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Shiva Devotion and Meditation As It Is

By

Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.



Gita Satsang Ghent, Belgium

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Shiva Devotion and Meditation As It Is

The psyche is the greatest of all cosmic wonders and the “sine qua non” of the world as an object. It is in the highest degree odd that Western man, with but very few – and ever fewer – exceptions, apparently pays so little regard to this fact. Swamped by the knowledge of external objects, the subject of all knowledge has been temporarily eclipsed to the point of seeming nonexistence.” (Carl Gustav Jung, psychologist.)

Shiva is the god of the yogis, self-controlled and celibate, responsible for change both in the form of death and destruction and in the positive sense of destroying the ego, the false identification with the form. This also includes the shedding of old habits and attachments. Lord Shiva is the destroyer of the world and restorer, following Brahma the creator and Vishnu the preserver, after which Brahma again creates the world and so on.

Shiva is 'shakti' or power, Shiva is the destroyer, the most powerful god of the Hindu pantheon and one of the godheads in the Hindu Trinity. Known by many names - Mahadeva, Mahayogi, Pashupati, Nataraja, Bhairava, Vishwanath, Bhava, Bhole Nath, Lord Shiva is perhaps the most complex of Hindu deities. Hindus recognise this by putting his shrine in the temple separate from those of other deities.

Lord Shiva is destroying and restoring. Old things are passed away, new things have now come. In the Hindu religion, Shiva (or Shiva), is the "One who purifies everyone by the utterance of His name" or the "Pure One". Shiva is one of the Hindu trinity or trimurti, which includes Brahma (creator) and Vishnu (preserver). Although he is the lord of destruction, this is a positive aspect since it represents the destruction of evil and since creation follows destruction. One may ask the question what is good, and what is evil! Shiva transcends all form and, therefore, can appear in many different forms, such as the lingam or Nataraja (Dancing Shiva). His consort is the beautiful Parvati.

In the Bhagavad Gita, the dialogue of the Supreme Lord Krishna and Arjuna on the battlefield of Kuruksetra, “God-realisation”, or siddhi means Self-realisation in the highest sense of the term. One consciously realises his oneness with the Supreme. As long as the seeker remains in ignorance, he will feel that the Supreme is someone else who has infinite Power, while he, the seeker or devotee, is the feeblest person on earth. But the moment he realises the Supreme, he comes to know that he and the Supreme (God) are absolutely one in both the inner and the outer life. God-realisation means one's **identification** with one's absolute Highest Self. When one can identify with one's “Highest Self Within” and remain in that consciousness forever, when one can reveal and

manifest it at one's own command, that is God-realisation", that is Self-realization.

I am suggesting to purchase the Shiva (Siva) handbook for worship written by Sri Swami Shivananda, Founder of the Divine Life Society (free download on Scribd). The book reveals everything you should know about the Lord Shiva, and how to reach Him in your Inner Self (your Greater Self) through yielding devotion, meditation, and a correct way of life. Enter Shiva's dance of life.



Shiva Lingam is a wide spread Indian Phallic figure. It consists of a feminine base 'Yoni' or 'vagina' and a rising masculine portion 'the Phallus' or 'penis.' The Linga artifacts, dating from the first century BC to the third century AD, are shaped like realistic 'Phalli'. Thereafter the shape becomes progressively more abstract. By medieval times, its observable portion, rising from the Yoni, forms a round block with domed apex. Shiva, in temples is usually found as a phallic symbol of the 'linga', which represents the energies necessary for life on both the microcosmic and the macrocosmic levels, that is, the world in which we live and the world which constitutes

the whole of the universe. In a Shaivite temple, the 'linga' is placed in the centre underneath the spire, where it symbolizes the naval of the earth.

Shiva, the lord of erect Phallus (urdhvalinga), is traced to the ithyphallic figure of Indus Valley civilization or to the phallic images found more generally in prehistoric India. The epics and Puranas tell how a great fire appeared from the cosmic waters, and from this flame Linga Shiva emerged to claim supremacy and worship over Brahma and Vishnu, when he was castrated because he seduced sages' wives in the pine forests of Himalayas. He castrated himself because no one could castrate the Supreme Lord. Thus fallen phallus of the Supreme Lord destroyed all the worlds until it reached the Yoni of Uma/Parvati and cooled down. All procreation of worlds started after the worship of Yoni-Linga was restored and all Gods, including Vishnu and Brahma accepted supremacy of Lord Shiva.

So, the Shiva Deity distinguishes from all others. The actual image of Shiva is also distinct from other deities: his hair piled high on the top of his head, with a crescent tucked into it and the river Ganges tumbling from his hairs. Around his neck is a coiled serpent representing Kundalini or the spiritual energy within life. He holds a trident in his left hand in which is bound the 'damru' (small leather drum). He sits on a tiger skin and on his right is a water pot. He wears the 'Rudraksha' beads and his whole body is smeared with ash.

Shiva is believed to be at the core of the centrifugal force of the universe, because of his responsibility for death and destruction. Unlike the godhead Brahma, the Creator, or Vishnu, the Preserver, Shiva is the dissolving force in life. But Shiva dissolves in order to create, since death is the medium for rebirth into a new life. So the opposites of life and death and creation and destruction both reside in his character.

Shiva is also often portrayed as the supreme ascetic with a passive and composed disposition. Sometimes he is depicted riding a bull called Nandi decked in garlands. Although a very complicated deity, Shiva is one of the most fascinating of Hindu gods.

Since Shiva is regarded as a mighty destructive power, to numb his negative potentials he is fed with opium and is also termed as 'Bhole Shankar', one who is oblivious of the world. Therefore, on Maha Shivratri, the night of Shiva worship, devotees, especially the menfolk, prepare an intoxicating drink called 'Thandai' (*made from cannabis, almonds, and milk*) sing songs in praise of the Lord and dance to the rhythm of the drums.

Rituals at Maha Shivratri

From the very early morning, Shiva temples are flocked by devotees, young and old, who come to perform the traditional Shivalingam worship (puja) and hence hope for favours from the god. Devotees bathe at sunrise, preferably in the Ganga, or any other holy water source (like the Shiva Sagartank at Khajurao). This is a purificatory rite, an important part of all Hindu festivals. Wearing a clean piece of clothing after the holy bath, worshippers carry pots of water to the temple to bathe the Shivalingam. They offer prayers to the sun, Vishnu and Shiva. Women pray for the well-being of their husbands and sons. An unmarried woman prays for a husband like Shiva, who is considered to be the ideal husband. The temple reverberates with the sound of bells and shouts of "Shankerji ki Jai" meaning "Hail Shiva". Devotees circumambulate the lingam, three or seven times, and then pour water over it. Some also pour milk.

According to the Shiva Purana, the Mahashivaratri worship must incorporate six items:

- Bathing the Shi Lingam with water, milk and honey, and Wood apple or bel leaves added to it, representing purification of the soul;
- The vermilion paste applied on the Shiv Lingam after bathing it, representing virtue;
- Offering of fruits, which is conducive to longevity and gratification of desires;
- Burning incense, yielding wealth;
- The lighting of the lamp which is conducive to the attainment of knowledge;
- And betel leaves marking satisfaction with worldly pleasures.

Tripundra refers to the three horizontal stripes of holy ash applied to the forehead by worshippers of Lord Shiva. These stripes symbolise spiritual knowledge, purity and penance (spiritual practice of Yoga), so also they represent the three eyes of Lord Shiva.

Wearing a rosary made from the rudraksha seed of the rudraksha tree (said to have sprung from the tears of Lord Shiva) when worshipping Lord Shiva is ideal. A rudraksha seed is a mahogany-like colour, sometimes black, and sometimes may have traces of sacred sandalwood powder, turmeric, kumkum, or holy ash if the rosary was used in worship ceremonies or anointed.

Thandai

In India, all foods are believed to be either heat-giving or cooling. Thandai is a North-Indian drink made especially when the hot, dry summer winds blow through the region leaving everything and everybody parched. This thirst-quencher is tasty and cooling. The recipe below makes six glasses.

Recipe:

Preparation Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 10 minutes

Total Time: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 liter milk
- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
- 30 almonds blanched
- 6 teaspoons whole pumpkin/sunflower seeds (unsalted)
- 1 1/2 teaspoon cardamom powder
- 3 teaspoons rose water (optional)
- Crushed ice
- Rose petals to garnish

Preparation:

- Grind the almonds, sunflower/pumpkin seeds, cardamom powder and rose water into a fine paste in a food processor.
- Add the milk, condensed milk and crushed ice to the paste and blend well.
- Strain the drink through a fine sieve or muslin and serve in glasses, garnished with rose petals.

Shiva (Sanskrit: Auspicious One), or Shiva, is one of the main Deities of Hinduism we have seen above, worshipped as the paramount lord by the Saivite sects of India. Shiva is one of the most complex gods of India, embodying seemingly contradictory qualities. He is the destroyer and the restorer, the great ascetic and the symbol of sensuality, the benevolent herdsman of souls and the wrathful avenger.

Shaivism or Saivism

Shaivism or Saivism is the name given to a group of religious traditions which regard Lord Shiva as the highest Supreme Self or Brahman and worship Him accordingly. It is considered to be one of the oldest, if not the oldest, sect of Hinduism, whose antiquity is said to be rooted in the prehistoric traditions of ancient India, dating back to the Indus Valley civilization (5000 BC) or even earlier. Followers of Saivism are popularly known as Saivas or Saivites. The early Vedic Indians worshipped an aspect of Lord Shiva, known as Rudra, whom they both feared and revered. In the later Vedic period some Upanishads emerged, such as the Svetasvatara Upanishad and the Katha Upanishad, in which Lord Shiva was depicted as the highest Supreme Brahman. It was also the period during which the Vedic religion underwent a radical transformation where by Vaishnavism, Saivism and Shaktism rose to prominence and the ancient Vedic deities such as Brahma, Indra, Agni and Varuna yielded their place to Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti.

By the time the Puranas were composed, Lord Shiva was recognized as a part of Hindu Trinity and His worship became popular in many parts of the Indian subcontinent. Both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata mention Lord Shiva as a prominent Hindu god. Credit goes to the Saiva Puranas, which were composed mostly in the early Christian era, in making Saivism a popular religious sect. Of the 18 Puranas originally composed, six were Shaiva Puranas, namely Shiva Purana, Linga Purana, Matsya Purana, Kurma Purana, Skanda Purana and Agni Purana. The Agamas are the most authoritative works on Saivism. They deal with the methods of ritual worship and contemplation of Lord Shiva.

Many prominent rulers of ancient India such as the Kushanas, the Guptas, the BaraShivas, the Satavahanas and the Cholas were ardent worshippers of Shiva. The BaraShivas played an important role in preserving many ancient traditions of Saivism, at a time when Buddhism was on the rise. Apart from the Indian subcontinent, Shiva was also worshipped in other parts of the world such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia and Indonesia

Lord Shiva's connection with ancient fertility cults is well documented. Followers of Shiva regard Him as the Father God and Shakti as the Mother Goddess. There are indications that the Indus people probably used fertility symbols resembling a prototype of the present day Shivalingam in their religious rituals. But we do not know whom they actually worshipped using the fertility symbols. The earliest archaeological evidence of Shivalingam dates back to 2nd Century BC. But we have reasons to believe that the practice was prevalent in ancient India centuries before that. Outwardly, the Shivalingam is a sexual symbol depicting the union of male and female genital organs. Symbolically it represents the involvement of the Soul and the Supreme Self with Nature or Prakriti.

There are many subsets within Saivism. While they all acknowledge Lord Shiva as the Supreme Deity, they differ from one another in respect of other details such as the modes of worship, nature of Brahman, the nature of individual soul, the relationship between the two, the nature of reality and the means to liberation. These schools of Saivism primarily fall under one of the three schools of Hindu philosophy, namely Advaita (monism), Vishishtadvaita (qualified monism) and Dvaita (dualism). Of the few sects that survived the vicissitudes of time, the following five are the most prominent

1. Pasupata Saivism
2. Kashmiri Saivism
3. Siddha Saivism
4. Gorakhnatha Saivism

5. Vira Saivism

The Five Schools

1. Pasupata Saivism
2. Kashmiri Saivism
3. Siddha Saivism
4. Gorakhnatha Saivism
5. Vira Saivism

Pasupata Saivism

The relationship between Shiva and Sakti outlined in the previous section holds in general terms for Saiva cults as well. The major distinguishing feature between Saktism and Saivism is the deity worshipped: Sakti for Saktas and Shiva for Saivas. As mentioned above, the term Shiva derives from the verb root *si*, which means 'to lie' and conveys a sense of Shiva as quiescent, though in the context of Saivism a more suggestive meaning is 'that in which all lies' which evokes a sense of Shiva as the all-pervasive supreme Reality. The term Shiva can also mean good, auspicious, gracious and other similar expressions as well as Lord, while Samkara is often cited as defining Shiva as 'one who purifies by the utterance of His name' or the 'Pure One' in the sense that Shiva is said to be unaffected by the three gunas (the three basic qualities or characteristics of creation: *sattva* - purity, light, harmony; *rajas* - activity, passion; *tamas* - dullness, inertia, ignorance).

In the company of Brahma as the creator of the cosmos and Visnu as its preserver, Shiva completes the Hindu trinity (the trimurti or three forms of Isvara or God in orthodox Hinduism) in the role of its destroyer. This role shouldn't be interpreted as something negative, though, as what Shiva destroys is the evil and suffering that must be cleared away for creation to follow. In Saivism the functions performed by Brahma and Visnu in the trimurti are incorporated into a broader conception of Shiva as the supreme Godhead who exercises five functions: creation (*srsti*), maintenance (*sthiti*), dissolution (*samhara*), obscuration (*tirodhana*) and grace (*anugraha*).

In his personal form Shiva is often portrayed as a yogi immersed in meditation wearing a tiger skin and holding a trident with snakes coiled around his arms and neck, all of which hold symbolic significance. Shiva is also depicted as Nataraja or Lord of the cosmic dance of creation and destruction, and is commonly represented by the Shiva-linga or lingam (meaning 'mark' or

'characteristic'), an oval-shaped mound made of stone, metal or clay with three horizontal stripes that is usually positioned on a yoni (meaning 'womb' or 'source') which acts as a pedestal. In this configuration the lingam and yoni symbolise the complementary relationship between the masculine and feminine principles of the cosmos respectively.

As with the beginnings of Tantra generally, the origins of Shiva worship are obscure, with the earliest evidence appearing in the Svetasvatara Upanisad, though there is mention of Shiva earlier still in the Rg Veda under the guise of the deity Rudra (from the verb root rud = 'to cry or howl'). Rudra appears as one of the 1,008 names of Shiva that are recited by Krsna to Yudhisthira in the Shiva Sahasranama, a section of the great Indian epic the Mahabharata. In the same division of that work there is another section, the Visnu Sahasranama (thousand names of Visnu), which is one of the most sacred and often chanted stotras (prayer or hymn) in Hinduism. The inclusion of both the Shiva and Visnu Sahasranamas in the Mahabharata documents their emerging significance as figures of worship, and pre-dates their increasing importance in the post-Christian era as both Saivism and Vaisnavism provided a Hindu alternative to Buddhism and Jainism.

Throughout its long history, Saivism produced an impressive array of lineages and traditions along with an extensive literature that includes the Saiva Agamas which, like the Sakta Tantras, are considered to be divinely revealed scriptures. The Saiva tradition recognises twenty-eight Agamas, though hundreds more are mentioned. As with the Tantras, the Agamas deal with a range of topics and develop a variety of philosophical positions, but all accept Shiva as the ultimate Reality and supreme Lord, and all agree on a small number of fundamental doctrines such as the threefold nature of pasa (literally 'rope') or the bonds that tie the individual to samsara: the impurities of ignorance (anava) and action (karma), and the power of obscuration (maya); and the four padas or stages of sadhana: virtuous conduct (carya), forms of religious worship (kriya), spiritual disciplines that have as their goal self-realisation (yoga), and liberating wisdom (jnana).

The multiplicity of philosophical positions, religious cultures and forms of sadhana that have developed around these points of agreement can most easily be discussed in terms of the major schools or sects of Saivism. However it should be kept in mind that only a well-informed minority knowingly subscribe to any particular school, with many if not most devotees of Shiva following an eclectic mix of beliefs and practices that form the religious observances of their families and communities. A representative selection of these sects would include Kashmir Saivism, Saiva Siddhanta, Kapalika, Vira Saivism and

Pasupata. Kashmir Saivism and Shiva Siddhanta are two of the better documented of these and so will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

The Kapalikas are a fiercely ascetic and eccentric sect that worships the fearsome aspect of Shiva in the form of Bhairava the ferocious. The term kapalika means 'skull bearer' and in this context refers to the characteristic Kapalika practice of carrying a human skull as a begging and food bowl. Some also link the Kapalikas with devotion to Lord Shiva in the form of the supreme begger who is depicted as wearing nothing but a garland of skulls and ash from funeral pyres. The Kapalikas are sometimes confused with another eccentric Saiva sect the Aghoris, which some believe split off from the Kapalikas in the fourteenth century CE. Aghoris are notorious for living in cremation grounds, smearing themselves with ash from burnt corpses, meditating while seated on corpses, and even eating the flesh of these. These practices are consistent with the Aghori's strongly non-dualistic metaphysics and are designed to subvert conventional Hindu distinctions such as those between purity and impurity. If all distinctions are ultimately illusory, as non-dualism implies, then this truth can be realised by transcending social taboos and embracing even the most culturally marginal aspects of life.

Vira Saivism accepts a version of qualified non-dualism referred to as sakti vishishtadvaita which recognises both the difference and non-difference of Shiva and the jiva somewhat like the relationship between the sun and its rays. Shiva and His Sakti are held to be ultimately non-different and the world is accepted as real and not illusory, however Shiva is considered to be more than His creation, being both the efficient and material cause of the cosmos.

Pasupata is the earliest known Saiva sect and is thought to have been founded by Lakulisa in the first or second century CE. Pasupatas worship Shiva as Pasupati, Lord of individuals and animals (from pasu meaning individual soul or animal, and pati which means Lord as well as being another name for Shiva). This school accepts a version of the bhedabheda doctrine or the relation of identity in difference. For the Pasupatas this means that Shiva as the ultimate reality is both non-dual (abheda) and the personal Lord of all pasu or individuals. This implies a difference (bheda) between Pati and pasu that remains even after liberation which is nonetheless understood as a state of complete union with Shiva, and is sometimes compared to stars disappearing in the sky at dawn.

Kashmir Saivism

Kashmir Saivism is the most prominent of the North Indian schools of Saivism, and is thought to have been founded by Vasugupta in the eight century CE. It is named after the region in which Vasugupta is said to have found the Shiva Sutras, which along with the Saiva Agamas form the scriptural foundation of this tradition. According to one account, Vasugupta was directed by Lord Shiva in a dream or vision to go to a particular rock on Mahadev Mountain. On doing so and touching the rock, it is reputed to have rolled over and revealed the seventy-seven sutras or aphorisms of the Shiva Sutra. According to another account, Vasugupta received the sutras in deep meditation. The nature of its origin aside, the Shiva Sutra is considered to have been divinely revealed and so is equal in status to the Saiva Agamas.

Kashmir Saivism is also known by the names Pratyabhijna, Spanda and Trika. Pratyabhijna means recognition or remembrance and refers to one of the central tenets of this school, that the individual is ultimately identical with Shiva as the Absolute, and that the recognition or remembrance in the sense of an immediate awareness of this identity leads to liberation. Spanda means self-movement or vibration and refers to another key principle of this school, the apparent movement from a state of absolute unity to the plurality of the world that takes place through the spontaneous activity or Sakti that gives rise to the creation, maintenance and dissolution of the cosmos. Trika means triple or triad, and refers to a number of threefold principles that are characteristic of Kashmir Saivism. These include the three fundamental categories Shiva, Sakti and anu or the individual that for Kashmir Saivism is a microcosm of the whole; Pati (Shiva), pasu (individual) and pasa (bond); and the triple nature of Sakti: iccha (will), jnana (knowledge) and kriya (activity).

It is also held that the designation Trika refers to the three types of literature in Kashmir Saivism: Agama, Spanda and Pratyabhijna Sastras (from the verb root sas = to rule, teach), which correspond to the three closely related philosophical positions that emerged within this tradition, and whose overall tendency was towards Samkara's Advaita Vedanta. Abhinavagupta (950-1015) is acknowledged as effecting a reconciliation of the three positions in his version of non-dualism in important works such as Tantraloka, Tantrasara, and Isvara Pratyabhijna Vimarsini.

Abhinavagupta's non-dualism or advaita (from a = 'not' + dvaita = 'dual'), like Samkara's, accepts a conception of the Absolute as the only Reality, both transcendent and indeterminate. However unlike Samkara, Abhinavagupta maintains that the cosmos is a real manifestation of Shiva (as the Absolute)

rather than something merely apparent. Shiva is the self-shining, pure consciousness or prakasa (from the verb root kas = 'to shine' and pra = 'forth'), whose self-awareness or vimarsa (meaning knowledge or reflection) is represented as Sakti. Spanda or kriya is understood as the spontaneous and eternal vibration or creative pulse that expresses Shiva's absolute freedom (svatantra: from sva = 'own' + tantra = 'rule') and infinite bliss (ananda); it has no inherent motive or guiding purpose beyond the joy of free expression. This doctrine is portrayed in Saiva iconography by the ecstatic dance of Shiva in the form of Nataraja (from nata = 'dancer' + raja = 'king'), whose movements are the movements of the cosmos: its creation, maintenance and dissolution, and whose dance is the cosmic play or lila, which takes place for no other reason than the joy of movement itself.

As the Absolute, Shiva is self-dependent and so remains unaffected by all manifestation which is made to appear as if it were distinct from Himself even though it is projected from Himself, in Himself and by Himself. The cosmos is therefore both real and non-different from Shiva, and this for Abhinavagupta is authentic advaita; not the denial of duality as it is for Samkara, but the ultimate unity of Shiva and Sakti, prakasa and vimarsa, which though distinguishable in thought are in reality inseparable. This conception of advaita is personified in Ardhanarisvara, the half-male and half-female form of Shiva that is intended to express this inseparability in art. In most cases Ardhanarisvara is male on the right side of the figure and female on the left-side, although some examples which are presumably sakta in origin reverse this arrangement.

According to Abhinavagupta, the pasu or individual self is nothing other than Shiva appearing under particular limitations (keeping in mind that some kind of limitation is required for any form of determinate existence to appear at all). The pasu is therefore an aspect of creation that expresses Shiva's absolute freedom and infinite bliss just like any other. However by identifying with determinate forms as if they were distinct from Shiva, such as thinking that 'I am the body' or 'I am this life', the pasu cuts itself off from its source and becomes bound to the cycles of samsara.

The error that is introduced through this false identification, through the sense that there is anything that is ultimately distinct from Shiva, is the root cause of all bondage or bandha (from the verb root bandh = 'to bind'). This ignorance of the real nature of the pasu is referred to as anava-mala: the impurity (mala) of ignorance, and is the mula-mala or root impurity that taints the other malas (karma and maya), which together constitute the three strands of pasa that bind the pasu. Karma-mala (the impurity of action) is said to be the result of anava-mala, with the false identification with determinate forms leading to the

impurities caused by residual impressions of past actions that are believed to have been the product of one's own finite will. Maya-mala (the impurity of transmigration) is in turn the result of both anava- and karma-mala, as the material conditions of empirical existence are misinterpreted as not only distinct from Shiva, but as what defines the finite pasu as an independent agent that endures through the cycles of birth, death and rebirth.

Given that anava-mala is held to be the root cause of bondage, and that the pasu is ultimately nothing other than Shiva, liberation or moksa in Kasmir Saivism is defined as the recognition or pratyabhijna of this underlying unity. The ignorance that pratyabhijna dissolves is not intellectual but innate and beginningless and so cannot be removed by intellectual knowledge alone. Pratyabhijna is instead an immediate and direct realisation of one's identity with Shiva, which by dissolving the false distinction between the determinate forms of what manifests and Shiva releases the pasu from the ties (pasa) that bind it. This realisation may be prompted by spiritual instruction and initiation (diksa), meditation on the sacred texts (sastra-vasyah), sincere and dedicated spiritual practice (yoga), through some combination of some or all of these, or may simply occur spontaneously. Regardless of the particular means, the pratyabhijna tradition emphasises the importance of the descent of Shiva's grace (saktipata or anugraha) in all spiritual attainment. The realisation that all manifestation, including oneself, is non-different from Shiva makes manifest in the form of the jivanmukti an embodied awareness of grace of Shiva in all creation, and a living example of advaita.

Saiva Siddhanta

Saiva Siddhanta is often presented as the southern branch of Saivism in India, described in terms of both its region of influence and the rich devotional literature it inspired in the Tamil language. While this strand of Saiva Siddhanta has been the focus of recent scholarship and will also be of this section, the tradition as a whole can be traced back to Nandinatha who is believed to have lived in Kasmir around 250 BCE. Nandinatha's Sanskrit work, Nandikesvara Kasika, has more in common with the advaita doctrines of Kasmir Saivism than the position developed by the southern arm of this tradition. It is therefore useful to refer to Sanskrit and Tamil forms of Saiva Siddhanta, with the former prevailing in northern and central India and the latter in the south. The former flourished until successive waves of Islamic conquest from the seventh century onwards significantly altered the religious demographics of the north and centre of India, while the latter continues to this day.

The principal and most distinctive literature of the southern arm of Saiva Siddhanta is the twelve-book Tirumurai ('holy book') which was composed between the fifth and ninth centuries CE and compiled in the eleventh century CE by Nambiyandar Nambi. The first seven Tirumurais are known as Tevarum and include the devotional hymns of three of the most revered figures of southern Saivism: Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar. The eighth Tirumurai contains the poetry of Manikkavacakar and is known as Tiruvacakam, while the tenth is the Tirumantiram of Tirumular who according to tradition was a direct disciple of Nandinatha, though more recent scholarship tends to place him around the eighth century CE.

This vast devotional literature attended a bhakti movement that insisted on a subtle yet irrevocable distinction between the individual self and Shiva. This conviction was given its first systematic statement in the thirteenth century CE by Meykander in his Shivajnanabodham, which is regarded as the standard exposition of the Tamil form of Saiva Siddhanta. This and subsequent works by significant figures such as Arulnandi, Umapati, Srikantha and Appaya Diksita developed a position somewhere between the advaita of Kasmir Saivism and the visistadvaita (qualified nondualism) of Ramanuja (1017-1137 CE), one of the most influential figures of Vaisnavism.

In maintaining that the individual self or pasu is of the same essence as Shiva without positing an ultimate identity between them, Meykander is able to conceive of liberation not as the realisation of one's identity with the Absolute, but as enjoying the eternal presence of the Lord.

Did the soul perish on becoming united with Shiva, there would be no eternal being associated with God. If it does not perish, but remains a dissociated being, then there would be no union with God. But the impurities will cease to affect the soul and then the soul like the union of salt with water will become united with Shiva as His servant and exist at his feet as one with Him. (Shivajnanabodham, xi, 5)

Shiva is therefore not only the Absolute, but also a personal God who in His infinite grace and love wishes 'that all should know Him' (Shivajnanabodham, xiii, 3). Both the Lord (Pati) and his pasu are of the nature of consciousness, and in liberation the pasu attains a perfect resemblance to Shiva, though the five functions of creation (srsti), maintenance (sthiti), dissolution (samhara), obscuration (tirodhana) and grace (anugraha) are reserved for Shiva alone.

The hymns of the Tirumurai describe the passage of those entangled in samsara - their waywardness, struggles and suffering - through their first awakenings and

continued trials as they turn their attention from worldly desires and concerns in growing love and devotion towards the Lord. The entanglement of the pasu in samsara is understood in terms of the three strands of pasa in much the same way it is in Kasmir Saivism. The pasu, ignorant of its true nature, falsely identifies with the body and the qualities of finite existence. However in contrast to Kasmir Saivism, both the pasu and empirical existence are not ultimately identical with Shiva. The cosmos has Shiva as its first cause, Sakti as its instrumental cause and maya as its material cause. Maya is insentient, the seed from which the cosmos develops and whose unceasing rhythms and karmic regulation is the theatre in which the pasu comes to know itself by coming to know Shiva. The cosmos and the pasu are pervaded by Shiva through His Sakti, and even though there is no ultimate identity between them, Shiva is said to dwell in them and they in Him. When Sakti is active, Shiva becomes both the subject of experience (bhokta) and the personal Lord whose grace is extended to all who turn to Him. In defining liberation in terms of a perfect resemblance to the Lord, the passage towards this state is marked by the purification of the consciousness that constitutes the true nature of the pasu. The ignorance (anava-mala) that binds the pasu to samsara is dissolved through devoted attention to Shiva, which when unqualified by any taint of the finite leaves the pasu able to reflect the supreme Reality in its purity, which is true knowledge of Shiva. The jivanmukti is thereby infused with the presence of the Lord and continues in this final embodiment until all past karma has been exhausted, with all subsequent actions being free expressions of the divine will.

Gorakhnath or Gorakshanatha Saivism

Gorakhnath or Gorakshanatha Saivism is also known as Siddha Siddhanta and Nath tradition. It was founded by Gorakshanatha (Gorakhnath) who lived about 10th century AD. He is believed to be 3rd, 4th or 5th in a line of twelve prominent teachers of this tradition, which has followers in both Buddhism and Hinduism. He was said to be a disciple of Matsyendranatha who was from in Nepal. Followers of this sect believe that knowledge of this tradition was received by Matsyendranath directly from Shiva himself. Gorakshanatha is credited with such works as Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati and Viveka Martanda. He composed them in Hindi. He also created twelve monastic orders across Northern India in an effort to preserve the Adinatha tradition. Other important works of this tradition are Hathayoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita, Shiva Samhita and Jnanamrita.

The school was predominantly ascetic and adapted many practices of the Pasupatha sect and the Adinatha Tradition in contrast to the Nandinatha tradition followed in the south. Although it is a tantric tradition, it differs from many left-

handed (vamachara) schools of tantra with its uncompromising emphasis on the practice of brahmacharya or celibacy and its stand against the use of sexual energy in yogic practices. In the past this sect enjoyed some Muslim following in the northern India and some of them even became heads of the sect's monasteries. The Gorakshanatha sect brought to light many secrets of hatha yoga, kundalini yoga and samadhi and contributed to their present day popularity. Members of this sect also dabble in occult sciences and siddhis or super natural powers.

Followers of this sect believe that it would be possible through yogic practices to prolong human life and become immortal in the physical body (kayasiddhi). They believe that through the practice of hathayoga it is possible to channel breath energy through a web of nerves or nadis and acquire occult powers as well as achieve liberation. No one knows for sure what these practices are except those who have been initiated into them. Some followers of this sect claim to have seen or interacted with beings who are several hundreds of years old. There are claims that Gorakshanatha, the original founder of the school, is still alive and active in our earth plane but does not appear in public.

Followers of the sect believe that Shiva is the material and efficient cause of creation and that after liberation the jivas would return to Shiva, like bubbles in water. Oneness with Shiva can be experienced by serious practitioners of yoga in a deep state of samadhi. Once the state of samadhi is reached, an individual would remain forever established in transcendental consciousness even while engaged in the mundane affairs of the outside world.

The sect is still active in many parts of India and abroad and its followers range from mendicants and street magicians to the most obscure ascetics living in the Himalayas. The popularity of hatha yoga, pranayama, kundalini yoga, holistic medicine, astrology and ayurveda in the modern world can be attributed to a great extent to this tradition.

The International Nath Order is draws its inspiration from the ancient Natha sect, although it strives to propagate its teachings mostly outside India. It was founded in 1978 by Guru Mahendranath in order to share the knowledge of his own spiritual awakening and also the wisdom of the ancient tantric schools of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Vira Saivism

Vira Saivism is based on Shakti-vishista-advaita philosophy according to which there is difference as well as non-difference between Shiva, the supreme self and jiva, the individual soul, and that the difference between the two is qualified by the activity of his power or shakti. According to Vira Saivism, God and soul are inseparable, but their relationship becomes qualified by the activity of shakti. During the process of creation, Shiva remains immutable while his Shakti issues forth and manifests the phenomenal world. Shakti, also called, devi or mulaprakriti, is an inseparable aspect of Shiva. During creation it undergoes transformation and evolution to manifest the will of Shiva.

Historical Development of Vira Saivism

Vira Saivism became popular in southern India, especially in the region presently known as Karnataka and Andhrapradesh due to the personality and remarkable efforts of Basavanna who lived from 1105 AD to 1167 AD. Basavanna is considered by his followers both as a religious guru and great social reformer. Without confining himself to religious teaching, he boldly opposed the social and religious maladies afflicting the Hindu society of his times, inviting those who were denied religious and social privileges because of their caste to join him.

From an early age he grew dissatisfied with the prevailing teachings of Saivism, the predominance of Vedic ritualism and caste based prejudices. So at a very early of 16, he set out to explore the teachings of Saivism on his own. He spent the next twelve years under the care of a Saivite Guru of Kalamukha Sect, studying the scriptures and practicing devotion to Lord Shiva. After achieving self-realization, he devoted himself to the propagation of his revolutionary ideas, attracting many followers. His effort led to the emergence of Vira Saivism as a strong sectarian movement in the Karnataka region.

The chief attraction of this movement was Basavanna's unequivocal emphasis on the emancipation of individual jivas from the evils of society and from their own ignorance. Unlike other religious gurus of his time, Basavanna wanted to release not only the individual but also the entire society from the impurities and illusions of the phenomenal world. He stood firmly against the evils of caste system, religious superstition and empty ritualism and advised his followers also to do the same. His firm stand against prevailing social and religious injustices caused quite a stir among the orthodox circles of Hinduism, attracting the

attention of many from the oppressed sections of society and contributed richly to the astounding popularity of Vira Saivism as a mass movement.

At the same time the actions of Basavanna caused dissatisfaction among the ruling classes and the upper castes and resulted in the discrimination of the sect. Followers of Basavanna were subjected to ridicule, criticism, persecution and social prejudice. But the inherent strength of the movement and the very fact that social ridicule and criticism were considered in many sects of Saivism as an ideal condition to transcend social conditioning and egoism helped the sect to withstand the attacks and grow stronger. The firm faith and leadership of many of its followers also helped it to survive the opposition and gain momentum. Prominent among those who contributed to its growing popularity were Allama Prabhu, Akka Mahadevi and Channa Basavanna.

Followers of Vira Saivism became distinguished as lingayats for their practice of wearing Shiva linga constantly on their bodies as a mark of devotion and surrender to Lord Shiva. The practice continues till date among the lingayats who are found mostly in Karnataka and parts of Andhrapradesh.

Literary Sources of Vira Saivism

Followers of mainstream Vira Saivism do not accept the authority of the Vedas and some of them even consider themselves to be outside the scope of Hinduism. The Saiva Agamas, the sayings or vachanas of the enlightened masters of the sect and those of some notable saints of Saivism belonging to the other sects form the basis of the main teachings of Vira Saivism. Prominent literary works of this sect include:

Basavanna's principal works

Allmma Prabhu's Mantra Gopya

Chennabasavanna's Karana Hasuge

Shivagna Prasadi Mahadevayya's Shunya Sampadane

Singiraja's Singirajapurana,

Mallanarya's Veerasaivamrita, Bhavachintaratna and Satyendra Cholakathe,

Lakkana Dandesa's Shivatatwa Chintamani,

Chamarasa's Prabhulinga Leele,

Jakkanarya's Nurondushthala.

Bhimakavi's Basavapurana.

Tontada Siddesvara's Shatsthalajnanamrita

Virakta Tontadarya's Siddhesvarapurana

Nijagunashivayogi's Shivayogapradipika and Vivekacintamani.

Virabhadraraja's five Satakas and

Sarvajnamurti's Sarvajnapadagalu.

Philosophy or Main Concepts of Vira Saivism Shiva, Shakti and the Self

Vira Saivism accepts Lord Shiva as the Supreme Lord and the self as its indistinguishable reality. Shiva is linga and the individual jiva is anga. The relationship between the two is one of difference as well as no difference (bheda-abheda). Shiva is also the Supreme Abode (para-sthala) in which reside all the beings. Shiva is the efficient and material cause of creation through the activity of his Shakti. During creation, Shiva does not under go change, while Shakti does. In Shiva the creation exists and in the end returns to him. Shakti is an aspect of Shiva and resides in him eternally. It veils the soul through its maya and is responsible for its ignorance of its true nature. During creation Shakti becomes split into kala (time) and bhakti (devotion). Kala brings forth the manifestation as a projection from Shiva. Bhakti resorts to the Jiva and in due course leads the soul back to its true identity. The soul's ultimate goal is to regain its true awareness and become one with Shiva. The union of the soul with Shiva (linganga-samarasya) produces inexplicable bliss in the Jiva.

The Union of Individual Soul with Shiva

The soul's real union with Shiva happens through a gradual six fold process called satsthala during which six different qualities resurface or manifest themselves in the individual soul. This process happens simultaneously both in the lowest (gross) and highest (subtle) levels of the individual soul suggesting their non-separation. It is called satsthala in the context of the highest plane and angasthala in the context of the lowest. It involves the progressive manifestation of the following:

bhakti (devotion),
mahesa (selfless service),
prasada (grace),
pranalinga (experience of unity),
sarana (self-surrender) and
aikya (union).

With the manifestation of each phase, the soul moves closer and closer to Shiva and finally merges into Him. This happens only through the Jiva's surrender to Shiva.

Spiritual Discipline and Code of Conduct.

In Vira Saivism Guru (personal spiritual master), Jangama (an enlightened spiritual guru) and Linga (Shiva) play a very key role in the union of Jiva with Shiva. Guru is the personal spiritual guide who has the knowledge of the path and knows how to guide one on it. Jangama is the realized soul or the perfect one who has already been through the path and knows how to lead one there. Linga is the ultimate goal, the journey as well as the path. One needs to surrender to them and seek their help in intensifying ones devotion to Shiva to obtain his grace and achieve the final union. The entry into Vira Saivism begins with an initiation rite (diksha). Once on the path, eight observances (astavarana) and five rules of conduct (panchachara) are prescribed for the adherents to achieve their liberation. The five rules of conduct are:

Daily worship of linga (lingachara)

Performing ones vocational and familial duties (sadachara)

Acknowledging Shiva as the Supreme Lord and all the Jivas as equal and not different (Shivachara)

Humility and respect for all creation (bhrityachara) and

Serving the community with loyalty and responsibility (ganachara)

The eight observances are:

Obedience to guru

Worship of linga

Reverence for the jangama

Smearing of the sacred ashes

Wearing the holy beads (rudraksha)

Drinking the water used in the cleaning of the linga or the feet of guru or jangama

Offering food to the deity, or guru or jangama

Recitation of the Shiva mantra (Om Namah Shivayah)

Vira Saivism in the Contemporary World

It is ironic indeed that today lingayats stand apart as a distinct social group in Karnataka and Vira Saivism institutionalized many principles which it once opposed vehemently, including the caste system, elevation of the Jangamas as a privileged priestly class, permission to conduct temple worship and purification ceremonies and giving gifts to gurus (guru dakshina) for the services rendered by them. Vira Saivism continues to be a strong social and religious movement in Karnataka and provides a viable path for the liberation of individuals from personal and social impurities and illusions.

The Temples of Shiva

The temples of Shiva are located all over the world, but the most prominent among them which house the twelve Jyotirlingas are located in India. The twelve Jyotirlinga temples mentioned in the Shivapurana are:

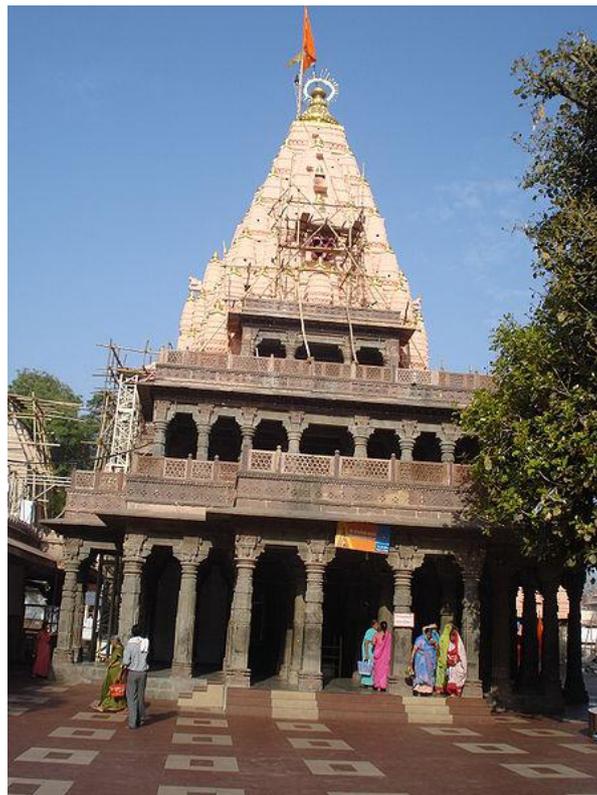
1. The Somnath temple,
2. The Mallikarjuna temple at Srisailam,
3. The Mahakaleswar temple at Ujjain,
4. The Omkareshwar temple at Omkareshwar,
5. The Kedarnath temple in the Himalayas,
6. The Bhimashankar temple in Maharashtra,
7. The Kashivishwanath temple at Varanasi,
8. The Triambakeshwar temple at Naski,
9. The Baidyanath temple at Deogarh,
10. The Nageshwar temple in Dwaraka,
11. The Ramalingeshwar temple at Rameswaram and
12. Grishneshwar temple near Ellora caves



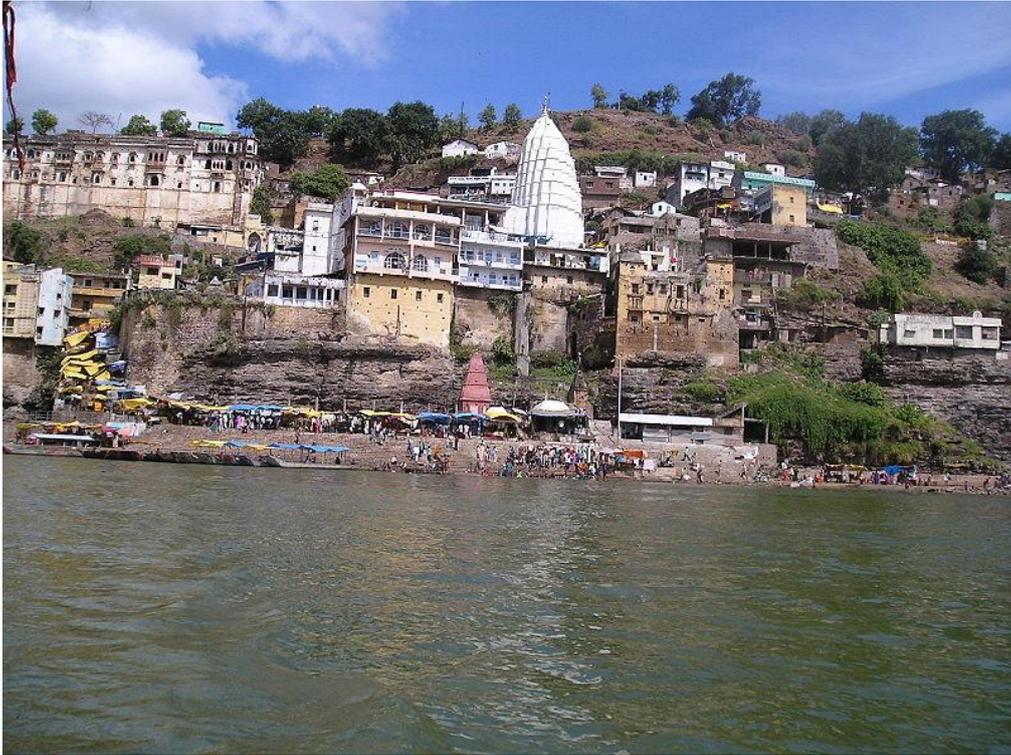
The Somnath Temple



The Mallikarjuna temple at Srisailam



The Mahakaleswar temple at Ujjain



The Omkareshwar temple at Omkareshwar



The Kedarnath temple in the Himalayas



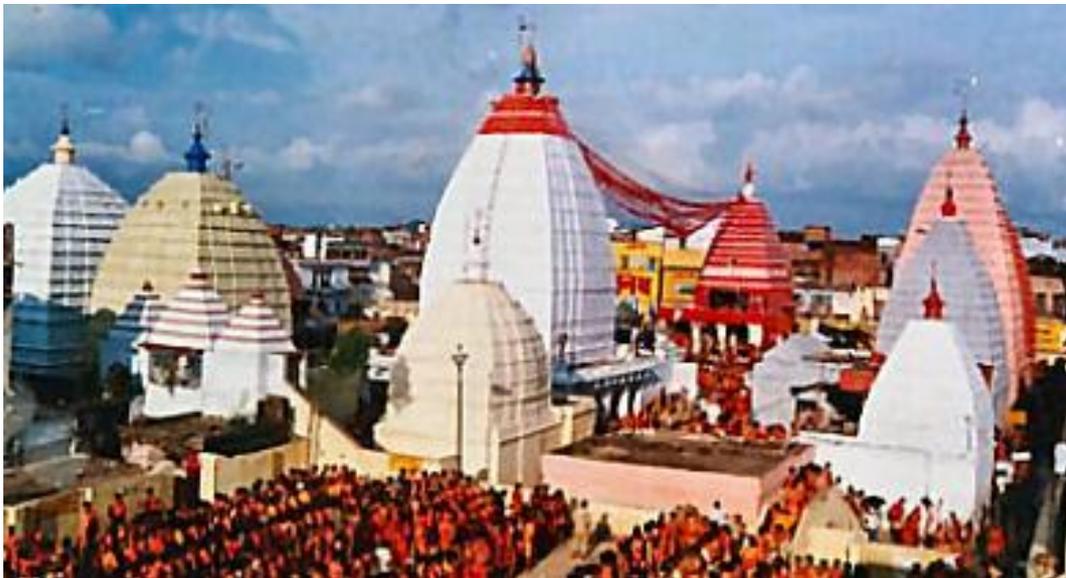
The Bhimashankar temple in Maharashtra



The Kashivishwanath temple at Varanasi



The Triambakeshwar temple at Naski



The Baidyanath temple at Deogarh



The Nageshwar temple in Dwaraka



The Ramalingeshwar temple at Rameswaram (*no picture of temple*)



Grishneshwar temple near Ellora caves



Ellora Caves

The Nayanars of southern India were poet saints who played an instrumental role between 6th and 8th century AD in popularizing the devotional worship of Shiva among the rural people. Through devotional singing and public display of religious fervour, they preached the path of devotion (bhaktimarg) to Shiva as an effective means to spread their message of divine love and surrender to God and inculcate among people the habit of religious worship and ethical living. Their activities also helped in containing the influence of Jainism and Buddhism in southern India and reviving the Vedic tradition. The Saiva tradition lists 63 Nayanars. Prominent among them were Kannappa, Karaikkal, Sundarar, Manikkavachakar, Nambi Andar Nambi, Sekkilar, Appar and Sundarar. Their compositions are preserved in such works as Tirumurai and Tevaram. Apart from them, Lakulisa, Vasugupta, Gorakshanath and Basavanna were some of the religious teachers, who played a prominent role in ensuring the continuation of Saivism as a major religious sect in the Indian subcontinent.

Lord Shiva known as Rudra and other characteristics of Himself.

Shiva was originally known as Rudra, a minor deity addressed only three times in the Rig Veda. He gained importance after absorbing some of the characteristics of an earlier fertility god and became Shiva, part of the trinity, or trimurti, with Vishnu and Brahma.

Shiva often wears a snake coiled around his upper arms and neck symbolizing the power he has over the most deadly of creatures. Snakes are also used to symbolize the Hindu dogma of reincarnation. Their natural process of moulting or shedding their skin is symbolic of the human soul's transmigration of bodies from one life to another.

Thiruvallangadu, north of Madras, is associated with the dance contest between Shiva and his consort in the form of Kali. According to legend, Shiva danced vigorously, and to subdue Kali, threw up his leg in the rhythm of the dance. Being a lady, Kali could not repeat this feat and stood dismayed. This dance and the subjugation of Kali, are described in the hymns of the female saint-poet Karaikkal Ammai.

Shiva's female consort and wife is Parvati; because of his generosity and reverence towards Parvati, Shiva is considered an ideal role model for a husband. The divine couple together with their sons - the six-headed Skanda and the elephant headed Shiva - reside on Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas.

Shiva often holds a trident, which represents the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu. It is also said to represent the threefold qualities of nature: creation, preservation and destruction, although preservation is usually attributed to Vishnu.

As the destroyer Shiva is dark and terrible, encircled with serpents and a crown of skulls.

Shiva wears sacred Rudraksha beads, perhaps a reference to his earlier name Rudra.

The crescent moon Shiva wears on his crown, besides being a symbol of Kama the goddess of nightly love, also represents the bull, Nandi, a fertility symbol.

“Shiva holds a skull that represents samsara, the cycle of life, death and rebirth.”

Shiva holds a skull that represents *samsara*, the cycle of life, death and rebirth. Samsara is a central belief in Hinduism. Shiva himself also represents this complete cycle because he is Mahakala the Lord of Time, destroying and creating all things.

His guardian is Nandi (the white bull), whose statue can often be seen watching over the main shrine. The bull is said to embody sexual energy, fertility. Riding on its back, Shiva is in control of these impulses.

Shiva is represented in a variety of forms. One such form is as a lingam. The ovoid shape is a representation of the absolute perfection of Lord Shiva - if that which is beyond form had to be given form, the lingam would be the closest form to the mystical experience of the absolute perfection of Shiva.

A great figure in the dance of life is the Hindu god Shiva. Although his name literally means the kind and the friendly one, he has three faces and combines in himself contradictory qualities of both destroyer and restorer.

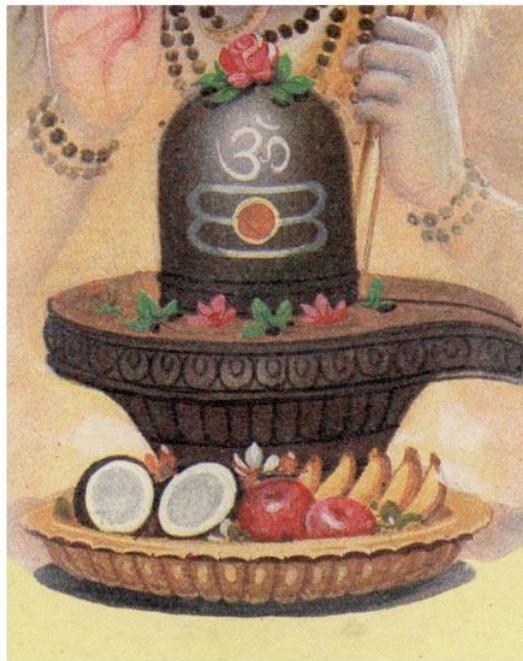
What does Shiva destroy? Ignorance! This is considered a great blessing in Hindu culture. Indeed, what better accomplishment could there be during our short visit on earth, than to learn to destroy the erroneous concept we have of ourselves?

How can we destroy such ignorance, in other words, how can we work towards our salvation? The Hindu culture teaches the use of Yoga and meditation, other cultures teach prayers, more primitive cultures teach sacrifice. Whichever path we chose, we must always "act and react," even the Christian Bible says that.

We cannot and must not isolated ourselves completely, and even if we try, our thoughts will always be in charge of our lives, and we must to learn to handle them. So, there is a constant physical and mental movement going on; a dance as mentioned before. How ugly or beautiful we make that dance is up to us.

If we are successful, we begin to understand and appreciate the dance of life, moving along in a soft way. The negative can destroy us, or it can help restore our sanity; that is, if we learn to dance around it, even flirt with it, so that we attract the negativity close enough to allow the light to illuminate our minds, and wipe out our ignorance about our True Self.

The Story of the Shiva Linga



Shiva saw no sense in the transitory pleasures of life, so he rejected samsara, smeared his body with ash, closed his eyes and performed austerities.

Shiva's tapas generated so much heat that his body transformed into a pillar of fire - a blazing lingam that threatened to destroy the whole world. The gods did not know how to control Shiva's fire.

Suddenly there appeared a yoni - the divine vessel of the mother-goddess. It caught the fiery lingam and contained its heat, thus saving the cosmos from untimely destruction.

Shiva is often pictured in a pacific mood with his consort Parvati, as the cosmic dancer Nataraja, as a naked ascetic, as a mendicant beggar, as a yogi Dhakshinamurthy, and as the androgynous union of Shiva and Parvati in one body (Ardhanarisvara).

Shiva also takes the form of Ardhanari, his androgynous form. The right side of the sculpture is Shiva and the left side is Parvati. The attributes of each are split directly down the middle.

Another example of Shiva's apparent synthesis of male and female attributes is seen in his earrings. He often wears one earring in the style of a man and the other as a female..



Shiva is commonly depicted with a third eye. The third eye is a symbol of higher consciousness. It is also something with which he can destroy his enemies "with fire." He can also kill all the gods and other creatures during the periodic destruction of the universe. Shiva's third eye first appeared when

Parvati, his wife, playfully covered his other two eyes, therefore plunging the world into darkness and putting it in danger of destruction.

More commonly about the Shiva Lingam

Most Gods and Goddesses within Hinduism are worshipped through the use of a sacred image, known as a *murti*. Every Deity has their particular image or icon that is used in puja. It is therefore common in temples to see a sacred image of Shiva along with His consort Parvati. But there is another sacred image of Shiva that is even more common than Shiva and Parvati seated beside each other and this is the Shiva Lingam. The Shiva Lingam is an aniconic form of Shiva because it has no specific features that could be recognized as Shiva if one did not already know what the form was. A Shalagram Shila, which a black fossil stone used in the worship of Vishnu, is a similar aniconic form.

The antiquity of the Shiva Lingam is uncertain. There are some who claim that certain remains found within the Indus Valley Civilization are Shiva Lingams. This claim, however, is disputed and is far from being a universally accepted. In addition, there is no mention in the Rig Veda or any of the other Shruti Vedic texts of the Shiva Lingam. There are, however, many references to the Shiva Lingam throughout the later Smriti Vedas and so it is uncertain at what point the Shiva Lingam became popular within Hinduism. But popular it is! Virtually all temples and Hindu homes have a Shiva Lingam.

In many cases a Shiva Lingam is a one piece image usually made of stone, but a true Shiva Lingam is comprised of two parts: the actual Lingam itself, which has a cylindrical shape, and a stand or peetham, which supports the Lingam. In the case of a one piece image the Lingam and the stand are together. There are two basic interpretations of what the Shiva Lingam actually is. The first is that the

Supreme, being ultimately formless, is represented by a formless image, the Lingam. One meaning of the word “lingam” is “sign” and therefore the Lingam is a “sign” of the formless nature of God. The second interpretation is that the Lingam is a symbolic phallus and that the stand which holds the Lingam is the female organ, and therefore the Lingam sitting within its stand is a symbolism for cosmic union and creation. Naturally, this latter interpretation is offensive to many worshippers, but given the imagery of ancient Hinduism with its elaborate sexual depictions found on many temple towers (*gopurams*) in South India, the phallic interpretation of the Shiva Lingam is not out of the question, especially given that another meaning of the word lingam is “male organ.”

The most common use of the Shiva Lingam is for sacred bathing (*abhisheka*) and so the worship of a Shiva Lingam always includes an *abhisheka* usually of milk and water, but commonly with other liquids, including yogurt, honey and clarified butter as well.

On Meditation

Meditation is a mental discipline by which one attempts to get beyond the reflexive, "thinking" mind into a deeper state of relaxation or awareness. Meditation often involves turning attention to a single point of reference. It is recognized as a component of many religions, and has been practiced since antiquity. It is also practiced outside religious traditions. Different meditative disciplines encompass a wide range of spiritual and/or psychophysical practices which may emphasize different goals—from achievement of a higher state of consciousness, to greater focus, creativity or self-awareness, or simply a more relaxed and peaceful frame of mind.

Imagine sitting out in the woods on a dark night with clear open skies and only the moon to accompany you. Somewhere deep down within you, you



can feel a fire of determination burning. The determination is to invoke **Lord Shiva**, to become one with the Infinite Existence. Shiv Namonkar recreates this fiery ambience for a seeker to meditate by chanting the holy **shiva mantras** and loose oneself in the process.

This **meditation technique** is called **Mantra Meditation** in which a seeker to **chant a mantra** powerfully and gradually enters into silence. Your voice reverberates within a listener right from the beginning of this album, which begins with a slow but powerful chanting of **Om Namah Shivay**.

Although there's a paucity of recorded history on meditation, its roots travel back to ancient times. Researchers speculate that primitive hunter-gatherer societies may have discovered meditation and its altered states of consciousness while staring at the flames of their fires. Over thousands of years, meditation evolved into a structured practice. Indian scriptures called "tantras" mentioned meditation techniques 5000 years ago.

Buddha, one of history's major proponents of meditation, and a major meditation icon, first made his mark around 500 B.C. His teachings were spread far and wide across the Asian continent. Separate countries or cultures adopted different forms of the word "meditation," and they each found their own unique way of practicing it. Buddhist and Hindu based Eastern-style meditation practices are still the most popular today.

Meditation was spread to Western society thousands of years after it was adopted in the East. It finally started to gain popularity in the West in the mid-20th century. In the 1960s and 1970s, many professors and researchers began testing the effects of meditation and learned about its multitude of benefits.

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In meditation one gives oneself to recognition that all is one. Oppositions and differences disappear. Sigmund Freud sensed this in his thoughts on the libido. The libido cannot be suppressed it must be transformed.

Physical Postures for Meditation

Different spiritual traditions, and different teachers within those traditions, prescribe or suggest different physical postures for meditation. Sitting, supine, and standing postures are used. Most famous are the several cross-legged sitting postures, including the Lotus Position.

Spine

Many meditative traditions teach that the spine should be kept "straight," that is, the meditator should not slouch. Often this is explained as a way of encouraging the circulation of what some call "spiritual energy," the "vital breath", the "life force" (Sanskrit prana, Chinese qi, Latin spiritus) or the Kundalini. In some traditions the meditator may sit on a chair, flat-footed (as in New Thought); sit on a stool (as in Orthodox Christianity); or walk in mindfulness (as in Theravada Buddhism). Some traditions suggest being barefoot, for comfort, for convenience, or for spiritual reasons.

Other traditions, such as those related to kundalini yoga, take a less formal approach. While the basic practice in these traditions is also to sit still quietly in a traditional posture, they emphasize the possibility of kriyas - spontaneous yogic postures, changes in breathing patterns or emotional states, or perhaps repetitive physical movements such as swaying, etc., which may naturally arise as the practitioner sits in meditation, and which should not be resisted but rather allowed to express themselves in order to enhance the natural flow of energy through the body. This is said to help purify the nadis and ultimately deepen one's meditative practice.

Mudra/Hand

Bas-relief in Sukhothai, Thailand depicting monks during walking meditation. Various hand-gestures or mudras may be prescribed. These can carry theological meaning or according to Yogic philosophy can actually affect consciousness. For example, a common Buddhist hand-position is with the right hand resting atop the left (like the Buddha's begging bowl), with the thumbs touching.

Eyes

In most meditative traditions, the eyes are closed. In some sects such as Zen, the eyes are half-closed, half open and looking slightly downward. In others such as Brahma Kumaris, the eyes are kept fully open.

Quiet is often held to be desirable, and some people use repetitive activities such as deep breathing, humming or chanting to help induce a meditative state.

In Sufism meditation (muraqaba) with eyes closed is called Varood while with open eyes is known as Shahood or Fa'tha.

Focus and Gaze

Often such details are shared by more than one religion, even in cases where mutual influence seems unlikely. One example would be "navel-gazing," which is apparently attested within Eastern Orthodoxy as well as Chinese qigong practice. Another would be the practice of focusing on the breath, which is found in Orthodox Christianity, Sufism, and numerous Indic traditions.

Cross-legged Sitting

Sitting cross-legged (or upon one's knees) for extended periods when one is not sufficiently limber, can result in a range of ergonomic complaints called "meditator's knee". Many meditative traditions do not require sitting cross legged.

Meditation Basics

For folks with no experience or training in meditation, the information below provides a simple and basic introduction to samatha (calm abiding) meditation. There are many different meditation techniques, and some of them can become quite arduous and advanced; but almost all meditative traditions begin with a mastery of calm abiding as the foundation for advanced practice. The information below is a good summary of what we would tell you if you walked into one of our meetings and asked us how to meditate.

Posture

- Sit on the floor with the legs crossed in the lotus, half-lotus, or standard cross-legged position. These positions are uncomfortable for many; alternatively, sit

upright in a straight-backed chair. Meditation should not be painful.

- The back should be perfectly straight. Try to straighten out even the normal curvature of the spine. Imagine a string running through your spine and pulling up to keep it straight. If you're sitting in a chair, do not lean back against the chair-back; only the base of the spine should be touching the back of the chair.
- Your shoulders should be straight and level, but without any tension.
- Place your hands in the position of meditative equipoise: The right hand is placed in the left hand, palms upwards, with the tips of the thumbs slightly raised and gently touching. The hands are held 4 - 5 inches below the navel. Alternatively, place your hands on your knees, with the fingers pointing downwards.
- Your head and neck should be slightly bent forward with the chin tucked in.
- In most meditative traditions, the eyes are closed. In some sects such as Zen, the eyes are half-closed, half open and looking slightly downward. In others such as Brahma Kumaris, the eyes are kept fully open.
- The mouth is held in a normal position, neither too tightly closed nor too loosely open, with the tongue held against the palate behind the teeth.

A Simple Relaxation Exercise

Before beginning the meditation, it may be helpful to perform this simple relaxation exercise to help settle the mind and the body: Assume the meditative posture as described above, and take a very deep breath, forcing the breath to fill and settle in your abdomen. Hold the breath as long as you can and then release it slowly. As you release the breath, relax your body and visualize all your physical and mental tensions and attachments being expelled with the exhalation. Do this three times.

Breath-Counting Meditation

The most basic technique in samatha, or calming meditation, is the breath-counting technique. Using this technique, you simply breathe normally and naturally, silently counting each inhalation and exhalation:

Breathe in ... count 1
Breathe out ... count 1
Breathe in ... count 2
Breathe out ... count 2
Breathe in ... count 3
Breathe out ... count 3

Continue in this way until you reach a count of either 7 or 10, and then start over again at 1.

The purpose of the counting is to give your mind a definite object on which to focus. One thing you will almost certainly notice in the beginning is how difficult it is to stay focused on your breath and your counting. Thoughts and mental distractions will inevitably arise and disrupt the exercise. When these distractions arise, simply notice them and let them go, and then return to the count, starting over at 1. You should not become frustrated or disappointed when your mind wanders from the count, as this is a perfectly natural occurrence. Just recognize the thought that has arisen, let go of it, and return to the count. You will notice that the longer and more frequently you practice, the less often that your thoughts intrude on your meditation.

Awareness of Breath Meditation

When you feel like you've mastered the breath-counting technique, you can drop the counting and just pay attention to your breathing. Notice the breath as it enters your nostrils, and travels down your throat into your lungs. Notice how your abdomen rises with each inhalation. Do the same thing as you exhale: Notice how your abdomen falls and feel the breath as it leaves your nostrils. At any time, if you feel like you're becoming too distracted, return to the counting until your mind settles once again.

Mantra Recitation Meditation

The silent repetition of a mantra is another popular technique. The Transcendental Meditation technique involves the repetition of a "personalized" mantra; in Buddhist meditation, there are a number of mantras to choose from. Simply repeat the mantra over and over silently to yourself; when a thought arrives to interrupt the recitation, simply notice the thought, let it pass away, and resume the recitation. Examples of Buddhist mantras include:

OM AH HUM (Basic seed syllables which can be recited individually or together)

OM MANÉ PADME HUNG (Mantra of Chenrezig, Bodhisattva of Compassion)

GATÉ GATÉ PARAGATÉ PARASAMGATÉ BODHI SVAHA
(Prajnaparamita Heart of Wisdom Mantra)

OM AH HUNG BENZAR GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG (Vajra Guru Padmasambhava's Mantra)

Personally, I have found the “Gayatri Mantra” most helpful at the beginning and end of every meditation session.

For those uncomfortable with the Sanskrit mantras, repeating the simple phrase "CLEAR MIND" can be an effective alternative.

Sanskrit Mantras are of great benefit to all spiritual seekers of **Truth**. Sanskrit is the *original* language, eternal, holy, and sacred.

The **Great** Hindu Vedas and Upanishads, where these mantras originate, are two of the *truest* volumes of knowledge **ever** written. Their ancient teachings are finally being proven by modern science.

Quantum Physics has now proven that all of what we think of as solid matter is actually a vibrational energy frequency arising from **consciousness**.

The true substance of the Universe is Consciousness; The Vedas and Upanishads have been teaching this Truth for *thousands* of years.

Keep in mind that all Truth is **beyond** Religion. Religion is separating, whereas truth and spirituality is unifying. You don't have to be Hindu in order to benefit from its Truth. We are **all** human; every other label we place on ourselves is limiting, and separating. The greatest spiritual masters and Avatars that ever lived all taught the **same** things. Religion, background, and culture had *nothing* to do with their teachings.

We are all **one** creation. There is only one infinite field of consciousness, and we are all part of this field.

The Vedas and Upanishads were discarded as myth by western scholars merely because they were **beyond** their capacity to comprehend them.

In order to understand any spiritual truth, one must first have a *burning* desire for it. Mantras can aid in your quest for Truth, which is **Enlightenment**. They

are ancient, powerful, and holy. Chant them with reverence, humility, and devotion.

Om Namah Shivaya is known as the great **redeeming** mantra and means “Reverence to Shiva” or “I bow to that which **I AM** becoming”.

Shiva is the **Supreme Reality**, the *inner* Self. It is the name given to consciousness that dwells in all.

Chanting to Shiva allows all other false, or no longer needed constructs to fall away, to be destroyed, so that we stand rooted in the strength of our **true** foundation.

This mantra turns the intellect within to face itself and see its *ignorance*. Repetition of this chant will **expand** your consciousness, **increasing** your wisdom and **purifying** your soul.

Saguna and Nirguna Forms of Meditation

Introduction

When you see the concrete figure of Lord Shiva or Lord Krishna with open eyes and meditate, it is the concrete form of meditation. When you reflect on the image of Lord Krishna by closing your eyes, it is also concrete form of meditation, but it is more abstract. When you meditate on the infinite abstract light, it is still more abstract meditation. The former two types belong to Saguna form of meditation, the latter to Nirguna form.

Even in Nirguna meditation, there is an abstract form in the beginning for fixing the mind. Later on, this form vanishes and the meditator and the meditated become one. Meditation proceeds from the mind only. The help of the mind is always needed either for perception of an object or for the understanding of Brahman. When you read a book with absorbing interest and attention, your mind gets fixed to the ideas. Even so, in Nirguna meditation of Brahman (formless Dhyana), the mind is fixed on one idea, viz., that of Atman.

Saguna Meditation and Generalities

Meditation on the Lord Shiva or Ishta Devata

This is meditation on a Murty (an effigy), either the Lord Shiva, the Lord Krishna, Rama, or Devi. This is a concrete form of meditation for people of

Bhakti-Marga. The Bhakti Marga is branch of Hinduism that emphasises a spiritual journey undertaken by a devotee that will culminate in a state of union with the Supreme or mutual indwelling of the deity and the bhakta. Bhakti Marga is a way of life, a path to the Heart, a connection to the Self. Saguna meditation is meditation with Gunas, attributes of the Supreme or Deity. Repeat His name also. Think of His attributes, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, etc. Your mind will be filled with purity. Lord Krishna's picture with flute in hand and Lord Vishnu's picture with conch, discus, mace and lotus are excellent ones of concrete meditation. Enthroned Him in the lotus of your heart amidst blazing light. Mentally think of His lotus-feet, yellow silk robe, necklace set with Kaustubha gem, earrings, crown, bracelets, conch, discus, mace and lotus, and then again come back to His feet. Again and again repeat the process.

Saguna meditation is meditation on a form. Select any Murty you like best, either Shiva, Vishnu, Rama or Krishna, according to your inclination or taste. Or follow the directions of your Guru. He will select for you the Ishta Devata or tutelary deity which will guide you. An archer first aims at grosser and bigger objects. Then takes up medium objects. Finally he shoots at finer and subtle objects. Even so, one should take to Saguna meditation to start with and when the mind is trained and disciplined well, he can have Nirakara, Nirguna meditation. Saguna meditation is meditation on a concrete object. Nirguna meditation is meditation on an abstract idea. Saguna Upasana removes Vikshepa. For three or six months, practise Trataka on any picture.

After six months' practice of Trataka, meditate on the mental picture of the Murty from half to two hours only in the Trikuti (space between the two eyebrows). See and feel that the Ishta Devata is present in every object in the universe. When you meditate, mentally repeat the Mantra of the Devata. Think of the attributes of the deity, such as omnipotence, omniscience, etc. Feel that Sattvic qualities from the deity flow towards you. Feel that you possess this Sattvic Bhavana. You will have Darsana of your Ishta Devata in one or two years, if you are sincere in your Sadhana. Follow this plan. This will help concentration. Move the mind on the various parts of the Murty. Take for instance the picture of Lord Vishnu with four hands and meditate as follows. The practice of Trataka is of great use in this Saguna meditation.

"Dhyeyah sada savitrimandalamadyavarti

Narayanah sarasijanasannivishtah

Keyuravan makarakundalavan Kiriti

Hari hiranmayavapur-dhritasankhachakrah."

"Sankhachakragadapane

Dvarakanilayachyuta."

"Meditate always on Narayana seated in the Asana of lotus-flower in the midst of a lustrous sun in the lotus of heart or in Trikuti with golden armlets set with diamond, with earrings, with golden crown set with diamond, with golden necklace set with Kaustubha gem and with golden colour, with discus, conch, mace and lotus-flower in four hands-that indestructible Achyuta of Dvaraka."

During meditation, move the mind on the various parts of Vishnu. See the various parts of Vishnu. See with the mind His feet first, then legs, then His yellow silk cloth, then His golden Hara set with diamond, Kaustubha gem, etc., on the breast, then the earrings, Makara Kundalas, then the face, then the crown on the head, then the discus on the right upper hand, then the conch on the upper left hand, then the mace on the lower right hand, then the lotus-flower on the left lower hand. This is the order. Then come down to the feet and start again to the upper parts. By this method the mind will not run towards objects.

First meditate on Virat-Purusha. Then take up Saguna meditation. Lastly have Nirguna meditation.

Meditation on Virat Purusha

Sit in Padma or Siddha Asana in your meditation room and meditate on the following thoughts for half an hour daily. This is a gross form of meditation for six months.

1. Heaven is His head.
2. Earth is His foot.
3. Quarters are His hands.
4. Sun and moon are His eyes.
5. Fire is His mouth.
6. Dharma is His back.
7. Grass and herbs are His hairs.

8. Mountains are His bones.

9. Sea is His bladder.

10. Rivers are His arteries and veins.

The mind will expand now. Afterwards take to Saguna meditation on a form of God such as Rama, Krishna or Shiva. Have this kind of meditation for a year. Then have recourse to Nirguna meditation on Brahman. By the practice of these various methods, the mind becomes a fit instrument to take up abstract meditation on an abstract idea.

Meditation on Gayatri

Gayatri is the "Blessed Mother" of the Vedas. It is a symbol of God, the Lord of created beings. Japa of Gayatri Mantra produces Chitta-Suddhi without which you can do nothing, nothing in spiritual line. You can never effect an iota of spiritual progress. Gayatri is an effective universal prayer. This is also known as Brahma Gayatri.

Om Bhur Bhuvah Svah; Tat Savitur Varenyam

Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi; Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat.

Om - Para Brahman

Bhur - Bhu-Loka (Physical plane)

Bhuvah - Antariksha-Loka (Astral plane)

Svah - Svarga-Loka (Celestial plane)

Tat - Brahman; Paramatman

Savitur - Isvara; Creator

Varenyam - Fit to be worshipped

Bhargo - Remover of sins and ignorance; Glory

Devasya - Of the shining one

Dhimahi - We meditate

Dhiyo - Intellects; Buddhis

Yo - Which; Who

Nah - Our

Prachodayat - Enlighten

"Let us meditate on Isvara and His Glory, Who has created this universe, Who is fit to be worshipped, Who is the remover of all sins and ignorance. May He enlighten our Buddhis (intellects)."

Retire into the meditation room after bath just before sunrise. Sit in your Asana and repeat the Mantra mentally as many times as you can, but not less than 108 times and constantly feel that you are receiving light, purity and wisdom from Gayatri. Concentrate on the meaning of the Gayatri. This is important. Have your gaze at the Trikuti, the place between the two eyebrows.

Nirguna Meditation

This is meditation on Lord Shiva, in His all-pervasive, unmanifested aspect, as the Supreme Para Brahman. In this form of meditation, you meditate on Lord Shiva as the Supreme Brahman without form, attributeless, eternal, infinite. Meditate on Him as the Suddha, Satchidananda, Vyapaka Atman; Nitya, Suddha, Siddha, Buddha, Mukta, eternally free Brahman; an unlimited Ocean of Pure Consciousness. Now, identify yourself with this transcendental Svarupa of Shiva. Feel that you are Chaitanya, Akhanda, Paripurna, Ekarasa, Santa, Unchanging Existence.

Every atom, every molecule, every nerve, vein, artery, should powerfully vibrate with these ideas. Lip-repetition of 'Sivoham' will not produce much benefit. It should be through heart, head and soul. This feeling should be kept up continuously. Negate the body-idea while repeating Sivoham mentally. When you chant Sivoham feel:

Infinity I am

All light I am

All joy I am

All glory I am

All power I am

All knowledge I

All Ananda I am Sivoham Sivoham

Shivoham Shivoham
Shivoham Shivoham
Shivoham Shivoham
Shivoham Shivoham
Shivoham Shivoham
Shivoham Shivoham

Meditate on the above ideas constantly. Constant effort with zeal and enthusiasm is an indispensable requisite. Repeat mentally the above ideas incessantly. You will realise.

Exercises in Nirguna Meditation

There is a living, universal Power that underlies all these names and forms. Meditate on this Power which is formless. This will form an elementary Nirguna meditation without any form (formless Dhyana).

“There is no world. There is neither body nor the mind. There is only one Chaitanya (pure consciousness). I am that pure consciousness.”-This is Nirguna meditation (without attributes).

Sit on Padmasana. Open the eyes. Gaze steadily on the formless air only. This is also another method of formless meditation. Concentrate on the air. This will lead to the realisation of the nameless and formless Brahman, the One Living Truth.

Imagine that there is a Parama, Ananta, Akhanda Jyotis (supreme, infinite effulgence) hidden behind all the phenomena with an effulgence that amounts to the blaze of crores of suns together. Meditate on That. That is also another form of Nirguna meditation.

Concentrate and meditate on the expansive sky. This is also another kind of Nirguna, Nirakara meditation. By the previous methods in concentration, the mind will stop thinking of finite forms. It will slowly begin to melt in the ocean of Peace, as it is deprived of its contents, viz., forms of various sorts. It will become subtler and subtler also.

Trataka Meditation

What is Trataka Meditation?

To put it briefly, Trataka - also called Yogic gazing - is a practice where the gaze is fixed on an object for some time and then that object is visualized clearly with the eyes closed, as an inner image at the eyebrow center.

Benefits

Trataka has several benefits which would be helpful to everyone and not only meditation practitioners:

- Trataka is believed to have a helpful effect in treating and even resolving several eye disorders such as weak eyesight. It improves the internal and external optic function.
- It improves concentrative powers and mental resolve.
- It helps in disconnecting with the noise and distractions of the external world. This is deeply relaxing.
- In yoga, it is said to also develop the "third" eye - the seat of intuition or that associated with "psychic" powers

How it works?

At the physical level it is said to strengthen the eye muscles by exercising them to focus upon a point. Practicing Trataka on an object such as the candle flame is said to provide a unique 'balming' effect to the eyes which help in eye health and in the alleviation of certain eye disorders.

At the pre-meditative level, it is necessary to stall eyeball movement for great benefits and experiences. As we are aware, eyeballs are constantly in motion even while sleeping in the form of REM (Rapid Eye Movement). The aim is to minimize and eventually stall even this minutest of movement. Trataka is a wonderful practice in Yoga to achieve this, as it helps in overcoming this by focusing on a point and then visualizing its after-image with the eyes closed.

Many of the hurdles in our personal lives and even on the path to meditation have to do with our inability to disconnect with the external world at will. In yogic terminology, this would mean the inability to withdraw our senses from the sense objects. Trataka, through the focus on one object, helps to make this disconnect more easily and prepares us to do so at will. This is relevant to almost everyone, but specifically vital for the meditation aspirant.

How it is accomplished?

Trataka can be practiced on several objects, but the most popular and effective is trataka on a flame. This is because a flame (such as a candle flame) produces the best after-image that helps in easier visualization of the flame even when eyes are closed. This is the desired effect of Trataka - wherein you can visualize and concentrate on the image even when the eyes are closed.

You should first be seated in a comfortable meditative posture or a squatting position with spine erect. If you have trouble squatting on the mat, you may raise the seating by a few notches.

A candle is placed in a Trataka Stand and the height of the stand is adjusted so that the wick of the flame is at horizontal eye level. The stand is placed at an arm's length. Trataka is to be practiced with spectacles removed, so people with spectacles may have to adjust the distance between the stand and themselves, so that they observe a clear image of the candle wick without blur.

The focus should on the top end of the wick, as the candle burns. Keep your eyes relaxed while fixing the gaze on the wick. Try not to blink as blinking will interfere in the formation of a clear inner image.

This gaze is kept constant for some time and then eyes closed. With the eyes closed, you should try to observe the inner image of the flame at the eye brow center.

If you don't see it, don't be disappointed - you should start seeing it with practice. Keep the eyes closed for as long as you see the inner image. Then re-start.

Two other meditation outlines

Meditation on “OM” (AUM)

Have the figure OM in front of you. Concentrate on this. Do Trataka also with open eyes (steady gazing without winking till tears flow profusely). This is both Saguna and Nirguna meditation (with and without attributes). Keep a picture of OM in your meditation room. You can do Puja for the symbol of Brahman. Burn incense if you wish to do so, etc. Offer flowers. This suits the modern educated persons.

Meditation on Mind

Mind is Brahman or the Supreme in manifestation. Mind is the Supreme in motion. As Brahman is approachable by means of the mind, it is only proper to meditate upon the Mind as Brahman. “The mind should be adored as Brahman; this is intellectual worship.” (Chhandogya Upanishad, III-18). This is Upasana Vakya.

Some Useful Hints for Meditation

In meditation, do not strain the eyes. Do not strain the brain. Do not struggle or wrestle with the mind. It is a serious mistake. Many neophytes commit this grave error. That is the reason why they get easily tired soon. They get headache and they have to get up very often to pass urine during the course of meditation owing to the irritation set up in the micturition centre in the spinal cord.

Make no violent effort to control the mind. Do not wrestle with it with force. It is a mistake to do so. But, rather allow it for a while and let it run and exhaust its efforts. The mind will jump now like an untrained monkey first. Gradually, it will slow down. Then you can fix the mind on your Lakshya either on a concrete form or on an abstract idea.

Get up at 4 a.m. (Brahma Muhurta). Sit comfortably in the Padma, Siddha, Sukha or Svastika Asana. Keep the head, neck and trunk in one straight line. Relax the muscles, nerves and brain. Calm the objective mind. Close the eyes. Do not struggle with the mind. Do not voluntarily and violently drive away intruding thoughts. Gently allow the divine thoughts to flow. Steadily think of the Lakshya (point of meditation). Have sublime, Sattvic thoughts. Vicious thoughts will, by themselves, vanish.

Even if the mind runs outside during your practice in meditation, do not bother. Allow it to run. Slowly try to bring it to your Lakshya (centre). By repeated practice, the mind will be finally focussed in your heart, in the Atman, the Indweller of your hearts, the final goal of life. In the beginning, the mind may run out 80 times. Within six months, it may run 70 times; within a year, it may run 50 times; within 2 years, it may run 30 times; within 5 years, it will be completely fixed in the Divine Consciousness. Then, it will not run out at all even if you try your level best to bring it out, like the wandering bull, which was in the habit of running to gardens of different landlords for eating grass, but which now eats fresh gram and extract of cotton seeds in its own resting place.

If there is much strain in meditation, reduce the number of hours for a few days. Do light meditation only. When you have regained the normal tone, again increase the period. Use your common-sense all throughout Sadhana. It is good to reiterate on this point.

Those who meditate for four or five hours at one stretch can have two Asanas, either Padma and Vajra or Siddha and Vajra, in the beginning. Sometimes, the blood accumulates in one part of the legs or thighs and gives a little trouble. After two hours, change the Asana from Padma or Siddha Asana to Vajrasana or stretch the legs at full length. Lean against a wall or a pillow. Keep the spine erect. This is the most comfortable Asana. Join two chairs. Sit on one chair and stretch the legs on another chair. This is another contrivance.

Pose or Asana is really mental. Try to have a mental Padma or mental Siddha Asana. If the mind is wandering, you cannot have a steady body or a steady physical pose. When the mind is steady or fixed in Brahman, steadiness of the body automatically follows.

Have the one all-pervading Bhavana (feeling). Deny the finite body as a mere appearance. Try to keep up the feelings always. Whatever elevates you, you can take it up for your advantage just to elevate the mind and then continue your prolonged meditation.

You must daily increase your Vairagya, meditation and Sattvic virtues such as patience, perseverance, mercy, love, forgiveness, purity, etc. Vairagya and good qualities help meditation. Meditation increases the Sattvic qualities.

Just as you conserve the energy by observing Mouna (vow of silence), so also you will have to conserve the mental energy by stopping useless thinking. Then you will save abundant reserve energy for meditation.

Remember these three word-images: PURIFICATION, CONCENTRATION, ABSORPTION. Repeat them mentally during meditation. This is a triplet. Remember this triplet. Purify the mind. Get rid of Mala (impurities such as Kama, Krodha, etc.). Perform selfless, desireless actions. This will purify the mind. Practise Upasana, Pranayama, Trataka and Rajayogic “Chitta-Vritti-Nirodha.” This will help Ekagrata. Then practise constant and deep meditation. The mind will be absorbed eventually.

“Pranavo dhanuh saro hyatma brahma tallakshyam uchate; Apramattena veddhavyam saravan tanmayo bhavet.”

“Om is the bow, mind is the arrow and Brahman is the mark to be aimed at. Brahman is to be hit or pierced by him whose thoughts are concentrated. Then he will be of the same nature (Tanmaya) as Brahman, as the arrow becomes one with the aim when it has pierced it.” (Mundakopanishad, II-ii-4)

Sit on Padma or Siddha Asana. Close the eyes. Concentrate the gaze on the Trikuti (space between the two eyebrows). Now, chant Dhirga Pranava (long OM) forcibly for five minutes. This will remove Vikshepa or tossing of the mind. Concentration will ensue. Now repeat OM mentally with Brahma-Bhavana. Whenever the mind begins to wander, again chant OM verbally. As soon as the mind gets calm, mentally repeat OM again. The same process can be adopted for Saguna meditation also.

Those who have knowledge of the flow of the five Tattvas in the nostrils can very rapidly advance in meditation. There is an intimate connection between the mind and the five Tattvas. When Agni-Tattva flows through the nostrils, mind is much agitated and meditation is interrupted. During the flow of the Akasa-Tattva, meditation is very favourable. A knowledge of “Svara-Sadhana” or “Svarodaya” as it is popularly termed is an indispensable necessity for those who take up to meditation.

Just as a very skilful archer, in shooting at a bird, is aware of the way in which he takes his steps, holds the bow, the bow-string and the arrow at the time when he pierces the bird-”Standing in this position, holding thus the bow, thus the bow-string and thus the arrow, I pierce the bird”-and ever afterwards would not fail to fulfil these conditions that he might pierce the bird, even so should the aspirant note the conditions such as suitable food thus: “Eating this kind of food, following such a person, in such a dwelling, in this mode, at this time, I attained to this meditation and Samadhi.”

As a clever cook, in serving his master, notes the kind of food that he relishes and hence forward serves it and gets gain, so the aspirant too notes the conditions such as nourishment, etc., at the moment of attaining meditation and Samadhi and, in fulfilling them, gets ecstasy again and again.

OM NAMAH SHIVAYA MANTRA

Key of C

Am Dm
Om Na-mah Shi - va - ya Om Na-mah Shi - va - ya

G C G7 C
Om Na-mah Shi - va - ya Om Na-mah Shi - va - ya

C Am Dm
Om Na-mah Shi - va - ya Om Na-mah Shi - va - ya

G C G7 C
Om Na-mah Shi - va - ya Om Na-mah Shi - va - ya

C F Dm
Om Na-mah Shi - va - ya Om Na-mah Shi - va - ya

G C G7 C
Om Na-mah Shi - va - ya Om Na-mah Shi - va - ya

The Meditation Session

Most teachers recommend meditating for 15 - 20 minutes once or twice a day. If you can accommodate two twenty-minute sessions every day, you will be surprised very quickly at the benefits you see. Unfortunately, many of us have difficulty with that type of schedule, so don't feel bad if you can't meet that goal. For beginning meditators especially, twenty minutes can seem like an eternity, so some teachers suggest that you start with a 5 - 10 minute daily meditation, and then work up to longer and more frequent sessions. The important thing is to just give it a try. You cannot master the techniques or experience the benefits of meditation with just one attempt. If you're interested in really experiencing

meditation, you should commit yourself to a daily meditation session (even a short one) for at least a week or two, before judging the experience for yourself.

The Lord Shiva has many Names

Lord Shiva, we know already, is considered as the destroyer of the Universe as per the Hindu Mythology. Shiva is one of the most popular gods of the Hindus. Lord Shiva is a complex god like goddess Kali, being destroyer and restorer at the same time. Shiva is also known as Bhole Shankar, the innocent god, who gets appeased easily. Shiv Shambhu is also recognised as an ascetic, as he resides on Mount Kailash in meditation. God Shiva is worshipped usually in his phallic (Lingam) form. Special Worship of Shiva can be seen during the month of Saawan (July-August) of Hinduism. Lord Shiva is known by many different names.

This list contains 108 names of Lord Shiva with their meanings:

Aashutosh One Who Fulfils Wishes at once
Aja Unborn
Akshayaguna God with Numberless Attributes
Anagha Without Any error
Anantadrishti of Infinite Vision
Augadh One Who Revels All the Time
Avyayaprabhu Everlasting Lord
Bhairav Lord of Terror
Bhalanetra One Who Has an Eye in the Forehead
Bholenath Kind Hearted Lord
Bhooteshwara Lord of Ghosts and Evil Beings
Bhudeva Lord of the Earth
Bhutapala Protector of the Ghosts
Chandrapal Master Of The Moon
Chandraprakash One Who Has Moon As A Crest
Dayalu Compassionate
Devadeva Lord Of The Lords
Dhanadeepa Lord Of Affluence
Dhyanadeep Icon Of Meditation And Concentration
Dhyutidhara Lord Of Radiance
Digambara Ascetic Without Any Clothes
Durjaneeya Difficult To Be Known
Durjaya Unvanquished
Gangadhara God Of River Ganga
Girijapati Husband Of Girija (Parvati)

Gunagrahin Acceptor Of Gunas
Gurudeva Master Of All
Hara Remover Of Sins
Jagadisha Master Of The Universe
Jaradhishamana Redeemer From Afflictions
Jatin One Who Has Knotted Hair
Kailas One Who Bestows Peace
Kailashadhipati Lord Of Mount Kailash
Kailashnath Master Of Mount Kailash
Kamalakshana Lotus-Eyed Lord
Kantha Ever-Radiant
Kapalin One Who Wears A Necklace Of Skulls
Khatvangin One Who Has The Missile (Khatvangin) In His
Hand
Kundalin One Who Wears Earrings
Lalataksha One Who Has An Eye In The Forehead
Lingadhyaksha Lord Of The Lingas
Lingaraja Lord Of The Lingas
Lokankara Maker Of The Three Worlds
Lokapal One Who Takes Care Of The World
Mahabuddhi Exceptionally Intelligent
Mahadeva Greatest God
Mahakala Lord Of All Times
Mahamaya Of Great Illusions
Mahamrityunjaya Great Victor Of Death
Mahanidhi Great Storehouse
Mahashaktimaya One Who Has Infinite Powers
Mahayogi Supreme of All Gods
Mahesha The Almighty
Maheshwara Lord of the Lords
Nagabhushana One Who Has Snakes as Ornaments
Nataraja King of the Art of Dancing
Nilakantha Blue Necked Lord
Nityasundara Ever Beautiful
Nrityapriya Lover of Dance
Omkara Originator of OM
Palanhaar One Who Protects Everyone
Parameshwara First among All Gods
Paramjyoti Greatest Splendor
Pashupati Lord of All Living Beings
Pinakin One Who Has a Bow In His Hand
Pranava Originator of the Syllable of OM

Priyabhakta Favorite of the Devotees
Priyadarshana of Loving Vision
Pushkara One Who Gives Nourishment
Pushpalochana One Who Has Eyes like Flowers
Ravilochana Having Sun as the Eye
Rudra the Dreadful
Rudraksha One Who Has Eyes like Rudra
Sadashiva Eternal God
Sanatana Eternal Lord
Sarvacharya Preceptor of All
Sarvashiva Always Chaste
Sarvatapana Scorcher of All
Sarvayoni Source of Everything
Sarveshwara Lord of All Gods
Shambhu One Who Bestows Prosperity
Shankara One Who Gives Happiness
Shiva Always Pure
Shoolin One Who Has a Trident (Trishool)
Shrikantha of Magnificent Neck
Shrutiprakasha Illuminator of the Vedas
Shuddhavigraha One Who Has a Pure Body
Skandaguru Preceptor of Skanda
Someshwara Lord of All Gods
Sukhada Bestower of Happiness
Suprita Well Pleased
Suragana Having Gods As Attendants
Sureshwara Lord Of All Gods
Swayambhu Self-Manifested
Tejaswani One Who Spreads Illumination
Trilochana Three-Eyed Lord
Trilokpati Master of All the Three Worlds
Tripurari Enemy of Tripura
Trishoolin One Who Has a Trident in His Hands
Umapati Husband of Uma (Parvati)
Vachaspati Lord of Speech
Vajrahasta One Who Has a Thunderbolt in His Hands
Varada Granter of Boons
Vedakarta Creator of the Vedas
Veerabhadra Supreme Lord of the Nether World
Vishalaksha Wide-Eyed Lord
Vishveshwara Lord of the Universe
Vrishavahana One Who Has Bull as His Mount

The Sadhus Devotees of Shiva

Apart from their participation in the Kumbh Mela, Sadhus usually live rather solitary lives, renouncing society and leading a monk-like existence, with basic food provisions and few possessions. Most Sadhus wear distinctly coloured clothes, to set them apart from the civilian population, while a number of Sadhus decline to wear clothes altogether, as they all used to do traditionally. Their distinct clothing, or nakedness, symbolises their renunciation of the mortal world and their dedication to a new spiritual existence. In a similar vein, on becoming a Sadhu, the holy man renounces his old name and receives a new one, indicative of his affiliation. Most often, however, they are referred to by the term Baba, which means, old wise man.

The Sadhus spend their time in devotion to their chosen deity, the most popular of which is Lord Shiva, the Destroyer (Shaivite devotees). Vishnu, the Preserver, or rather his incarnations (Avatars) like Rama or Krishna, are the other most followed deities (Vaishnavite devotees).

Followers of Lord Shiva, as well as of Lord Rama, may adopt Shiva's long dreadlocks. Lord Shiva is the longhaired god, who uses his long matted strands of hair, his powerful jata, to temper the potentially catastrophic force of the river Ganges - the goddess Ganga descending from heaven.

Apart from their differences in clothes, almost all Sadhus have distinctive markings painted on their forehead to demonstrate their allegiance to their sect and chosen deity.

Most Sadhus lead a life of austerity (tapasya) and a number wear heavy wooden and metal chastity belts to highlight their chastity. Some will go to extremes in self-inflicted suffering to speed up their way to enlightenment. The most unbelievable to watch are those who remain standing for twenty-four hours a day for years on end or who hold one arm aloft until all feeling is lost and the muscles atrophy, leaving the Sadhus permanently disabled.

Others believe in easier routes to enlightenment; viewing Shiva as the Lord of Hash, some strive to be permanently intoxicated. This results in a number of rather red-eyed Sadhus spending their days smoking marijuana, which is admittedly a little easier than standing for twelve years, and would explain why smoking Sadhus are in abundance.

Sadhus are at the heart of the Kumbh Mela. Apart from taking a holy dip in the Ganges, the aim of the Hindu pilgrims is to have the Darshan ("vision") of a Sadhu in order to receive their spiritual energy. Believers regard them as holy

because of their radical commitment, and the most devout Sadhus are worshipped as Gods on Earth. Followers and disciples hope to gain spiritual merit or perhaps even enlightenment by touching the Sadhus' feet or listening to them - the ones not under vows of silence that is. Sadhus are also thought to transmit spiritual energy through Prasad. Pilgrims offer items such as food and flowers to Sadhus, and the ones not kept or sacrificed are distributed as Prasad, which literally means food from the Gods.

Tens of thousands of Sadhus will gather at the Kumbh Mela where the different Sadhu Akharas (orders) will maintain their own camping areas. In the past there was intense rivalry between the Shaivite and Vaishnavite sects, mostly about the order of precedence in the bathing processions, which sometimes resulted in bloodshed, and even today some of that competitive spirit still lingers.

One of the most obscure and radical sects of the Sadhus are the Aghoris. Though one of the smaller sects, they are noted for their extreme behaviour. The Aghori philosophy is that by acting contrary to all Sadhu and general Hindu taboos they will actually speed up enlightenment.

This includes reversing even the most important of practices such as vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol.

As followers of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, they express a morbid fascination with death, and many spend their time surrounded by corpses, and drinking from human skulls. It is said that some take their devotion to the even greater extremities of eating excrement and having sexual intercourse with menstruating. Although numbers of the sect have dwindled there are still many that carry out these age-old traditions.

One of the most prominent Sadhu sects, the Juna Akhara, consists of the warrior-ascetics or Nagas (the naked). They smear their bodies with holy ash and sport long matted hair, symbolic of their devotion to Lord Shiva, generally known as the God of destruction, but to Sadhus better known as the Lord of Yoga.

The Nagas importance is emphasised at the Mela as they lead the millions of pilgrims in a procession to the sandy banks of the Ganges on the main bathing day.

There is a long history of militant asceticism and the Nagas were recruited and organised into militant armed bands to defend the Hindus against the onslaught of the invading Muslims. Their performances at the Kumbh Mela recall their martial heritage with weapon and wrestling displays.

There are also militant ascetics who follow Vishnu, rather than Shiva, and these are called Bairagis. The regiments of militant Bairagis are similar to the Akhara organisations of the Nagas. Even though all bairagis wear clothing nowadays, some sections are also called Nagas, as they used to be naked in the past.

Though bairagis are well respected, the more important are the Shaivite Akharas, especially the Juna Akhara, this is illustrated by their leading role in the Kumbh processions.

Many Hindus believe that women must be reincarnated as men before they can reach spiritual enlightenment, but nevertheless there are a number of Goddesses, such as Kali, that Sadhus are devoted to. And there are also a number of female Sadhus, Sadhvis. These holy women are as respected as men, and often referred to as Mataji, Revered Mother.

Sadhvis are committed to celibacy and other ascetic practices, and so as not to complicate matters many have their own sub-sects and living quarters. However, some Sadhvis become disciples of the male gurus and perform Sadhanas (hardships that bring one closer to God) such as standing on one leg for an entire year.

The common thread of thought in the religious beliefs of the Indian subcontinent upholds a single Reality (as in absolute monism) and holds in reverence each of the several manifestation of the Ultimate Reality in the forms of Gods. Bhrama, Vishnu and Shiva are revered as the Supreme Trinity of multitude of manifestations of Divinity. It is said that all that is true, all that is good and all that is beautiful is God (Satyam Shivam Sundaram).

Among Sadhus too, Shiva is referred to as 'the good one' or the 'auspicious one'. Shiva - Rudra is considered to be the destroyer of evil and sorrow. Shiva - Shankara is the doer of good. Shiva is 'tri netra' or three eyed, and is 'neela kantha' - blue necked (having consumed poison to save the world from destruction. Shiva - Nataraja is the Divine Cosmic Dancer. Shiva - Ardhanareeswara is both man and woman.

He is both static and dynamic and is both creator and destroyer. He is the oldest and the youngest, he is the eternal youth as well as the infant. He is the source of fertility in all living beings. He has gentle as well as fierce forms. Shiva is the greatest of renouncers as well as the ideal lover. He destroys evil and protects good. He bestows prosperity on worshipers although he is austere. He is omnipresent and resides in everyone as pure consciousness.

Shiva is inseparable from Shakti - Parvati the daughter of Himavaan - Haimavati. There is no Shiva without Shakti and no Shakti without Shiva, the two are one - or the absolute state of being - consciousness and bliss.

The five mantras that constitute Shiva's body are Sadyojaata, Vaamadeva, Aghora, Tatpuruasha and Eesaana. Eesaana is Shiva not visible to the human eye, Sadyojaata is Shiva realized in his basic reality (as in the element earth, in the sense of smell, in the power of procreation and in the mind). The Vishnudharmottara Purana of the 6th century CE assigns a face and an element to each of the above mantras. (Sadyojaata - earth, Vaamadeva - water, Aghora - fire, Tatpuruasha - air and Eesaana - space).

The names of the deified faces with their elements are Mahadeva (earth), Bhairava (fire), Nandi (air), Uma (water) and SadaShiva (space). Panchamukha lingams have been seen from the 2nd century onwards. The Trimurthi SadaShiva image of Shiva in the Elephanta Caves near Mumbai is a portrayal in stone, of the five faces of Shiva. The fourth and the fifth heads are not seen in this image here.

The works of sages Vyasa, Vasishtha, Patanjali, the poet Kalidasa, the tamil saint poets Nayanmars - Appar, Sundarar, Sambandar, the poet Manikkavachakar, the mystic tamil siddhas, tantric philosophers, the spiritual leader Adi Sankaracharya and others such as Basavanna and Appayya Deekshitar speak of the attributes of Shiva.

Ganga Meditation



In the Hindu tradition, reverence is shown to almost every river of the Indian subcontinent. This devotion extends all the way back to the Rig Veda, the

world's earliest text, where all earthly rivers are said to have their origin in heaven. In the cosmology of the Rig Veda, the creation of the world or the process of making the world habitable is associated with the freeing of the heavenly waters by Indra, the king of gods. A demon is said to have withheld these waters, thus inhibiting creation. When Indra defeated this demon, the waters rushed onto the earth, like a mother cow eager to suckle her young (Rig Veda 10.9). The rivers of earth are therefore seen as being necessary to creation and as having a heavenly origin.

Another important aspect in the veneration for rivers is the purifying quality of running water in general. The purity-conscious Hindu social system, in which pollution is inevitably accumulated in the course of a normal day, prescribes a bath as the simplest way to rid oneself of impurities. This act simply consists of pouring a handful of cold water over one's head and letting it run down one's body. Moving, flowing, or falling water is believed to have a great cleansing power. This last is specifically exemplified in the act of sprinkling of water over one's head, or dipping into a running stream, these mere actions being thought of as sufficient enough to remove most kinds of daily pollution accumulated throughout the ordinary course of human existence.

Water absorbs pollution, but when it is running, like in a river, it carries pollution away as well. Correspondingly, the word 'Ganga' is derived from the etymological root 'gam,' meaning to "to go." Indeed, Ganga is the "Swift-Goer," and the running, flowing, and energetic movement of her waters is constantly mentioned as one of the major reasons behind her purifying attributes. Mother Ganga indiscriminately purifies her devotees, whether they be virtuous or sinful. She is non judgmental, and her children are equal in her eyes.

In the western culture religion is sober and it contains a fear of spiritual drunkenness. There seems to almost be a fear of losing control in worship and dedication. Even the Pentecostal Evangelicals are accused of being on a more emotional or soulful realm instead of a spiritual realm. True expression of worship is stifled by strict codes of behaviour. This is not true in India and the Hindu. Excuses need not be made for appearance or the use of cannabis for the religious or in festivals. Western culture has a narrow perspective of god, while the Hindu worships god in many forms.

Ganga meditation works towards a pure state of mind that relates to a mythical swan. This mythical swan supposedly could drink the milk out of water that was mixed with milk. Ganga meditation refers to the mind able to filter and absorb the good through the vast inputs before it. When we meditate and go deeper inwards our thinking patterns change and gradually our mind begins to perceive

from higher conscious states, like a swan gliding above thought process. When the mind goes inwards and goes beyond to the thoughtless realm of deep meditation, the mind state is called Ganga meditation.

Yogis who meditate for years together acquire a pure mind state that enables the discipline and insight to choose the right intake of food and herbs. Ganja, as marijuana is called in India, is considered to be a sacred herb of Lord Shiva due to the effect it has on the mind to go inward, with focus.

Ganja, however, is also regarded with reverence. In other words, ganja is to be smoked exclusively to take the mind to the oneness state. The effect of taking the inward journey through ganja is, ability to transcend the mind, meaning to go beyond sleep to the sleepless sleep state called "turiya" by the yogis; to transcend body consciousness, and go beyond hunger, heat and cold; ability to empower the mind with clarity, insight, creativity and focus. All these effects are actually nearly the opposite effects that one might have when ganja is smoked simply for recreation.

These are steps suggested from the yogic wisdom to enhance the goodness of this sacred herb of higher consciousness.

1. Keep your stomach light, and that is, ensure a gap of at least two hours before you had a meal. A light stomach enables the mind to climb beyond body consciousness.
2. Sit down and go into the calm space within. Become aware of breath with deeper inhales, longer retentions and stretched exhales.
3. Feel your Higher Self (Soul) as the Spirit within. Make a mental offering of the ganja to your Self, the joyful part of you.
4. Inhale breath. Make a straw with your tongue as you inhale. Inhale imagining the breath to be from the tail end of the spine- the root chakra.
5. Retain breath- Hold the breath and slowly visualize the spot above the navel as where the energies are rested.
6. Exhale breath. Exhale with your eyes close and focused on the 'third eye', the spot between the eye brows.
7. Skull breathing: inhale with full lungs, retain breath, bring the focus to the third eye and do short bursts of exhale visualizing the third eye utilizing the diaphragm. Do this a couple of times.
8. Inhale, retain breath and focus in the third eye and say, "Aaaaah" slowly and feel the sound become resonance as you visualize a light in the third eye.

9. Bring your focus into the “third-eye” and find an immense calm space where you are in the moment- no thoughts of tomorrow or yesterday- just the now moment.

10. Say hello to the joyful stillness inside you - this is your soul, the Spirit.

11. Say a mantra that you like or tune into a mantra chant and allow the mind to be absorbed in the chanting that enables the mind to repeat in the same pattern over and over again. This condenses the mind to focus on a single point.

12. Take the ganja to your heart, think of an intent, like- 'Peace for the world', and feel the ganja being blessed by your favourite deity of worship as Shiva, Krishna, Jesus, God (Allah) or Goddess Kali or any entity/being/name who you attribute as Source.

Now smoke the blessed ganja!

There are believed to be 330 million gods or faces of god in Hinduism. This is not that different from Christianity, for in Christianity God is all holy, the rose of Sharon, the Prince of Peace, the great creator, the great I Am, the everlasting Lord, Emmanuel, Jesus and on and on. In times of old in India it was believed that there were 330 living beings, thus the idea of 330 million deities or gods. Lord Shiva is who we will be exploring here. Shiva literally means “the supreme one.”

Shiva is the lord of herbs. He is believed to be in a constant high and the lord of all “consciousness-changing” drugs. From this short explanation or description of Shiva, you can see the lure to the hippies of the sixties and their European trail that usually ended in southern India. Even today many will go to India for a spiritual holiday or a time of inner cleansing and exploration.

Shiva is the wild one or the trickster of the godhead. He truly is the original hippie. His eyes were always red and he continued his roaming the countryside even after his marriage to Parvati. Just as wives of the 21st century cook a feast to lure their husband out of the woods on holidays, Parvati decided to brew her husband a drink to keep him home. She did not have a still or brew her own ale, but created a drink using the buds of the female cannabis plant. This drink made him look at home with a different perspective. Now there was no place like home and no woman more beautiful than his wife. So ladies, if you want to keep your man home, break out the holy herb cannabis!

The most visible dedication to Shiva is seen in the Saivite sadhus. These sadhus use cannabis to have a more philosophical perspective of life and the world. It is also used as an aid in meditation. These devotees are easily identified as they are covered in ashes, have long matted hair and smoke large quantities of cannabis. Like their Lord Shiva, they exemplify the dirty hippie.

The poet Manikkavacar of the ninth century proclaimed, “We are not subject to anyone. We do not fear anything. We’ve joined His devotees. We will dive (into the sea of bliss) again and again and cavort there with His devotees.” The cannabis users today reflect this attitude of freedom. Even during this time of prohibition, cannabis is used worldwide.

Bhang is a preparation from the leaves and flowers (buds) of the female cannabis plant and is consumed either as a beverage or smoked. This is traditionally prepared during festivals associated with Lord Shiva such as Holi in March and Vaisakhi in April. Consuming bhang during Holi is a standard practice. Bhang removes inhibitions during this festival which imposes no restrictions.

Bhang has been used in India since around 1000 BC and is described in ancient text as a beneficial herb that “releases anxiety”, thus a freedom in worship and devotion.

The pipes used to smoke bhang are called chillums and are made of fired clay and often decorated with a cobra. Smoking the chillum is more of a social undertaking instead of a private one. The chillum may be stroked and even talked to during the process as the sadhus and devotees share their stories and parables of old. It is lit with two matches, one for Shiva and one for Shakti. The sadhus may growl like a wild animal and once the fire ignites the herb, it is like lightning from Shiva’s third eye(see pineal gland further on). As Kali reduces the world to ashes for the enjoyment of Shiva, so is the flame turning the herb to ashes. Before the first drag upon the chillum, the sadhu shouts an invocation much like a toast in our culture.

The chillum moves clockwise around the group of participants where each lifts the pipe to their forehead (third eye) while giving their toast and then takes a long steady take. Coughing is considered a bad omen and reveals a bad conscience or disharmony within the person. It is said that one or two long drags upon the chillum are enough for you to enter a spiritual realm. The breath released becomes the very breath of creation for now the sadhu is Shiva, god in human form. It is a magical time as devotees lay offerings at the feet of Shiva, now in human form.

Today, smoking cannabis is enjoyed best with friends and circulates among them much like the sadhu. Inhibitions are lost and truth and fellowship flow freely.

Recipe for Flavoured Bhang drink

Ingredients

2 cups water

1 ounce marijuana (fresh leaves and flowers of a female plant preferred)

4 cups warm milk

2 tablespoons blanched and chopped almonds

1/8 teaspoon garam masala (a mixture of cloves, cinnamon, and cardamon)

1/4 teaspoon powdered ginger

1/2 to 1 teaspoon rosewater

1 cup sugar

Method of Preparation:

Bring the water to a rapid boil and pour into a clean teapot. Remove any seeds or twigs from the marijuana, add it to the teapot and cover. Let this brew for about 7 minutes.

Now strain the water and marijuana through a piece of muslin cloth, collect the water and save.

Take the leaves and flowers and squeeze between your hands to extract any liquid that remains. Add this to the water.

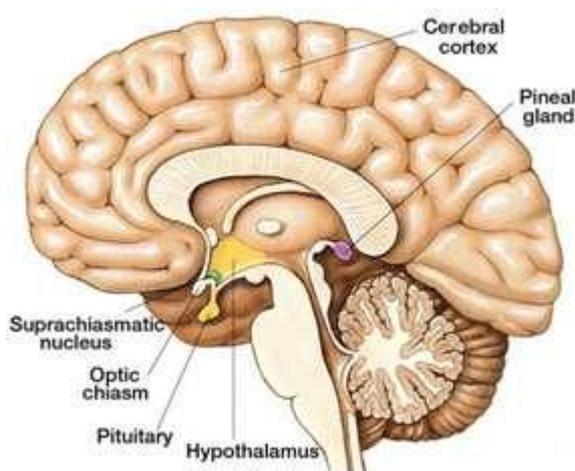
Place the leaves and flowers in a mortar and add 2 teaspoons warm milk. Slowly but firmly grind the milk and leaves together. Gather up the marijuana and squeeze out as much milk as you can. Repeat this process until you have used about 1/2 cup of milk (about 4 to 5 times). Collect all the milk that has been extracted and place in a bowl. By this time the marijuana will have turned into a pulpy mass.

Add the chopped almonds and some more warm milk. Grind this in the mortar until a fine paste is formed. Squeeze this paste and collect the extract as before. Repeat a few more times until all that is left are some fibers and nut meal. Discard the residue.

Combine all the liquids that have been collected, including the water the marijuana was brewed in. Add to this the garam masala, dried ginger and rosewater. Add the sugar and remaining milk.

Cool it, serve, and enjoy.

The Pineal Gland or Third-Eye



The pineal gland is considered one of the body's greatest mysteries. Today we know that it is an endocrine gland which secretes the hormone melatonin. It is shaped like a pine cone and placed exactly in the middle of the brain. The French philosopher Descartes suggested that the pineal gland, or the cone gland, as he called it, was the dwelling place of the soul, and the gateway to the spiritual world. But apart from this comment,

western science has mainly ignored this gland and considered it more or less useless. Since Darwin it has been described as reminiscent of an eye which no longer is in use, and originates from earlier history of evolution when we were a more primitive species.

It is not until the last sixty years that science has started to uncover some of the pineal glands great secrets. After seven years of age small layers of calcification appears in the gland, and makes it look like a small cone in x-rays. Because it is situated in the middle of the brain, it is used to detect tumours of the brain, because this would displace the pineal gland from it's centre.

With the exception of the kidneys, no other place in the body receives as much supply of blood as the pineal gland, and there is several indications that this gland plays a much greater role than previously thought. New discoveries have now shown that the hormone secreted by this gland, melatonin, has several effects:

- Decreases the aging process
- Starts off puberty
- Strengthen the immune system
- Regulates body heat
- Regulates oestrogen level among woman
- Regulates sleep function

The pineal gland is light sensitive, and is one of the reasons it is part of the body's biological clock, both in humans and animals, and has a regulating effect in sleep function. Melatonin has in fact also psychedelic effects, and can release special ecstatic and transcendental experiences, among meditators and mystics.

The mystical third-eye



According to several occult traditions, the pineal gland is connected to "The Third Eye", which is situated in the middle of the forehead, on a straight line from the pineal gland. With Shiva and The Buddha, the third eye is found described as a "shining spot" and "a flaming pearl", symbolising unity, transcendental wisdom and spiritual consciousness.

This point is often used as point of concentration in meditation, because it is one of the places in the body where it is most easy to hold a steady focus, as well as it activates psychic energy. Concentration on this point will sooner or later give strong impressions of inner light, and is a method to get in contact with the energy dimension beyond the physical body.

In the Bible there is a saying that refers to the third eye:

*"Let thine eye be single. That thy whole body shall be full of light."
(Mark 6:22 and Luke 11:34. This is from the King James version of the Bible which was written in the time of Shakespeare. Later editions have other translations which often loses this interesting point made out by Jesus.)*

How to Worship the Lord Shiva at Home and Satsang

Shiva or Shivling lingam connects a devotee with the Supreme Being – Lord Shiva. The lingam is the symbol of Lord Shiva and the lingam puja helps the devotee in understanding Lord Shiva. The Lord cannot be described but still we say he is without a beginning and an end and is without a form. It is difficult for a devotee to understand this formless nature. Therefore Lord Shiva appeared in the form of Jyotirlinga before Brahma and Vishnu. The Lingam thus is a symbol of Lord Shiva. Each Lingam puja, step by step, takes the devotee to the eternal truth – that he/she is part of the Supreme Being.

The Lord Shiva (the aspect of God who destroys ignorance) Puja (worship) is of two kinds. One is scriptural and the other is devotional - non-scriptural. The scriptural books of worship are called Agama. The devotional books are called Nigama.

When Lord Shiva explains how to worship himself it is called Agama. When Parvati [the consort of Lord Shiva] explains how to worship Lord Shiva, when she becomes the great questioner and learner, then it is known as Nigama. In one there are technical exercises, scriptural exercises. You read which side you must face, what kind of havan samagari you must use, what kind of a statue you must use, what kind of mantra you must say, and if you make a slight mistake what will happen to you. In this way, out of fear, you have great discipline.

The other way is discipline out of love.

An example of this is the hunter who brought dead rabbits and offered them to Lord Shiva. One day he saw Lord Shiva's eye was watering and bleeding so he took out one of his own eyes and put it in place of the watering eye. But he noticed the Lord's other eye was also watering and bleeding so he took out his other eye and offered it to the Lord. Then suddenly both eyes became whole and he had the divine vision of the Lord. Meaning if you offer your all then God becomes alive to you.

Neither method is wrong. The scriptural method needs a little extra caution, while with the non-scriptural method you worship like a little child. Sit on his head or sit on his toes, it does not matter, He knows we are little children. Even Christ said you have to become like little children. Not childish but childlike.

Similarly you can worship Christ with all the paraphernalia in the scriptural way, or you can worship him according to the purity of your heart and call upon

him wherever you like, whatever you are doing, he is our very own. He will come. He has to come.

Worshipping the Lord Shiva at Home and Satsang

Before starting the Puja, the devotee takes a bath and wear freshly washed clothes. Hymns praising Lord Shiva or the mantra ‘om namaha shivayaa’ are repeated to create a mood for worship. Then, the devotee sits in front of the lingam and blows conch or ring bells. This indicates the beginning of the Puja.

First it is the panchamrit abhishek - the libation of five holy liquids over the lingam. The libation can consist of any five of the following – water from river Ganga, honey, sugarcane juice, milk, yogurt, ghee, seawater, coconut water or milk, fragrant oils, rose water or other precious liquids. Usually, only milk of cow is used. While pouring the liquid, Om Namah Shivaya is uttered. Some devotees utter the Lord’s name 108 times and some 1008 times. There is no fixed rule.

After the panchamrit abhishek, the lingam is cleaned with water from Ganga. (This is might not be possible always so just normal water.) After this the lingam is smeared with sandalwood paste and is decked with flowers. Water and sandalwood paste is used to keep the lingam cool, as Lord Shiva is always in a highly inflammable state. In some Shiva temples, cooling liquid constantly drops from pot hung above the Lingam.

Next, sweets, coconut and fruits are offered to the Lord. Camphor and incense are lit and ‘arati’ is conducted. Some devotees fan the lingam and sing praises of the lord.

Finally, ringing of bells or blowing of conch indicates the end of Puja. White ash (vibhuti) is rubbed on the forehead and it is also distributed. Fruits, sweets and coconut are distributed as ‘prasada.’

Lord Shiva Festivals

Constituting the trinity of Hindu Gods, Shiva performs the function of the destroyer so that new life is created once again. Shaivism is one of the most popular Hindu cults with millions of devotees following this sect. Through penance and ascetic practice the followers of Shiva try and observe the principals of Shiva. Lord Shiva is actually a god of contradictions by being a destroyer as well as a restorer, an ascetic as well as a householder. The ultimate

truth and virtues inherent in Lord Shiva is Satyam Shivam Sundaram - truth, goodness and beauty.

The dissolving force in life, Shiva stands out as the most different of Hindu gods. Unlike other Hindu gods, Shiva wears a snake around his neck has unkempt maze like hair, is devoid of any jewels, wears just a loincloth and resides in the cold Mount Kailash. Lord Shiva in fact is the principal god of the ascetics and hence resembles them a lot. Lord Shiva's unclad body covered with ashes reflects the transcendental aspect of his life. The snake coiled around Lord Shiva's neck is in fact a reflection of his role as a destroyer. With 'pralay' Lord Shiva destroys the old world to prepare it for a new cycle. Likewise a snake removes its old skin to wear a new skin to start a new life. The trishula (trident) symbolizes the Lord's three fundamental powers of will (iccha), action (kriya) and knowledge (gyan). The trident is also a symbol of the trinity, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva himself reflecting the three qualities of nature creation, preservation and destruction.

Shiva is the supreme lord of the Hindus and was the true believer of interdependence of men & women for sustenance of the world, hence earning the name 'Ardhanareshwar'. Lord Shiva is portrayed in Hindu religion and mythology as the perfect householder, living with his wife Parvati and sons Ganesha and Kartikeya on Mount Kailash. One today finds twelve jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva spread all over India and several other temples. 'Maha Shivaratri' or the Night of Shiva is celebrated every year on the 13th night of the Krishna paksha. This festival dedicated to Lord Shiva is one of the most significant Hindu festivals which are celebrated by fasting during the day. To his believers Lord Shiva is "Maheshwara" encompassing the roles of creator, preserver and destroyer all by himself.

Mahashivaratri is a special day for the devotees of Lord Shiva. On the festival, people would observe a fast for the entire day and sing bhajans and songs in the praise of the deity. Lord Shiva temples are flocked by devotees, as special puja is conducted all through the day. Different types of Abhishek are performed, with the use of honey, ghee, milk, rose water, sandalwood paste and yogurt. During the time, many devotees would sing the traditional, Shiva Chalisa - a prayer for Lord Shiva. The lyrics of the chalisa have been written many years ago, with the aim to invoke the Lord and ask for his help in removing the hardships of his devotees. In the following lines, we have given the lyrics of Shiva Chalisa.

Lord Shiva Chalisa

Jai Ganesh Girija Suvan
Mangal Mul Sujan
Kahat Ayodhya Das Tum Dev Abhaya Varadan

Jai Girija Pati Dinadayala
Sada Karat Santan Pratipala
Bhala Chandrama Sohat Nike Kanan Kundal Nagaphani Ke

Anga Gaur Shira Ganga Bahaye
Mundamala Tan Chhara Lagaye
Vastra Khala Baghambar Sohain Chhavi Ko Dekha Naga Muni Mohain

Maina Matu Ki Havai Dulari
Vama Anga Sohat Chhavi Nyari
Kara Trishul Sohat Chhavi Bhari Karat Sada Shatrun Chhayakari

Nandi Ganesh Sohain Tahan Kaise
Sagar Madhya Kamal Hain Jaise
Kartik Shyam Aur Ganara-U Ya Chhavi Ko Kahi Jata Na Ka-U

Devan Jabahi Jaya Pukara
Tabahi Dukha Prabhu Apa Nivara
Kiya Upadrav Tarak Bhari Devan Sab Mili Tumahi Juhari

Turata Shadanana Apa Pathayau
Lava-Ni-Mesh Mahan Mari Girayau
Apa Jalandhara Asura Sanhara Suyash Tumhara Vidit Sansara

Danin Mahan Tum Sama Kou Nahin
Sevak Astuti Karat Sadahin
Veda Nam Mahima Tab Ga-I Akatha Anandi Bhed Nahin Pa-I

Pragate Udadhi Mantan Men Jvala
Jarat Sura-Sur Bhaye Vihala
Kinha Daya Tahan Kari Sara-I Nilakantha Tab Nam Kaha-I

Pujan Ramchandra Jab Kinha
Jiti Ke Lanka Vibhishan Dinhi
Sahas Kamal Men Ho Rahe Dhari Kinha Pariksha Tabahin Purari

Ek Kamal Prabhu Rakheu Joi
Kushal-Nain Pujan Chaha Soi
Kathin Bhakti Dekhi Prabhu Shankar Bhaye Prasanna Diye-Ichchhit Var

Jai Jai Jai Anant Avinashi
Karat Kripa Sabake Ghat Vasi
Dushta Sakal Nit Mohin Satavai
Bhramat Rahe Mohin Chain Na Avai

Trahi-Trahi Main Nath Pukaro
Yahi Avasar Mohi Ana Ubaro
Lai Trishul Shatrun Ko Maro
Sankat Se Mohin Ana Ubaro

Mata Pita Bhrata Sab Hoi
Sankat Men Puchhat Nahin Koi
Svami Ek Hai Asha Tumhari
Ava Harahu Aba Sankat Bhari

Dhan Nirdhan Ko Deta Sadahin
Jo Koi Janche So Phal Pahin
Astuti Kehi Vidhi Karai Tumhari
Kshamahu Nath Aba Chuka Hamari

Shankar Ho Sankat Ke Nishan
Vighna Vinashan Mangal Karan
Yogi Yati Muni Dhyan Lagavan
Sharad Narad Shisha Navavain

Namo Namu Jai Namah Shivaya
Sura Brahmadi Par Na Paya
Jo Yah Patha Karai Man Lai
Tapar Hota Hai Shambhu Saha-I

Riniyan Jo Koi Ho Adhikari
Patha Karai So Pavan Hari
Putra-hin Ichchha Kar Koi
Nischaya Shiva Prasad Tehin Hoi

Pandit Trayodashi Ko Lavai
Dhyan-Purvak Homa Karavai

Trayodashi Vrat Kare Hamesha
Tan Nahin Take Rahe Kalesha

Dhupa Dipa Naivedya Charhavai
Anta Vasa Shivapur Men Pavai
Kahai Ayodhya Asha Tumhari
Jani Sakal Dukha Harahu Hamari

Nitya Nema kari Pratahi
Patha karau Chalis
Tum Meri Man Kamana
Purna Karahu Jagadish

The Temples celebrate variously and solemnly the following festivals:

1. Mahashivarathri
2. Mahaganapathi
3. Navarathri
4. Durga festival
5. Kartika masa pooja
6. Shankara jayanthi
7. Hanuma jayanthi
8. Ramanavami
9. Sankranthi festival

Hindus around the world -- from South Asia to Britain and beyond -- observe many colourful holidays throughout the year. Recent festivals include the Ganesh Chaturthi, celebrating the birth of the elephant-headed deity, and Janamashtami, the birth anniversary of the god Krishna. The range of experiences at these celebrations runs from joyfully loud and spectacular to solemn and contemplative. Each devotee celebrates in a distinct, personal way even while joining the larger community. Hinduism is the world's third-largest religion; the majority of its one billion adherents are concentrated in India, but sizable communities exist all over the globe. I hope you enjoy these vivid, intriguing glimpses of Hindu festivals photographed over the past few months.

An important Lord Shiva Festival:

Maha Shivaratri or Shivratri Utsav is a famous Hindu festival in honour of Lord Shiva, one of the Trimurtis in Hinduism. Shivaratri, which literally means “Great Night of Shiva” or “Night of Shiva”, is observed on the 13th night/14th day in the Krishna Paksha on the month of Phalgun (February – March) in the

Hindu Calendar. Mahashivaratri is celebrated on the night before Amavasya, the night before and day of the new moon. February 20, 2012.

Pranayama or Lifeforce

Pranayama is derived from two Sanskrit words - Prana (life force) and Ayama (control). Therefore, in its broadest description, Pranayama (Lifeforce) would mean the control of the flow of life force.

One of the initiation techniques into Pranayama is through the practice of Yogic Breathing or Yoga Breathing. Yogic Breathing helps us break down and understand our breathing better as being composed of diaphragmatic and thoracic breathing. Although this breathing technique forms a basis to advanced Pranayama techniques, it leads to important benefits of its own and provides us a glimpse of what we are capable of reaching through Pranayama.

Breathing forms the basis of Pranayama. During breathing for Pranayama inhalation (puraka) stimulates the system and fills the lungs with fresh air; retention (kumbhaka) raises the internal temperature and plays an important part in increasing the absorption of oxygen; exhalation (rechak) causes the diaphragm to return to the original position and air full of toxins and impurities is forced out by the contraction of inter-costal muscles. These are the main components leading to Pranayama which massage the abdominal muscles and tone up the working of various organs of the body. Due to the proper functions of these organs, vital energy flows to all the systems. The success of Pranayama depends on proper ratios being maintained between inhalation, exhalation and retention.

Yogis claim that by Yogic culture the weight of the body can be so reduced that it can fly over the space to any distance in an instant. They can prepare a magic ointment, which, when applied to the soles of the feet, gives them power to traverse any distance on earth within a very short time.

By the practice of Khechari Mudra, by applying the elongated tongue to the posterior nasal openings, they can fly in the air. By keeping a magic pill in their mouth they can also move in space to any place in the twinkling of an eye. When we are anxious to know the welfare of our own relations in a distant or foreign land, we take recourse to writing letters and sending ordinary or urgent cables.

Practicing the Khechari Mudra also stimulates the release of “feel good” neurotransmitters such as dopamine. With the release of calming and soothing hormones, a Khechari Mudra practitioner also experiences a profound state of calmness and well-being. Additionally, applying pressure to the points on the roof of the mouth helps to balance out the energetic pathways throughout the body. In this way, incorporating a regular practice of the Khechari Mudra into your Yoga practice will help to revitalize your entire being as the nectar of the gods is released and flows from the bindu located at the Third Eye Chakra throughout your whole body. It is even said that practicing the Khechari Mudra has the power to awaken the divine Kundalini Shakti energy that lies coiled at the base of the spine.

This is a very simple practice that is also known as nabho mudra. Actually there is a far more difficult form of khechari mudra that involves various surgical operations to the tongue, lasting over a period of months. The practice we give here, however, can be done by everyone without any preparation or practice.

Technique of the Khechari Mudra

Roll your tongue upwards and backwards, so that the lower surface lies in contact with the upper palate.

Stretch the tip of the tongue backwards as far as is comfortable. Don't strain, for you will be required to hold this position for the duration of Ujjayi Pranayama. At first you will feel almost immediate discomfort, but with practice you will find that you can perform khechari mudra for longer periods of time. When you feel discomfort, release the tongue for a second or so and then again repeat the tongue lock. This mudra should be incorporated into Ujjayi Pranayama.

Awareness

This will depend on the meditational practice being performed. However, part of one's awareness should be on the sound emerging from the throat and the corresponding inhalation and exhalation.

Reasons for the practice

In the neck there are two remarkable organs called the carotid sinuses situated on each side of the main artery supplying the brain with blood, in

front of the neck and just below the level of the jaws. These small organs help to control and regulate blood flow and pressure. If there is any fall in blood pressure, it is detected by these two sinuses and the relevant message is sent directly to the brain centre. The brain responds immediately by increasing the heartbeat and contracting the arterioles (tiny blood vessels), thus raising the pressure to its normal level. Any rise in blood pressure is also detected by the carotid sinuses, which inform the brain and the opposite steps are taken to rectify the situation.

Tension and stress are associated with high blood pressure. Ujjayi Pranayama by applying a slight pressure on these sinuses in the neck causes them to react as though they have detected high blood pressure, with the result that the heartbeat and the blood pressure are reduced below normal. One becomes physically and mentally relaxed. This is the reason why ujjayi is so important in many meditational practices. It induces overall relaxation, which is essential for success in meditation.

Khechari mudra accentuates this pressure in the throat region and consequently on the two carotid sinuses. The reader can experiment for himself by doing ujjayi firstly without khechari mudra and then with, and compare the difference in pressure.

Ujjayi Pranayama is a simple practice but it has many subtle influences on the body and brain, both physical and mental as well as bioplasmic. The slow and deep breathing results in immediate calmness of the mind and body, as well as bringing the bioplasmic body into harmony. Furthermore, the sound at the throat tends to soothe one's whole being. If one remains aware of this sound for a reasonable period of time to the exclusion of other thoughts, then one will feel immediate benefits.

Benefits

As we have said, this practice is mainly used in conjunction with meditation techniques, and it is usually practised in this way. However, those people who merely want to relax themselves can do ujjayi in conjunction with a meditation practice or shavasana.

People who suffer from insomnia will find it especially useful. Those who suffer from high blood pressure will find that Ujjayi helps to reduce the pressure, even if only for a short period of time at first. However, during this period the body and mind will gain some much needed rest.

In general we can say that Ujjayi is helpful for all ailments that originate from nervous-ness or chronic stress.

The Yogis claim that they can, by meditation (Dhyana), know anything that happens in other parts of the world by a projection of the mind or by mentally travelling the distance which is only a matter of few seconds. Yogi Lahiri, whose Samadhi is still in Varanasi, travelled to London to see the state of health of his superior's wife. For hearing a friend at a long distance the material world presents us with telephones and wireless receivers, but the Yogis claim that through their Yogic power, they can hear anything, from any distance, even the voices of the Supreme and other invisible beings in the firmament. Today when a man is suffering from a disease the material world presents us with doctors, medicines, injections and so forth, but the Yogis claim that by a mere glance or by simple touch or by recitation of Mantras, not only the diseases can be cured but also life can be given to a dead man.

These Yogis by persistent effort in concentration get different Yogic powers that are known as 'Siddhis'. Those who acquire these Siddhis, are known as Siddhas. The process through which they obtain Siddhis is called Sadhana. Pranayama is one of the most important Sadhanas. Through the practice of Asana, you can control the physical body and through Pranayama, you can control the subtle, astral body or the Linga Sarira. As there is an intimate connection between the breath and nerve-currents, control of breath leads to the control of vital inner currents.

Pranayama (Lifeforce) occupies a very important place in Indian religion. Every Brahmachari, and every Grihastha also, has to practise it three times every day morning, noon and evening in his daily worship during Sandhya. It precedes every religious practice of the Hindus. Before he eats, before he drinks, before he resolves to do anything, Pranayama should be performed first and then the nature of his determination should be clearly enunciated and placed before the mind. The facts of its preceding every effort of the will is a surety that, that effort will be crowned with success and the mind will be directed to bring about the desired result. Here I may refer to the feat of memory, practised by the Hindu Yogins, under the name of concentration on one hundred things, 'Satavadhana', wherein one hundred questions are put to a Satavadhani or the concentrator in rapid succession by different persons, some testing the verbal memory of the performer, others testing his power of mental calculation, again some others, trying to test his artistic skill, without giving him any time for committing to memory the questions put to him. The performer begins by reproducing the questions, in any order, in respect of those questions, with their

answers. This is generally done in three or more turns, in each turn giving only a portion of the answer to each of the questions and then continuing from where he left off in the next turn. If the questions are of the nature of mathematical problems whose solutions are required, he delivers the answers along with the problems, having solved them mentally.

This faculty of concentration of mind is often exhibited not only with reference to the intellect but also with reference to the five senses. A number of bells may be marked differently and the sounds may be allowed to be studied and made mental note of with the mark given to it. A number of objects of similar shape and colour which are likely to cause deception to the eye of an ordinary man may be shown once to the 'Avadhani' with their marks. While he is attending to other things, if a bell were to be struck or one of the objects suddenly exhibited before his sight, he will at once mention the mark of the bell or the number of the object shown. Similarly his keenness of touch is also put to the test. Such feats of memory are due to the training which they receive from the daily practice of Pranayama.

The Prana may be defined as the finest vital force in everything which becomes visible on the physical plane as motion and action, and on the mental plane as thought. The word Pranayama, therefore, means the restraint of vital energies. It is the control of vital energy which tingles through the nerves of persons. It moves his muscles and causes him to sense the external world and think his internal thought. This energy is of such a nature that it may be called the vice versa of the animal organism. The control of this force is what is aimed at by the Yogis by means of Pranayama. He who conquers this is not only the conqueror of his own existence on the physical and mental plane, but the conqueror of the whole world. For, the Prana is the very essence of cosmic life, that subtle principle which evolved the whole universe into its present form and which is pushing it towards its ultimate goal. To the Yogi the whole universe is his body. The matter which composes his body is the same that evolved the universe. The force which pulsates through his nerves is not different from the force which vibrates through the universe. The conquest over the body does, therefore, mean to him the conquest over the forces of nature. According to the Hindu Philosophy, the whole nature is composed of two principal substances. One of them is called the Akasa or ether and the other, Prana or energy. These two may be said to correspond to matter and force of the modern scientists. Everything in this universe that possesses form or that has material existence is evolved out of this omnipresent and all-pervasive subtle substance 'Akasa'. Gas, liquid and solid, the whole universe, consisting of our solar system and millions of huge systems like ours and in fact every kind of existence that may be brought under the word 'created', are the products of this one subtle and invisible Akasa and at

the end of each cycle return to the starting point. In the same way, all the various forces of nature that are known to man-gravitation, light, heat, electricity, magnetism-all those that can be grouped under the generic name of 'energy', physical creation, nerve-currents, all such as are known as animal forces, and thought and other intellectual forces also, may be said to be the manifestations of the cosmic Prana. From Prana, they spring into existence, and in Prana, they finally subside. Every kind of force in this universe, physical or mental, can be resolved into this original force. There can be nothing new except these two factors in some one of their forms. Conservation of matter and conservation of energy are the two fundamental laws of nature. While one teaches that the sum total of Akasa forming the universe is constant, the other teaches that the sum total of energy that vibrates the universe is also a constant quantity. At the end of each cycle the different manifestations of energy quiet down and become potential; so also the Akasa which becomes indistinguishable; but at the beginning of the next cycle the energies start up again and act on the Akasa so as to evolve the various forms. Accordingly, when the Akasa changes and becomes gross or subtle, Prana also changes and becomes gross or subtle. As the human body is only a microcosm to a Yogi, his body composed of the nervous system and the internal organs of perception represent to him the microcosmic Akasa, the nerve-currents and thought-currents, and the cosmic Prana. To understand the secrets of their workings and to control them is, therefore, to get the highest knowledge and the conquest of the universe.

He, who has grasped this Prana, has grasped the very core of cosmic life and activity. He, who has conquered and controlled this very essence, has not only subjected his own body and mind but every other body and mind in this universe. Thus Pranayama or the control of Prana is that means by which the Yogi tries to realise in his little body the whole of cosmic life, and tries to attain perfection by getting all the powers in this universe. His various exercises and trainings are for this one end.

Why delay? Delay means so much of additional suffering and misery. Let us increase the speed, struggle harder until we succeed in bridging over the vast chasm of time. By doing proper Sadhana let us attain the goal at once in this body, right now in this very moment. Why not we get that infinite knowledge, infinite bliss, infinite peace and infinite power, now itself?

The solution of the problem is the teaching of Yoga. The whole science of 'Yoga' has this one end in view, to enable man to cross the ocean of Samsara, to increase power, to develop knowledge and to attain immortality and eternal bliss.

Technique of Pranayama and Yogic Breathing

Breathing is so simple and so obvious we often take it for granted, ignoring the power it has to affect body, mind and spirit. With each inhale we bring oxygen into the body and spark the transformation of nutrients into fuel. Each exhale purges the body of carbon dioxide, a toxic waste. Breathing also affects our state of mind. It can make us excited or calm, tense or relaxed. It can make our thinking confused or clear. What's more, in the yogic tradition, air is the primary source of prana or life force, a psycho-physio-spiritual force that permeates the universe.

Pranayama is loosely translated as prana or breath control. The ancient yogis developed many breathing techniques to maximize the benefits of prana. Pranayama is used in yoga as a separate practice to help clear and cleanse the body and mind. It is also used in preparation for meditation, and in asana, the practice of postures, to help maximize the benefits of the practice, and focus the mind.

Below are several of the most commonly used forms of Pranayama.

Ujjayi

Ujjayi is often called the "sounding" breath or "ocean sounding" breath, and somewhat irreverently as the "Darth Vader" breath. It involves constricting the back of the throat while breathing to create an "ah" sound -- thus the various "sounding" names.

Benefits

Focuses the mind

Increases mindfulness

Generates internal heat

How to do it

1. Come into a comfortable seated position with your spine erect, or lie down on your back. Begin taking long, slow, and deep breaths through the nostrils.
2. Allow the breath to be gentle and relaxed as you slightly contract the back of your throat creating a steady hissing sound as you breathe in and out. The sound need not be forced, but it should be loud enough so that if someone came close to you they would hear it.

3. Lengthen the inhalation and the exhalation as much as possible without creating tension anywhere in your body, and allow the sound of the breath to be continuous and smooth.

To help create the proper "ah" sound, hold your hand up to your mouth and exhale as if trying to fog a mirror. Inhale the same way. Notice how you constrict the back of the throat to create the fog effect. Now close your mouth and do the same thing while breathing through the nose.

When to do it

During asana practice

Before meditation

Anytime you want to concentrate

Dirgha Pranayama Known as the "complete" or "three-part" breath, dirgha pranayama teaches how to fill the three chambers of the lungs, beginning with the lower lungs, then moving up through the thoracic region and into the clavicular region.

Benefits

Promotes proper diaphragmatic breathing, relaxes the mind and body, oxygenates the blood and purges the lungs of residual carbon dioxide.

How to do it

Sit with your spine erect, or lie down on your back. Begin taking long, slow, and deep breaths through the nostrils.

1. As you inhale, allow the belly to fill with air, drawing air deep into the lower lungs. As you exhale, allow the belly to deflate like a balloon. Repeat several times, keeping the breath smooth and relaxed, and never straining. Repeat several times.
2. Breathe into your belly as in Step #1, but also expand the mid-chest region by allowing the rib cage to open outward to the sides. Exhale and repeat several times.
3. Follow steps #1 and #2 and continue inhaling by opening the clavicular region or upper chest. Exhale and repeat.

4. Combine all three steps into one continuous or complete flow.

When to do it

During asana practice

Prior to meditation

Prior to relaxation

Anytime you feel like it

Nadi Shodhana

Nadi Shodhana, or the sweet breath, is simple form of alternate nostril breathing suitable for beginning and advanced students. Nadi means channel and refers to the energy pathways through which prana flows. Shodhana means cleansing -- so Nadi Shodhana means channel cleaning.

Benefits

Calms the mind, soothes anxiety and stress, balances left and right hemispheres, promotes clear thinking

How to do it

- Hold your right hand up and curl your index and middle fingers toward your palm. Place your thumb next to your right nostril and your ring finger and pinky by your left. Close the left nostril by pressing gently against it with your ring finger and pinky, and inhale through the right nostril. The breath should be slow, steady and full.
- Now close the right nostril by pressing gently against it with your thumb, and open your left nostril by relaxing your ring finger and pinky and exhale fully with a slow and steady breath.
- Inhale through the left nostril, close it, and then exhale through the right nostril.

That's one complete round of Nadi Shodhana --

- Inhale through the right nostril

- Exhale through the left
- Inhale through the left
- Exhale through the right.

Begin with 5-10 rounds and add more as you feel ready. Remember to keep your breathing slow, easy and full.

When to do it

Just about any time and any where. Try it as a mental warm-up before meditation to help calm the mind and put you in the mood. You can also do it as part of your centering before beginning an asana or posture routine. Also try it at times throughout the day. Nadi Shodhana helps control stress and anxiety. If you start to feel stressed out, 10 or so rounds will help calm you down. It also helps soothe anxiety caused by flying and other fearful or stressful situations.

Important Summary on Lord Shiva Worship

Worship of Shiva

Lord Shiva or Siva is worshipped in His Saguna aspect in the form of Shivalingam. Generally Shivabhaktas do Panchayatana Puja. In this Puja, Lord Shiva, Ganesa, Parvati, Suryanarayana and Saligram are duly worshipped.

Get the Panchayatana Murtis on an auspicious day. Install them with great faith in your own house. Conduct special prayers, Archana, Puja, Abhisheka, and feeding of Brahmins, Mahatmas and the poor on a grand scale. Install the deity in a separate room. Worship the Lord daily with all sincerity and faith. You will have all wealth, peace of mind, attainment of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha also. You will lead a prosperous life and enter the Immortal abode of Shiva-Sayujya, on death.

Collect plenty of Bael or Bilva leaves for Lord Shiva's worship. Get ready Dhupa, Dipa, camphor, sandal-sticks, fresh water, plenty of flowers, food offerings to the Lord, a seat to sit upon, a bell, conch and other things required for the Puja before you begin the worship. Get up in the early morning before sunrise. Wash your face. Take bath. Wear silk dress separately kept for Puja purposes. Decorate the Puja room nicely. Enter the room chanting Lord's names, glorifying Him, repeating Hymns in His praise and prostrating before the Lord. Wash your feet before entering the room. Sit in a comfortable posture and commence your worship. You have to first

of all do Sankalpa for beginning the Puja in the prescribed method. You should then do Kalasa (water vessel), Sankha (conch), Atma (self) and Pitha (Lord's seat) Puja in their order. You should then offer Shodasopachara Puja to the Lord and then repeat Mahamrityunjaya Mantra, Rudrapatha, Purushasukta, Gayatri, and do Abhisheka with pure water, milk, sugarcane juice, ghee and other articles according to your capacity or with pure water alone. Rudrabhisheka is highly beneficial. If you do Rudra Japa and Abhisheka, all your worries and agonies will disappear and you will attain the highest beatitude of human existence by the grace of Lord Visvanath. Rudra is a great purifier. There is invisible hidden power in Rudra and Purushasukta. There is a wonderful inspiration in the recitation of Rudra. Start the worship and realise its glory and splendour for yourself.

After Abhisheka, decorate the Lord nicely with sandal paste and flowers. Then do Archana repeating His names, 'Om Shivaya Namah', 'Om Mahesvaraya Namah', etc. Do daily 108 or 1008 Archanas if possible. After Archana, do Arati with different kinds of lights—single Arati, Triple Arati, Pancha Arati and Karpura Arati. Ring bells, cymbals, conch, etc., during Arati. Offer sacred Prasad or Naivedya to the Lord.

After Arati is over, sing the praises of the Lord like Mahimna Stotra, Panchakshara Stotra, etc., waving the Chamara. In the end repeat the prayers 'Kayena vachah', 'Atma tvam Girija matih', and 'Kara-charana-kritam'. Offer everything to the Lord. Feel that you are a mere instrument in His hands. Do everything for obtaining the divine grace only. Develop Nimitta Bhava. Serve the Bhaktas. The Lord is much pleased with the service of His devotees. Distribute the Prasad among the Bhaktas in the end. Take the Prasad with great faith. The glory of Bhagavan's Prasad is indescribable. Vibhuti is taken as Prasad and applied to the forehead.

When you advance in Saguna worship with external objects of worship, you can begin Manasa Puja. You will have Darsana of the Lord and final emancipation.

Have special Pujas on Mondays and Pradosha (thirteenth day of every fortnight—Trayodasi) days. These days and Shivaratri (in the month of February-March) are very sacred for Lord Shiva. Celebrate the Shivaratri on a grand scale. Fast the whole day. Have Trikala Puja, special Abhisheka, Ekadasa-rudra-japa, Sahasrarchana, vigil in the night, study of hymns of Lord Shiva, Shivapurana, hearing discourses on the Lilas of Lord Shiva. After Puja on the next day, break your fast with Abhisheka water. Offer sacred food offerings and partake of the Divine Prasad. You will have great

mental peace, and spiritual advancement. Never miss this opportunity. Daily worship is a sure remedy for all ills. You will never suffer from poverty. Take my word and begin the Puja right from this day onwards.

Shiva Manasa Puja

Manasa Puja is mental worship. Manasa Puja is more powerful and effective than the external worship with flowers, sandals, etc. You will have more concentration when you do Manasa Puja.

Mentally enthrone the Lord on a Simhasana, set with diamonds, pearls, emeralds, etc. Offer Him a seat. Offer Arghya, Madhuparka and various sorts of flowers, clothes, etc. Apply sandal paste to His forehead and body. Burn incense and Agarbatti (scented sticks). Wave lights. Burn camphor and do Arati. Offer various kinds of fruits, sweetmeats, Payasa, cocoanut and Mahanaivedyam. Do Shodasa-upachara or the sixteen kinds of offerings in worship.

Panchakshara Mantra Writing

Write down in a fine note book 'Om Namah Shivaya' for half an hour or more. You will have more concentration by taking recourse to this Sadhana. Write the Mantra in ink clearly. When you write the Mantra observe Mouna. You may write the Mantra in any language. Give up looking hither and thither. Repeat the Mantra mentally also when you write the Mantra. Write the whole Mantra at once. When the Mantra notebook is completed, keep it in a box in your meditation room. Be regular in your practice.

Keep a small notebook in your pocket and write Mantra when you get leisure in the office. Have three things in your pocket, viz., the Gita, Mantra notebook and a Japa Mala or rosary. You will be immensely benefited.

Shiva Jnanam

Japa and meditation of the sacred names of Lord Shiva will free you from all sins and lead you to the attainment of Shiva Jnanam or eternal bliss and immortality. Shiva-nama is the very soul of all Mantras.

Lord Shiva has manifested in the world in sixty different aspects. Vrishabharudha, Hari-hara, Nataraja, Bhairava, Dakshinamurti, Ardhanarisvara, Bhikshatana, Somasekharamurti, Urdhvanatana, Kalasamhara, Jalandhara, Surasamhara, Lingodbhava are His forms.

Shiva means that which is eternally happy or auspicious, Parama-mangala. Om and Shiva are one. Mandukya Upanishad says: 'Santam Shivam Advaitam'. Even an outcaste can meditate on the name of Lord Shiva.

Shiva manifests in the Gayatri Mantra, Agni and in the Sun. When you repeat Gayatri and when you worship the Agni and the Sun, you should meditate on Lord Shiva.

Japa of Panchakshara and meditation of Lord Shiva should be particularly done in the Pradosha Kala or just before the sunset. The Pradosha on the thirteenth Tithi after a full moon or a new moon day, is known as the Mahapradosha. The Devas visit Shiva temples for the worship of the Lord at this period. You can worship the Devas also if you visit temples during Mahapradosha. Devotees of Lord Shiva observe full fast on Mahapradosha days.

A devotee of Lord Shiva should apply Vibhuti to his forehead and body. He should wear a Rudrakshamala. He should worship the Shivalinga with leaves of the Bilva tree. He should do Japa and meditation of the Panchakshara 'Om Namah Shivaya'. Lord Shiva is propitiated by everyone of these actions. Vibhuti or Bhasma is very sacred. It is worn by Lord Shiva Himself. The bead of a Rudrakshamala represents the third eye on the forehead of Lord Shiva. Bilva leaves are regarded to be one of the five abodes of Lakshmi or the Goddess of wealth.

It is Shiva only who causes bondage and Mukti for the Jivas. It is Shiva who makes the Jivas realise their essential Divine Nature. Shiva made Maya as the body, senses and the Universe and thrust the Jivas into the Maya. He created the idea of egoism, 'I'-ness in them. He bound them in Karma and made them experience pleasure and pain according to the nature of their Karmas, virtuous actions or vicious deeds. This is the stage of bondage of the Jivas.

Gradually it is Shiva only who releases them from the fetters of egoism, Karma and Maya and makes them shine as Shiva. This is the state of Moksha or freedom. It is only through the grace of Lord Shiva, they attain the state of final emancipation.

The Jivas have no independence, when they are under the influence of the three impurities, i.e., Anava, Karma and Maya. They are endowed with a little knowledge (Alpajnana).

The Jiva must first know his nature and his relationship with Lord Shiva in order to attain His grace. Life or Prana is in the body. Lord Shiva is within the Prana. He is the Prana of Pranas, and yet He is distinct from the Pranas and body. If there is no Prana in the body, the body becomes a corpse. It cannot perform any action. Shiva is the support for this body, Prana and Jiva. The Jiva cannot do any action without Shiva. It is Shiva who illumines the intellect. Just as the eye cannot see without the light of the sun, although it is endowed with the power to see, so also the intellect cannot function without the light of Lord Shiva.

The four Sadhanas, viz., Charya, Kriya, Yoga and Jnana are the four steps to attain Salvation. They are like the bud, flower, unripe fruit and ripe fruit. Lord Shiva gradually frees the individual souls from egoism, Karma and Maya. The Jivas gradually become disgusted with the sensual pleasures. They become balanced in pleasure and pain. Through the grace of the Lord they understand that Karma is the cause for births and deaths. They begin to do actions for the Lord, serve the devotees of the Lord and attain purity of mind. They understand that the soul or Shiva is distinct from the body, senses and mind and is beyond the reach of mind and speech. They get initiation into the significance of ‘Om Namah Shivaya’, the Panchakshara Mantra and meditate on Shiva.

They practise Shiva Yoga. Their hearts melt. Seer, sight and seen vanish. All the activities of senses, mind and intellect cease. They bathe Lord Shiva with the stream of Divine Love that is generated in their heart and offer their heart as flower unto the Lord.

They hear the sound ‘Chilambosai’ and march forward through the path of the sound and behold the vision of Nataraja in the Chidakasa and are immersed in the ocean of Shivananda. They become one with the Lord, just as camphor melts in the fire.

Worship of Shiva Linga

The popular belief is that the Shiva Lingam represents the phallus or the virile organ, the emblem of the generative power or principle in nature. This is not only a serious mistake, but also a grave blunder. In the post-Vedic period, the Linga became symbolical of the generative power of the Lord Shiva. Linga is the differentiating mark. It is certainly not the sex-mark. You will find in the Linga Purana: Pradhanam prakritir yadahur-lingamuttamam; Gandhavarnarasairhinam sabda-sparsadi-varjitam—The

foremost Linga which is primary and is devoid of smell, colour, taste, hearing, touch, etc., is spoken of as Prakriti (Nature).

Linga means 'mark', in Sanskrit. It is a symbol which points to an inference. When you see a big flood in a river, you infer that there had been heavy rains the previous day. When you see smoke, you infer that there is fire. This vast world of countless forms is a Linga of the Omnipotent Lord. The Shiva Linga is a symbol of Lord Shiva. When you look at the Linga, your mind is at once elevated and you begin to think of the Lord.

Lord Shiva is really formless. He has no form of his own and yet all forms are His forms. All forms are pervaded by Lord Shiva. Every form is the form or Linga of Lord Shiva.

There is a mysterious power or indescribable Sakti in the Linga, to induce concentration of the mind. Just as the mind is focussed easily in crystal-gazing, so also the mind attains one-pointedness, when it looks at the Linga. That is the reason why the ancient Rishis and the seers of India have prescribed Linga for being installed in the temples of Lord Shiva.

Shiva Linga speaks to you in the unmistakable language of silence: "I am one without a second, I am formless". Pure, pious souls only can understand this language. A curious passionate, impure foreigner of little understanding or intelligence says sarcastically: "Oh, the Hindus worship the phallus or sex organ. They are ignorant people. They have no philosophy". When a foreigner tries to learn Tamil or Hindustani language, he first tries to pick up some vulgar words. This is his curiosity nature. Even so, the curious foreigner tries to find out some defects in the worship of symbol. Linga is only the outward symbol of the formless being, Lord Shiva, who is the indivisible, all-pervading, eternal, auspicious, ever-pure, immortal essence of this vast universe, who is the undying Soul seated in the chambers of your heart, who is your Indweller, innermost Self or Atman, and who is identical with the Supreme Brahman.

A Shiva Linga consists of three parts, the lowest of which is the Brahma-Pitha, the middle one, the Vishnu-Pitha and the uppermost one, the Shiva-Pitha.

Some are Svayambhu-lingas, some are Narmadesvaras. There are twelve Jyotirlingas and five Pancha Bhuta Lingas in India. The twelve Jyotir-lingas are: Kedarnath, Kasi Visvanath, Somanath, Baijnath, Ramesvar, Ghrusnesvar, Bhimasankar, Mahakala, Mallikarjuna, Amalesvar, Nagesvar

and Tryambakesvar. The five Pancha Bhuta Lingas are: Kalahastisvar, Jambukesvar, Arunachalesvar, Ekambaresvar of Kanjivaram and Nataraja of Chidambaram. The temple of Lord Mahalinga at Tiruvidaimarudur known also as Madhyarjuna is regarded as the great Shiva temple of South India. Spatikalinga is also a symbol of Lord Shiva. This is prescribed for Aradhana or worship of Lord Shiva. It is made up of quartz. It has no colour of its own, but takes on the colour of the substances which come in contact with it. It represents the Nirguna Brahman or the attributeless Supreme Self or formless and attributeless Shiva.

For a sincere devotee, the Linga is not a block of stone. It is all radiant Tejas or Chaitanya. The Linga talks to him, makes him shed profuse tears, produces horripilation and melting of heart, raises him above body-consciousness and helps to commune with the Lord and attain Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Lord Rama worshipped the Shiva Linga at Ramesvar. Ravana, the learned scholar, worshipped the golden Linga. What a lot of mystic Sakti there should be in the Linga!

May you all attain the formless Shiva through the worship of the Linga, the symbol of Lord Shiva which helps concentration of mind and which serves as a prop for the mind to lean upon in the beginning for the neophytes!
Shiva Linga is Chinmaya

The light of consciousness manifesting out of SadaShiva is, in reality, the Shivalinga. From Him all the moving and unmoving creations take their origin. He is the Linga or cause of everything. In Him, the whole world merges itself finally. The Shiva Purana says: "Pitham Ambamayam Sarvam Shivalingascha Chinmayam." The support or Pitham of all is Prakriti or Parvati, and Linga is Chinmaya Purusha, the effulgent light which is self-luminous. Union of Prakriti or Parvati, and Purusha or Shivalinga is the cause of the world. In Sanatkumara-samhita of the Shiva Purana, Lord Shiva says: "O Parvati, daughter of mountain, there is none dearer to Me than the man who worships Me in the Linga, knowing that Linga is the root-cause of everything and knowing the world to be Linga-maya or Chaitanya-maya." The Linga is like an egg. It represents the Brahmanda (cosmic egg). Whatever that is contained in the Brahmanda is in the Linga. The whole world is the form of Lord Shiva. The world is a Linga. Linga also is the form of Lord Shiva.

Linga signifies that the creation is effected by the union of Prakriti and Purusha. It means Laya, Jnana, Vyapya, Prakasa, Arathaprakasa, Samarthyaa and the symbol which denotes the above meaning. Linga means the place of

dissolution for the world and all beings. It signifies also Satya, Jnana and Ananta—Truth, knowledge and Infinity. It indicates that Lord Shiva is endowed with all-pervading and self-luminous nature. Linga is a symbol which makes us understand the various kinds of Artha which are indicated above. There are six Lingas, viz., Anda Linga, Pinda Linga, SadaShiva Linga, Atma Linga, Jnana Linga and Shiva Linga. These Lingas are taken to mean the characteristics by which the Anda (the Universe), Pinda (the body), SadaShiva, etc., are to be recognised and understood.

The union of Linga with Yoni is a representation of the Eternal Union between the static and the dynamic aspects of the Absolute Reality. This represents the Eternal Spiritual Communion of the paternal and the maternal principles from which all the phenomenal diversities have originated. This is an eternal communion of the Changeless Being and the Dynamic Power or Sakti from which all changes flow.

Further, the lower sexual propensities in the aspirants are eradicated by this sublime conception. The spiritualisation and divinisation of Linga and Yoni, helps the aspirants to free themselves from sexual thoughts. All base thoughts gradually vanish by entertaining this lofty idea. All sexual relations in this world are spiritualised as the manifestations of the ultimate Creative Principle, of the eternal Self-enjoyment and Self-multiplication of Lord Shiva in and through His Power or Sakti.

The union of Linga with Yoni symbolises the creation of this universe by Lord Shiva in conjunction with His Sakti or Power.

The so-called educated men of the modern age have no spiritual insight and philosophical penetration. Hence, they criticise the union of Linga with Yoni as immoral and obscene, owing to their extreme ignorance and lack of enquiry, deep thinking and Satsanga or association with sages. This is highly deplorable and lamentable indeed! May Lord grant wisdom to these poor ignorant souls!

Way to Attain Lord Shiva

Tirumular's Tirumantram is a poetical work, said to be composed in the course of three thousand years. It deals with the practical and theoretical aspects of Saiva religion and philosophy. The treatment of Pati (Lord Shiva), Pasu (the individual soul) and Pasa (attachment) in the old method, is found in this book. The following is Tirumular's exposition in his Tirumantram.

God alone is the Guru or the spiritual teacher. He shows Shiva or Sat. Sat-Guru is Ambalam or Chidakasa Shiva. You will have to search the Guru in your own heart. Knowledge, devotion, purity and Siddhis are obtained through the grace of the Guru. The grace descends in virtuous aspirants who have purity, dispassion, etc.

The thirsting aspirant should get help from Guru Param. Guru Param imparts spiritual instructions to the aspirant. Then Suddha Guru confers upon him Divine Grace. When the aspirant obtains the Divine Grace, he gets several powers, purity, the power to know the Mantras, higher Siddhis, etc. Then the Sat-Guru reveals himself in the Chidakasa, breaks the three bonds, viz., Anava (egoism), Karma (action) and Maya (illusion) and helps him to enter the illimitable domain of Moksha or supreme abode of eternal bliss. Shiva Guru presents himself later on and manifests Sat, Asat and Sadasat. When the Jiva attains this final knowledge, he becomes Shiva himself. The Guru who presents himself in the earlier and later stages, is Shiva himself. The devotee attains the grace of the Lord when he meditates on Him in the chambers of his heart, in the space between the two eyebrows and in the head. The holy feet of the Lord are highly eulogised. Tirumular says: "The holy feet of my Lord are Mantra, beauty and truth."

Jneya or that which is to be known, is Shiva Ananda which is a product of Shiva and His grace, Sakti. The Jnata (knower) is the individual soul or Jiva. He knows Shiva by abiding in Shiva Ananda and obtains Jnana or knowledge.

Moksha is the attainment of Shiva Ananda. He who attains Moksha will attain supreme knowledge of Shiva. He who gets established in Shiva Ananda will attain knowledge and Moksha (the final emancipation). The Jiva who knows Shiva Ananda dwells for ever in it. He attains Shiva and Sakti in Shiva Ananda. He is endowed with true knowledge which is really union of Shiva and Sakti. Lord Shiva shows the path which leads on to Moksha, to the aspirant who is endowed with dispassion, non-attachment, renunciation, who praises Him always and performs regular worship.

The devotee of Lord Shiva gets strength to resist the temptations of the world and of Indra, through his Tapas or austerity. He does not care at all for the celestial pleasures offered by Indra. He is quite contented with the supreme bliss attained through union with Lord Shiva.

When the Sadhaka does rigorous austerities and practises concentration, he attains several powers. Indra and other Devas get terribly afraid that they

will lose their position. Hence, they put several obstacles on his path and tempt him in a variety of ways by offering celestial car, damsels and various sorts of celestial pleasures. But the firm Sadhaka stands adamant. He never yields and marches direct to the goal, viz., Shiva-Pada or the Immortal seat of eternal Bliss. He who yields gets a downfall. Visvamisra had a downfall. Sage Tirumular says: "Abandon pride of learning. Introspect. Look within. You will be firmly established in Shiva. Nothing will shake you. You will be freed from the trammels of births and deaths."

Saiva Siddhanta teaches Advaita only. It is Shiva Advaita.

Greatness of the Prasad

Prasad is that which gives peace. During Kirtan, worship, Puja, Havan and Arati, Badam, Kismis, milk, sweets, fruits are offered to the Lord. Puja is done by Bael leaves, flowers, Tulsi, Vibhuti, and these are given as Prasad, from the Lord. They are charged with mysterious powers by the chanting of Mantras during Puja and Havan.

Prasad is a great purifier. Prasad is a panacea. Prasad is a spiritual elixir. Prasad is the Grace of the Lord. Prasad is an embodiment of Sakti. Prasad is divinity in manifestation. Many sincere aspirants get wonderful experiences from Prasad alone. Many incurable diseases are cured. Prasad energises, vivifies, invigorates and infuses devotion. It should be taken with great faith.

Live for a week in Brindavan, Pandharpur or Banares. You will realise the glory and miraculous effects of Prasad. Prasad bestows good health, long life, peace and prosperity on all. Glory to Prasad, the bestower of peace and bliss. Glory to the Lord of the Prasad. Giver of immortality and undying happiness.

Vibhuti is the Prasad of Lord Shiva, to be applied on the forehead. A small portion can be taken in.

Kumkum is the Prasad of Sri Devi or Sakti, to be applied at the space between the eyebrows (Ajna or Bhrumadhya).

Tulsi is the Prasad of Lord Vishnu, Rama or Krishna, not to be taken in. Badam, Kismis, sweets, fruits, etc., are to be taken in.

All these Prasads are given on all important religious functions.

Benefit of Pilgrimage

You will find a description of Oertel's treatment in books on medicine, for certain cardiac affections (heart-troubles). The patient is asked to climb up hills slowly. So, the Kailasa trip, besides the spiritual benefit, removes many kinds of minor heart-troubles. The heart is invigorated and strengthened. The whole cardiac-vascular, nervous, pulmonary, alimentary, integumentary systems are thoroughly overhauled and purified. There is no necessity for Kuhne's steam bath. You perspire profusely during the march. The whole body is filled with fresh, oxygenated blood. The gentle breeze blowing from the tall pine trees all over, surcharged with natural oil of pine, disinfects the lungs and a consumptive is cured of phthisis when he returns. The excessive fat is reduced. A Kailas trip is the best treatment for reduction of obesity in corpulent persons. Many kinds of stomach troubles, uric acid troubles and various sorts of skin diseases are cured. You will not get any disease for a period of twelve years, as you are charged with new electrons, new atoms, new cells, new molecules and new nuclei with renovated protoplasm. This is no Arthavada (glorification). You get two birds by throwing one stone. The Kailas trip brings spiritual blessings and good health. Hail! Hail to Sambhu, the Lord Shiva who dwells in Kailas with His Sakti, Parvati, who gives Mukti to His devotees and who is known by the different names, Hara, SadaShiva, Mahadeva, Nataraja, Sankara, etc.

The goal of life is God-realisation which only can free us from the miseries of Samsara, the wheel of birth and death. The performance of the daily obligatory rites, Nitya-Naimittika Karmas, Yatras, etc., unselfishly, leads to the acquisition of virtue. This leads to the destruction of sin, which in turn results in the purification of the mind. This purification of the mind leads to the comprehension of the true nature of Samsara or relative existence, its false and worthless nature. From this results Vairagya (renunciation), which arouses a desire for liberation. From this desire results a vigilant search for its means. From it comes the renunciation of all actions. Thence, the practice of Yoga, which leads to a habitual tendency of the mind to settle in the Atman or Brahman. This results in the knowledge of the meaning of such Sruti passages as 'Tat Tvam Asi', which destroys the Avidya (ignorance), thus leading to the establishment in one's own self. Thus you see that Yatra like Kailas trip is a Parampara Sadhana for God-realisation, as it causes Chitta Suddhi and Nididhyasana. Dhyana is a direct Sadhana. Householders who are shut up in the world amidst various sorts of cares and anxieties, find a great relief in a Yatra. Their minds get quite refreshed by a Yatra. Further, during the travel they come across Sadhus and Sannyasins. They can have good Satsanga. They can clear their doubts. They can get

various sorts of help from them in spiritual Sadhana. That is the main object of Yatra.

Let me bring to your memory, once more, the last word of the Vedas, Upanishads—‘Tat Tvam Asi’, my dear readers. Om Tat Sat, Om Santi, Peace be unto all beings.

Benefits of Parikrama

Parikrama is the devout perambulation or Pradakshina around a sacred and holy spot. This is either a mountain peak, a sacred Tirtha, a place of pilgrimage or an entire area regarded as holy and sanctified by tradition. This practice of making a circuit is ordinarily done at any time, and especially undertaken by devotees en masse at particular periods during the year.

When done on a smaller scale within a small ambit as round a Murti installed in a shrine, round the sacred Tulsi plant or Pipal tree, the perambulation is in common parlance termed ‘Pradakshina.’ A Parikrama also doubtless constitutes Pradakshina, but by convention, it is come to refer mainly to big circuit.

More difficult forms of Parikrama are in vogue. Additional measures involving greater physical exertion and strain are combined with Parikrama. Some lay themselves fully stretched upon the ground and roll along over the entire route. Some others proceed slowly prostrating full length at every three or ten steps; still others walk step by step, placing one foot in close proximity to the other and cover the whole distance of Parikrama; and others do the circuit themselves gyrating in a continuous Atma-Pradakshina. All these difficult features are adopted by devotees at times as special penance, or in accordance with some vow previously made, or as spontaneous expression of their zeal or fervour. Your mental attitude and motive will bestow on you the highest, maximum spiritual good.

Undaunted Yatris in the icy Himalayas do the difficult Parikrama of Mount Kailas and even longer circuit of Lake Manasarovar. Other Yatris complete a round of entire Uttarakhand, in doing the Kedar-Badri-Yatra by going via one route and returning via another, after circling the Chardham. Far off in the South, pious devotees make Pradakshina of the holy Arunachala at Tiruvannamalai. Rama Bhaktas and Krishna Premis go round Chitrakuta Parvata, Ayodhya, Brij, Brindavan, Govardhana and Badrinath.

The deep significance of Parikrama lies in the fact that the devotee considers not the physical aspect of the place, hill or Tirtha, but the spiritual power it symbolises and the Divine Presence that is manifested and felt through it. Through the Lord's revelation in the tenth chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita, you will understand how much special places are saturated with the Divine Presence. By the fervent attitude of faith and veneration, you make yourself fully receptive to the inflow of the spiritual vibrations of the holy place. These powerful spiritual currents enter and purify all the sheaths, gross and subtle, destroying bad Vasanas and Samskaras. Tamas and Rajas are reduced. The concentrated influence of Sattva awakens the dormant spiritual tendencies. By Parikrama, the devotee drinks deep the Divine atmosphere pervading the place and comes out of this spiritual path steeped in Sattvic vibrations. This is the inner working and significance of doing Parikrama. Being a great purifier, it is enjoined on all devotees as a method of penance or Tapascharya by wise tradition and convention. It is an act of great spiritual benefit and religious merit too. The devotee takes bath, wears clean clothes, smears Tilak or sacred ash and wears Tulsi or Rudraksha Mala and starts with God's name on his lips. On the Parikrama route, you gain valuable Satsanga by meeting Sadhus and Sannyasins living there. Your sins are destroyed by taking bath in sacred rivers (on big Parikramas) or ponds and Kunds. You are elevated and blessed by Darsana of many holy shrines situated on the way. You develop patience and endurance putting up with various discomforts in the sun or rain or cold. Difficult Parikramas mean giving up many dear articles to which the mind is attached. You have your mind freed from all thoughts and you are absorbed in the one idea of the Divine presence. A devoutly conducted Parikrama constitutes in one single act a triple Sadhana elevating your body, mind and spirit. The spiritual vibrations of the holy places of pilgrimage and shrines purify your base Asuric Vrittis and fill you with Sattva and purity. You need not go in for Satsanga. Mahapurushas come to you of their own accord. They are always in search of real and sincere Sadhakas. Therefore, they also remain in holy places like Badri, Kedar, Kailas, Hardwar, Brindavan, Mathura, etc.

Blessed indeed are those who take part in Parikrama, because they will soon attain peace, bliss and immortality! Glory to Lord Rama, the Lord of Ayodhya! Glory to Krishna the Indweller of all hearts, whose special seat is Brindavan! Glory to Bhaktas! May their blessings be upon you all!

Real Flower and Arati

The tower of a temple represents Brahma-randhra. Balipitha represents the navel or Manipura Chakra. Nandi represents Ajna Chakra. Dhvajastambha represents Sushumna Nadi which runs from Muladhara to Brahma-randhra. Dig-devata dwells in the ears, Vayu in the skin, Sun in the eyes, Varuna in the tongue, Asvins in the nose, Vishnu in the feet, Indra in the hands, Agni in the speech, Prajapati in the generative organ, Yama in the anus, Sutratman in the Prana, Hiranyagarbha in Antahkarana, Chandra in mind, Brahma in the intellect, Rudra in egoism, Shiva in Chitta, Sarasvati in the end of the tongue, Parvati in Anahata Chakra, Lakshmi in Manipura Chakra, Ganesa in Muladhara and Satchidananda Brahman in Brahma-randhra at the crown of the head.

Satya, Ahimsa, Tapas, mercy, love, self-restraint, contentment, forgiveness, Jnana, equal vision, peace are the real flowers of Puja. All the Nadas are the waters for Abhisheka. The virtuous actions are the offering of incense. Vedanta is Pitambar. Jnana and Yoga are the Kundalas. Tapas and meditation are the lights. Japa is Chamara. Anahata is the music. Kirtan is umbrella. Pranayama is the fan.

Tattvas are the attendants of the Lord. nana-Sakti is the Devi. Agama is the commander. The eight Siddhis are the door-keepers of the Lord. Turiya is the Bhasma. Veda is the bull or Nandi. Kalyana Gunas represent the Trident in the hand. Panchakshara is the holy thread. Suddha Jiva is the ornament. The Vrittis are the Pujopakaranas. The Panchabhutas and the five Tanmatras are the Rudrakshamalas of Lord Shiva. Tiger skin represents Ahankara.

Kriya-Sakti and virtuous actions are Dhupa or incense for the Lord. Chit-Sakti which produces knowledge is also Dhupa. Offering of the ego and the mind at the lotus-feet of the Lord is real Naivedya. Just as camphor melts and becomes one with the fire, so also the mind of a sage melts and the individual soul gets merged in the Supreme Soul. This is real Karpura Arati.

Ganja in Hinduism

Ganja or Cannabis is associated with worship of Shiva, who is popularly believed to like the hemp plant. Bhang is offered to Shiva images, especially on Shivratri festival. This practice is particularly witnessed at the temples of Benares, Baidynath, Tarakeswar, Pashupatinath Temple and other Shiva Temples of India and Nepal. *Bhang* is not only offered to Shiva, but also consumed by Shaivite yogis. *Charas* is smoked by some Shaivite devotees and cannabis itself is seen as a gift (*prasad*, or offering) to Shiva to aid in sadhana. Some of the wandering ascetics in India and Nepal known as sadhus smoke *charas* out of a clay *chillum*.

During the Indian and Nepalese (especially Terai Region and some parts of Hilly Regions as well) festival of Holi, people consume *bhang* which contains cannabis flowers. According to one description, when the *amrita* (elixir of life) was produced from the churning of the ocean by the devas and the asuras, Shiva created cannabis from his own body to purify the elixir (whence, for cannabis, the epithet *angaja* or "body-born"). Another account suggests that the cannabis plant sprang up when a drop of the elixir dropped on the ground. Thus, cannabis is used by sages due to association with elixir and Shiva. Wise drinking of *bhang*, according to religious rites, is believed to cleanse sins, unite one with Shiva and avoid the miseries of hell in the after-life. In contrast, foolish drinking of *bhang* without rites is considered a sin. Although cannabis is regarded illegal and given a DRUG's status, many Nepalese people consume it during festivals (like Shivaratri) which the government tolerates to some extent and also for their personal uses and recreation purposes. The legal action against the use and handling of cannabis in Nepal is found in a mixed pattern, giving it a mixed status-both as harmful and religious material.

Of course one can argue that the use of cannabis have nothing to do with religion, but should be considered as normal drug abuse, and partly I would agree that this is the case. But the main reason why Shiva has been connected to cannabis is because this drug in a way favours meditation and experience of the Supreme, the Higher Self within. I was also meeting a yogi from Varanasi who did not use any drugs; not even tea; he was practising pranayama and japa and dhyana to get the union with Shiva. But once, during Shivaratri, he had tasted some bhang that was presented and he compared the feeling he got from this to the feeling from his dhyana. But still he warned against using drugs, and the reason was according to him that it keeps you attached to prithivi; the Earth. If you are depending on a drug to experience Supreme's presence, you will always

come down again, and then you have to deal with all the earthly stuff in relation to that; getting money, buying drugs etc. And the idea in yoga is the non-attachment which is underlying the meditation and favouring this; opening for the union of your self and the Supreme. Where the Lord Shiva remained so far unknown, in the Nordic myths alcohol was called “the spit of the gods” and was drunk to induce varying states of mind. Ganja is much better, however its use forbidden in many countries of the world. This one must respect.



Contents

Shiva Devotion and Meditation As It Is	2
Rituals at Maha Shivratri	4
Thandai-Recipe	5
Shaivism or Saivism	6
Pasapata Saivism	8
Kashmir Saivism	11
Saiva Siddhanta	13
Gorakhnath or Gorakshanatha Saivism	15
Vira Saivism	17
Historical Development of Vira Saivism	17
Literary Sources of Vira Saivism	18
Philosophy or Main Concepts of Vira Saivism	19
The Union of Individual Soul with Shiva	19
Spiritual Discipline and Code of Conduct	20
Vira Saivism in the Contemporary World	20
The Temples of Shiva	21
Lord Shiva known as Rudra and other characteristics of Himself	28
The Story of the Shiva Linga	30
More commonly about the Shiva Lingam	31
On Meditation	32
Physical Postures for Meditation	34
Meditation Basics	35
A Simple Relaxation Exercise	36
Breath-Counting Meditation	35
Awareness of Breath Meditation	37
Mantra Recitation Meditation	37
Saguna and Nirguna Forms of Meditation - Introduction	39
Saguna Meditation and Generalities	39
Meditation on the Lord Shiva or Ishta Devata	39
Meditation on Virat Purusha	41
Meditation on Gayatri	42
Nirguna Meditation	43
Exercises in Nirguna Meditation	44
Trataka Meditation	45
Two other meditation outlines	46
Meditation on “OM” (AUM)	46
Meditation on Mind	46
Some Useful Hints for Meditation	47
OM NAMA SHIVAYA MANTRA (Words and Music)	50

The Meditation Session	50
The Lord Shiva has many Names	51
The Sadhus Devotees of Shiva	54
Ganga Meditation	57
Recipe for Flavoured Bhang drink	62
Method of Preparation	62
The Pineal Gland or Third-Eye	63
The mystical third-eye	64
How to Worship the Lord Shiva at Home and Satsang	65
Worshipping the Lord Shiva at Home and Satsang	66
Lord Shiva Festivals	66
Lord Shiva Chalisa	68
The Temple Celebrations of Festivals	70
An important Lord Shiva Festival	70
Pranayama or Lifestorce	71
Technique of the Khechari Mudra	72
Technique of Pranayama and Yogic Breathing	77
Nadi Shodhana	79
Important Summary on Lord Shiva Worship	80
Worship of Shiva	80
Shiva Manasa Puja	82
Panchashara Mantra Writing	82
Shiva Jnanam	82
Worship of Shiva Linga	84
Way to attain Lord Shiva	87
Greatness of the Prasad	89
Benefit of Pilgrimage	90
Benefits of Parikrama	91
Real Flower and Arati	93
Ganja in Hinduism	94
Contents	96

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