarring noise and you will like to get up and go away rather than listen to it, so also when you chant the Mantra wrongly, Gods will get up and go away. They do not bear it any more. So, it requires training. But once it is properly learnt, it becomes a protection for you from catastrophies of every

kind,-physical, psychological and what not. So, those who know may chant it, recite it and take part in the recitation of it everyday in the temple, at least during the worship on Mahasivaratri.

Those who cannot do this because it is difficult, can chant the Mantra 'Om Namah Sivaya', the Panchakshara Mantra of Lord Siva with Om preceding it. It is a Kavacha; a kind of armour that you put on. This armour will protect you from danger of every kind. It will protect you and also all those whom you want to be protected. It will protect your family, will protect your country, will protect the whole world. It can cease wars and tensions of every kind, provided you offer the prayers wholeheartedly from the bottom of your heart. Collective prayer is very effective. If a hundred persons join together and pray, it will have a greater effect than one person praying. Of course, if that single person is very powerful, even one person's prayer is alright. But, where personalities have their own weaknesses and foibles, it is better that people have congregational prayer. When all the minds are put together they form a great energy. It surges forth into God. So during this period preceding Sivaratri prayer is to be, offered to Lord Siva, as the Master of Yogin, as the incarnation of all virtues and powers, as a facet of the Almighty Lord. The glory of Lord Siva is sung in the Siva Purana, in the Yajur Veda Rudra Adhyaya as I mentioned, and in the Mahabharata. You will be wonderstruck at the force with which Vyasa and other Sages sing the glories of God, of Vishnu, of Narayana, of Siva, of Devi in the various Puranas and Epics, because these masterpieces have been written by those who had the

vision of God. Only one who has the vision of God can express in soulful force. Otherwise, it will be an empty sound without much significance and thought. So, chant the Mantra 'Om Namah Sivaya' as many times as possible everyday, mentally or even verbally as is convenient, with self-control, which means to say without any thought of sense-object. If you chant the Mantra together with the thought of sense-objects, then there is divided devotion. It is like dividing the course of a river in two different directions so that the force of the waters gets lessened. Suppose you have five sense-objects and towards all of them your senses are running, and you are thinking of God also at the same time. Then, you know, energy is divided, concentration becomes weak and meditation is not successful. No meditation will become successful, if the senses are active; because, the senses are the opposite of the effort at meditation. While meditation is the collective force of the mind concentrating itself on God-consciousness, the senses, when they are active, do the opposite of meditation and you become a tremendous extrovert. You are connected to the objects of sense, rather than the universal concept which is God. God is unity, whereas sense objects are multiplicity. They are the opposite of what you are aiming at in your spiritual life. With moderate behaviour in every manner in your spiritual life, you will attain to success. As the Bhagavad Gita beautifully puts it, 'moderate in your eating, moderate in your activity, moderate in your speech, moderate in your sleep'-form the golden mean, the via-media, the golden path. God is the harmony of all powers in the universe. Harmony means

the middle course, neither this extreme nor that extreme. You cannot say whether it is or it is not. We don't know what it is. As Buddha said: " 'Nothing is', is one extreme; 'everything is', is another extreme. God is in the middle. Truth is in the middle." So, the middle path is the best path, which is the path of austerity with understanding. This is the characteristic of the middle path. When there is understanding without austerity, it is useless. When there is austerity without understanding, that is also useless. There must be austerity with understanding and understanding with austerity, knowledge with self-control and self-control with knowledge, that is wisdom. Knowledge with self-control is called wisdom, whereas knowledge without self-control is mere dry intellectuality. That is of no use. And austerity without understanding is a kind of foolishness. It will have no proper result. So, Lord Siva is not merely an austere Being but also a repository of Knowledge. All worshippers of knowledge also worship Lord Siva, as He is the God of all students, scholars and seekers of wisdom and knowledge. Thus, Maha-Sivaratri is a very blessed God-sent opportunity for us. So on this day, pray to Lord Siva with all your heart, with all your soul, fully trusting on the might of God, wanting nothing from the objects of sense and delighted within that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. God is bound to come. The powers of the cosmos are everywhere and they can be invoked at any time by us, provided we are strong enough in our will and in the method of invocation. We are blessed because we live in the Kingdom of God. We are blessed because we are seekers of

Truth. We are blessed because we are disciples of a great Master. We are blessed, thrice blessed, four-times, five-times blessed because we are seeking God who also seeks everything in this creation. God seeks the world and the world seeks God. This is the mystery of creation, the subtlety of the spiritual path and the glory of the meditative life. Jnana and Vairagya combined is Lord Siva who is worshipped on Mahasivaratri day.

Lord Siva is easily pleased. He is called Asutosh. Asutosh means 'easily pleased'. He is not a difficult Person. You can quickly please Lord Siva. If you call Him, He will come. Sometimes He is also called 'Bhole Baba', very simple, not a complicated Person. He comes to help you even unasked. He did help the Pandavas. The Pandava brothers were in war with the Kauravas in the battle in the Mahabharata. And Lord Siva helped them without their knowing that the help was being offered. Lord Siva helped the Pandavas invisibly and why not He help us? He helps all those who tread the righteous path. So let us tread the path of righteousness and be recipients of Divine Grace.

We may look at the whole thing from another angle of vision. The Sanskrit word Sivaratri means 'the night of Siva'. On this holy day we are to fast during the day and keep vigil during the night. You may be wondering why Siva is connected with the night and not with the day, in which case we can observe vigil during day-time and fast during the night! Instead of that why the whole thing has been put topsy-turvy! Siva being connected with night has a highly spiritual and mystical connotation. It is not that divinity as manifest in the form of Lord Siva has any special connection with the period

we call night. If you study deeply the Upanishads and such mystical texts of high spiritual significance, you will realise that the Supreme Being, the Absolute, is designated in its primordial condition as a supreme Darkness due to excess of light. This adjective or qualification 'due to excess of light' must be added. It is darkness because of the excess of light. When you look at the sun for a few minutes with open eyes and then look elsewhere, you will see only darkness. The sun has dazzled you to such an extent that all appear as darkness. It is said in the Mahabharata that when Lord Sri Krishna showed the Cosmic Form in the court of the Kauravas, everything was dark, as it were. The intensity of the light was such that it looked like darkness to the eyes of man. So, in one of the famous creation-hymns of the Rigveda we have a similar reference made to the original condition of creation. There is the hymn of the Veda called the Nasadiya Sukta, wherein it is said: Tama asit tamasa gudhamagre-"Darkness there was; at first concealed in darkness." According to us, light is perception of objects, and therefore non-perception of objects is regarded by us as night. Because, knowledge or consciousness unrelated to the perceptual process is unknown to the human mind. Generally, to know is to know an object; and if it is not to know an object, it is not to know anything at all. For example, take the state of deep sleep. Why do we fall asleep? Do you know the reason? What is the cause for our going to sleep every night? Where is the necessity? The necessity is psychological and to some extent highly metaphysical. The senses cannot always continue

perceiving objects, because perception is a fatiguing process. The whole body, the whole nervous system, the entire psychological apparatus becomes active in the process of the perception of objects. And without our knowing what is happening the senses get tired. They cannot go on contemplating things all the twentyfour hours of the day. Why should they not be contemplating objects of sense throughout the day, all the twentyfour hours of the day? The reason is that perception is an unnatural process from the point of view of consciousness as such. Perception of an object is the alienation-of an aspect of our personality through the avenue of a particular sense in respect of its object. All this is difficult. for many to grasp. This is a highly psychological, secret. Consciousness is indivisible. This is a simple fact. Many of you would have heard about it. Consciousness is undivided, incapable of division into parts. So it cannot be cut into two sections, of subject and object. On the basis of this fact there cannot be a division between the seer and the seen in the process of perception. To make this clear, let us see what happens in dream.

In dream we see objects like mountains, rivers, persons, etc. But they are not there. Things which are not there become visible in dream. Now, did the mountain you saw in dream exist? It did not. But did you see it? Yes, you saw it. How did you see, when it was not there? Is it possible to see a non-existent object? How can non-existent things be seen? It is contradictory statement to say that non-existent things can be seen. What do you see when things are not there? You will be wonderstruck! What happens in

dream is that there is an alienation of the mind into the objects of perception; and the mind itself becomes the mountain there. There is tension created due to the separation of a part of the mind into the object and a part of it existing as the perceiving subject. That is why we are restless in dream. We cannot be happy. It is neither waking nor it is sleep. It is very difficult to be happy in this condition because a tense situation of consciousness is created. What happened in dream, the same happens to us in the waking condition also. Just as the mind in dream divided itself into two sections, the perceiving subject and the object that was seen, in the waking state also, it divides itself into the subject and object. It is like a divided personality. It is as if your own personality has been cut into two halves, of which one half is the 'seer' and the other half is the 'seen'. It is as if one part of your personality gazes at another part of your own personality. You are looking at your own self as if you are a different person. You are objectifying yourself, you alienate yourself. What can be more false and undesirable than this situation? It is a mental sickness.

Now we are able to understand this situation in dream on account of the comparison that we make between waking and dream. When you wake up, you do not see the dream objects and then you begin to analyse the condition in which you were when you were dreaming. We say, when we are awake, we are in a world of reality, whereas in dream we were in a world of unreality. How do you know that the world of dream was a world of unreality? Merely because, we compare it with the waking condition which we consider as real. How do

you know that the world of waking is real? You cannot say anything about this, because there is nothing with which you can compare it, as you did in the case of the dream. If you can know another standard of reference, higher than the waking condition, you would have been able to make a judgement of it, whether it is real or unreal, good or bad and so on. When you are dreaming, you do not know that the objects are unreal. You consider them as real and you take it for granted. The comparison between the dream and the waking world, is responsible for our judgement of the unreality of the dream world. But with what will you compare the waking world? There is at present nothing to compare it with, and therefore we are in a condition which is self-sufficient, self-complacent and incapable of rectification. When you feel that you are perfectly right, nobody can teach you. Nobody can set you right, because you think that you are right. The question of teaching arises only when you feel that you are ignorant and you need teaching. The waking world is only an indication to us as to what could be happening or what is perhaps happening. We cannot know what is happening actually, unless we transcend this condition, which we have not done yet. But, by the conclusion that we can draw from an analysis of the dream-condition, we can conclude to some extent that in the waking state also we are in a fool's paradise. What is the guarantee that we will not wake up again from this waking world, into something else? As in dream you did not know that you were dreaming, in this waking also you do not know that you are in a state similar to dream. You think that this world in waking is a hard fact and a solid reality, just as

you believed the world of dream also to be. Now to the senses an absence of perception is, equal to darkness, the darkness that we experience in deep sleep.

Let us come back to the subject of Sivaratri, the night of Siva. When you perceive an object you call it waking. When you do not perceive it, it is darkness. Now you see in the waking condition, the so-called waking world, present before us a world of objects as we are intelligent. In dream also there is a sort of intelligence. But in sleep there is no intelligence. What happens? The senses and the intellect withdraw themselves into their source.

There is no perceptual activity and so the absence of perception is equated to the presence of darkness. The cosmic Primeval condition of the creative will of God, before creation,-a state appearing like darkness, or night-is what we call the condition of Siva. It is very important to remember that the state of Siva is the primordial condition of the creative will of God, where there is no externality of perception, there being nothing outside God; and so, for us, it is like darkness or night. It is Siva's night, Sivaratri. For Him it is not night. It is all Light. Siva is not sitting in darkness. The Creative Will of God is Omniscience, Omnipotence, Omnipresence, all combined. Sometimes we designate this condition as Isvara. The Supreme Absolute, which is indeterminable, when it is associated with the Creative Will with a tendency to create the Cosmos, is Isvara in Vedantic parlance and Siva in Puranic terminology. This is the very precise condition described in the Nasadiya Sukta of the Veda as Tamas

or darkness. This is to repeat again, darkness due to the excess of the Light of the divine Absolute. If you look at God, what will you see? You will see nothing. The eyes cannot see Him. Because He is such dazzling light. When the frequency of light gets intensified to a very high level, light will not be seen by the eyes. When the frequency is lowered, comes down to the level of the structure of the retina of the eye, only then you can see light. There are various kinds of lights, various intensities or frequencies, and the higher frequencies are incapable of cognisance by the senses on account of their structural deformity. So if you see God, you will see nothing.

As a matter of fact, we are seeing God even now. But we are not able to recognise Him. The world that we see before us is God Himself. There is no such thing as the world. The world does not exist. It is, only a name that we have given to the Supreme Being. Call the dog a bad name and then hang it. Who asked you to call it a world? Why do you give such a name? You yourself have given it a name and say, 'Oh, this is the world!' You can call it by another name. You are free to give any name to it. Really there is no such thing as a world. It does not exist. The world is only a name that we give to a distortion created in the perception of our consciousness due to its isolation into the subject and the object.

To come back to the analogy of dream again, the mountain that we saw in dream was not a mountain; it was only consciousness. There was no mountain. But it looked like a hard something in front of you, against which you could

hit your dream head. You see buildings in dream. It was consciousness that projected itself into the hard substance of bricks and buildings, mountains and rivers, persons and animals, etc., in dream. The world of dream does not exist. You know it very well, and yet it appears. What is it that appears?

The consciousness itself, projects itself outwardly, in space and time created by itself, and then, you call it a world. Likewise, in the waking state also the Cosmic Consciousness has projected itself into this world.

The world is Cosmic Consciousness. The Supreme Divinity Himself is revealed here in the form of this world. As the dream world is nothing but consciousness, the waking world also is nothing but consciousness, God. This is the essence of the whole matter. So you are seeing God. I am right in saying that. What you see in front of you is God only. It is not a building.

There is no such thing as a building. But we call it a building due to an error of perception, due to ignorance and due to not being able to analyse the situation in which we are involved. We are caught up in a mess, in a paradox, in a confusion and the confusion has entered us, entered into the bones, as it were, into the very fibre of our being and made us fools that we are today. It is to awaken ourselves from this ignorance and to come to a state of that supreme blessedness of the recognition of God in this very world, that we practise Sadhana. The highest of Sadhanas is meditation on God.

On Sivaratri, therefore, you are supposed to contemplate God as the creator of the world, as the Supreme Being unknown to the Creative Will, in that

primordial condition of non-objectivity which is the darkness of Siva. In the Bhagavad Gita, we have a similar verse which has some sort of a resemblance to this situation. "Ya nisa sarvabhutanam tasyam Jagarti samyami; yasyam jagrati bhutani sa nisa pasyato muneh." "That which is night to the ignorant, is day to the wise; and that which is day to the wise, is night to the ignorant.' The ignorant feel the world as day light and a brightly illumined objective something, and that does not exist for a wise person. The wise see God in all His effulgence and that does not exist for the ignorant. While the wise see God, the ignorant does not see Him; and while the ignorant see the world, the wise do not see it. That is the meaning of this-verse in the second chapter of the Gita. When we see sunlight, the owl does not see it. That is the difference. The owl cannot see the sun, but we can. So, we are owls, because we do not see the self-effulgent Sun, the pure Consciousness. And he who sees this Sun, the pure Consciousness, God, is the sage, the illumined adept in Yoga.

So Sivaratri is a blessed occasion for all to practise self-restraint, self-control, contemplation, Svadhyaya, Japa and meditation, as much as possible within our capacity. We have a whole of the night at our disposal. We can do Japa or we can do the chanting of the Mantra, Om Namah Sivaya. You can also meditate. It is a period of Sadhana. Functions like the Maha Sivaratri, Ramanavami, Janmashtami, Navaratri are not functions in the sense of festoons and celebrations for the satisfaction of the human mind; they are functions of the Spirit, they are celebrations of the Spirit. In as much

as we are unable to think of God throughout the day, for all the 365 days of the year, such occasions are created, so that at least periodically we may recall to our memory our original destiny, our Divine Abode. The glory of God is displayed before us in the form of these spiritual occasions.