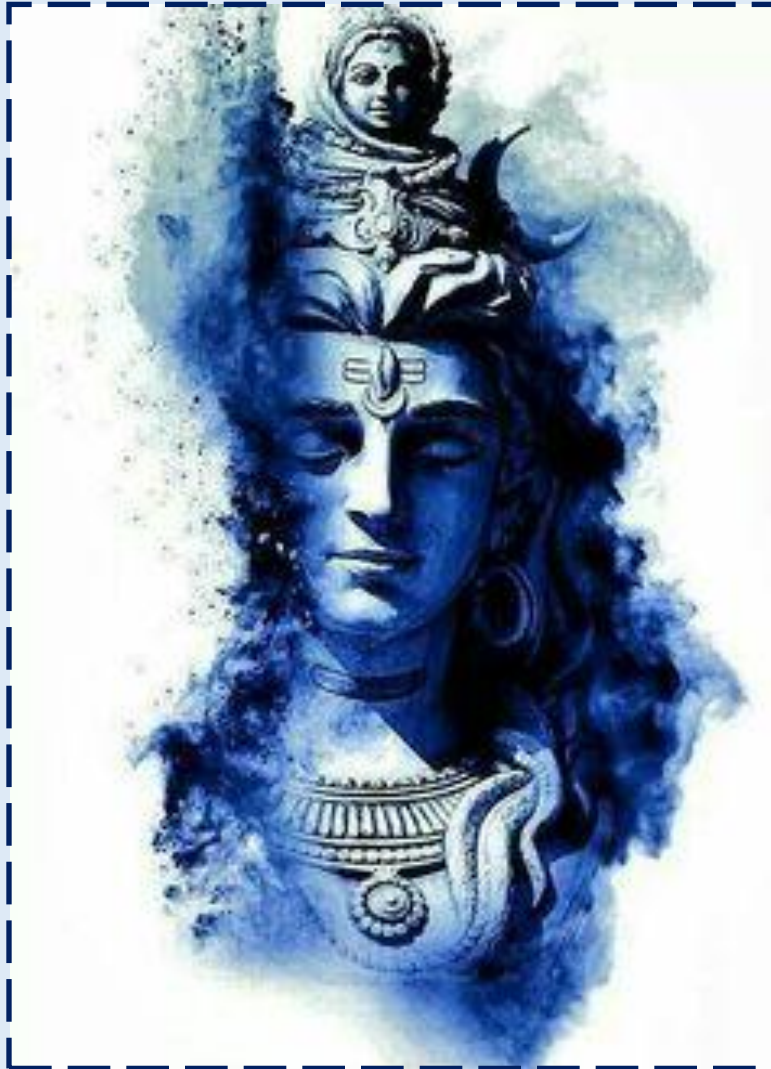


Understanding Shiva

A collection of talks on Shiva by
His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

11/2/2015



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Shiva - The Cause Of All Causes

Shiva can be split as *Sha+ee+va* where

- *Sha* stands for *shareeram* or body
- *Ee* stands for *eeshwari* or life giving energy
- *Va* stands for *vayu* or motion

Thus Shiva represents the body with life and motion.

If the 'ee' is removed from Shiva, it gets reduced to *sha+va* or *Shava* which means a lifeless body. Anything with Shiva is with life, and anything without Shiva is *Shava*, or without life.

So Shiva is auspicious, Shiva is potential, and Shiva is life. Shiva is all encompassing - the universal soul or consciousness. Realizing this Shiva Tattva leads to *Ananda* (bliss).

Who is Shiva? What is Shiva Tattva?

Sri Sri: I would ask the question 'What is not Shiva?'

Is Shiva somebody? Is he a form? Is he someone sitting in some place? No! ***Shiva is the entire universe.*** He is in every atom of the universe.

Shiva doesn't have a body, he was never a person at all. To symbolize the unfathomable, the infinite divinity, and to make it comprehensible for young people, for children and others, they made a form. In fact, ***there is no form to Shiva.***

Shiva is a principle (*Tattva*) from where everything has come, everything is sustained in it, and everything dissolves into it. Shiva is the space, it is the consciousness.

There is no way that you can even step out of Shiva at anytime because Shiva is the summum bonum of the whole creation.

That is why Shiva's body is depicted in blue because blue signifies the sky; the all pervading infinity which has no limits, and no shape.

The consciousness which is bliss and innocence, the consciousness which is the bestower of dispassion - *is Shiva.*

The whole world is moving in an auspicious rhythm of innocence and intelligence - that *is Shiva.*

The permanent and eternal source of energy, the eternal state of being, the one and only one - *is Shiva. The soul (of everything) is called Shiva - there is no difference between the soul and Shiva.*



*The Shiva Tattva Has
Three Stages:*

1. *Arupa - without form*
2. *Rupa-arupa - form
emerging from the
formless*
3. *Sarupa - with form*

*Before creation, the
process of creation and
the creation, is Shiva.*



It is a miracle how the same consciousness is present in every being in this creation! There is no other miracle greater than this.

It Has No Form Yet It Is In All Forms

In the Rudra-abhishekam, it is said, '*Virupe-bhyo vishva-rupe bhyash-cha vo namo namah*'.

Virupe-bhyo means, that *one* which has no form and, *Vishva-rupe-bhyo* means, yet it is in all the forms of the universe. Everything, all forms are the manifestation of the formless Shiva. Shiva is the consciousness that present all over; it is an energy field.

It Never Began and It Will Never End

Shiva is never born and he has no end. He is eternal. He is the fourth state of consciousness, known as the 'Turiya avasta' (the meditative state), that is beyond the waking, sleeping and dreaming state.

There is a beautiful story related to Shiva. Once *Brahma* the creator, and *Vishnu* the preserver of the Universe wanted to find Shiva and understand it completely. So Brahma said, I will go and look for his head and you find his feet. So for thousands of years Vishnu went down and down to find Shiva's feet but couldn't find it. Brahma went up and up to find his head but couldn't find.

The meaning here is, there is no feet and no head to Shiva. *There is no beginning and no end to Shiva.*

Finally they both met at the middle and said that they couldn't find either.

This universe is *Ananta vistara* (of infinite expanse). The consciousness pervading this infinite universe is also infinite and is *Agneya* (not knowable). It is only lovable.

How can you know Shiva?

'*Tapo yoga gamya*' (a verse from Veda Saara Shiva Stotram by Adishankaracharya). He can be known through *tapa* (penance) and *yoga*.

Through *Omkaara* you can know it, i.e., if you go deep into *Omkaara*, the primordial sound of the Universe. Om is not something that you repeat. It is something that you hear.

How can you understand Shiva?

'*Shruti Gyan Gamyah*' (a verse from Veda Saara Shiva Stotram by Adishankaracharya). He can be understood through the knowledge of the *shrutis** that you hear deep in meditation. Only through meditation; through the depth of the wisdom of the *shrutis* can you understand



To understand Shiva the ancient Rishis recommended 4 steps:

1. **Anavopaya** - disciplining the ego
2. **Anava** - meditation
3. **Saktopaya** - activating the energy centre by centering one's attention in silence
4. **Sambavopaya** - freeing oneself from thought.



what Shiva is.

Without yoga, Shiva can't be experienced. Yoga doesn't mean only asanas (physical postures) but yoga is that experience of Shiva which happens in meditation. It is when that 'wow' happens from within.

We have three states of consciousness - waking, dreaming and sleeping, and there is a fourth state of consciousness where we are neither awake, nor dreaming, nor sleeping. It is a state where the mind is awake but the body is resting, and you know you are present, but do not know where you are - *this is Shiva*. And this state is experienced in meditation.

If you start to enter that state where you are not dreaming or sleeping, you enter the state of samadhi, where you are free from worries.

So where should you search for the Shiva Tattva? Search for it in-between the states of waking and dreaming, or in-between deep sleep and waking, not far away in Mount Kailash.

When you are meditating, what is the experience that you have? It is neither waking nor sleeping. That glimpse of the fourth state is what is called Shiva Tattva. When you sit and meditate, you get in touch with the Shiva Tattva deep inside you. This state gives you the deepest rest possible that you can experience. The mind becomes fresh, delicate, beautiful and innocent.

There are some verses in Sanskrit in which Shiva's description is so beautiful.

'Namami-shamishan nirvan roopam, vibhum vyapakam brahma-ved swaroopam. Nijam nirgunam nirvikalpam niriham chidakashmakashvasam bhajeham.'

(Opening verses of the Rudrashtakam - An Ode sung in the glory of Lord Shiva, by Shri Goswami Tulsidas)

It is the lord, it is the most powerful, it is all over, spread everywhere. There is no place that it is not. It is that space, that consciousness where all the knowledge is present. It was never born and it has no attributes. It is a state of Samadhi where there is nothing, just the inner sky of consciousness. That is what is Shiva.

Visit link: www.artofliving.org/shiva to listen to the above chant

That Which Is Beyond Words

Shiva Tattva is the most beautiful Tattva and that is why it is so difficult to talk about it also. It can only be felt. It is beyond understanding but we will make little attempt to understand it. That is why it is mystical as it is beyond words.

In talking about the Shiva Tattva, the words go that close but they return. The mind also goes that close but it can't reach it.

This is brought out beautifully by the Taittiriya Upanishad of Yajur Veda, which says, 'Yato Vaco Nivartanthe aprapyā manasa saha'.

Which means: That from which both speech and thought return without being able

to understand or fathom it. That which cannot be described or even imagined.

The Entire Range Of Creation

Shiva comprises of the entire range of creation. Creation is full of opposites. So on one hand he is considered *Shweth vastra dhaara* (wearing white clothes) and on the other hand, he is *Krishna Varna* (meaning he is dark). That is darkness and light together, and dance and meditation together.

He is the Lord of the Universe and yet he doesn't have anything. Not even a piece of cloth or jewellery. He is the Lord of the Universe but he doesn't wear anything- he is naked.

So Shiva Tattva binds the dynamism of the beautiful dance and stillness of meditation. He is *Rudra* or the fierce on one side and *Bholenaath* or the most innocent on the other. Innocent and intelligent; furious and yet so compassionate. We say, '*Karpura gowram karuna avataram*', meaning the embodiment of compassion and on the other hand he is fiery or furious.

So Shiva Tattva is depicted in its totality through its opposites which are extremes. That's why its complete. It is whole.

Sundaresha - The Lord of Beauty

Another aspect of Shiva is beauty. Shiva is ***Sundaresha***. The lord of beauty. And also Aghora: very fearful. The fearful forms in the Universe are also his forms. Shiva is most beautiful and most terrifying. To the one who follows righteousness, he is most beautiful. To the one who creates terror in others, he is terror. The core of our being is innocence - Shiva is called Bholenath (innocence) - with which we were all born, everything else we get later - going into the core of our existence is meditation.

Virupaksha - The Seer, Sight and The Seen

One of the names of Lord Shiva is *Virupaksha* which means: ***the one who is formless yet sees all.***

We know that there is air all around us and we can feel the air as well. But what if the air also starts feeling you?

Space is all around us, we identify space, but what if space also recognizes and feels your presence? This happens. Only we don't know it.

The divine is all around you and is seeing you. He is the formless core of existence and the goal. He is the seer, sight and the scene.

<http://unity.artofliving.org/in-en/what-is-shiva>

Understanding the Form of Shiva



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”Shiva doesn’t have a body,
he was never a person at all. To symbolize the
unfathomable infinite divinity,
and to make it comprehensible for people,
they made a form”

- Sri Sri

✦ Significance of Crescent Moon

Shiva Tattva is where there is no mind and the moon signifies the mind. When there is no mind then how can this 'no mindedness' be expressed and how can anybody understand it? You need a little bit of the mind to understand, experience and to express.

The no-mind, infinite consciousness requires that little bit of mind to express itself in the manifest world. So, to express that inexpressible, that little mind (crescent moon) is on the head.

Wisdom is beyond the mind, but it needs to be expressed with a tinge of mind and this is symbolized by the crescent moon.



✦ Significance of Lord Shiva's Damru

Damru symbolizes the Universe which is always expanding and collapsing. From an expansion it collapses and then it re-expands, this is the process of creation.



If you see your heartbeat, it is not just one straight line but it is a rhythm that goes up and down. The whole world is nothing but rhythms; energy rising and collapsing to rise again. So the *damru* signifies that. Look at the shape of the *damru*, from expansion it collapses and again expands.

The *damru* is also a symbol of sound. Sound is rhythm and sound is energy. The whole universe is nothing but a wave function, it is nothing but rhythms. What does quantum physics say? It says the same thing - the whole universe is nothing but rhythms. It is just one wave (*Advaita*). So the *damru* signifies the non-dual nature of the universe.

✦ Significance of Serpent around Lord Shiva's Neck

A state of samadhi where there is nothing, just the inner sky of consciousness, is Shiva; where there is alertness and no action. To describe this *alertness* they put a snake around Shiva's neck. So the *serpent* is a symbol of *alertness*.

In the state of meditation when the eyes are closed, it gives the impression that the person is sleeping, but he is not asleep, he is alert. To express this state of consciousness, a *snake* is shown around Lord Shiva's neck.



✦ Significance of Lord Shiva's Trishul (Trident)

Trishul represents the three aspects of consciousness - waking, dreaming and sleeping, and it represents the three *gunas* - satva, rajas and tamas.



Holding a *trishul* (Trident) signifies that Shiva (the divinity) is above all the three states - waking, dreaming and sleeping, yet is the upholder of these three states. The divinity is beyond the three *gunas*, but it holds the three *gunas* together.

Shul means *problems* or *suffering*. **Trishul** means that which destroys all kind of suffering.

Three types of pain that arise in life:

1. *Aadibhautik* (physical)
2. *Aadhyaatmik* (spiritual) and
3. *Aadidaivik* (ethereal)

What relieves you from all the problems and suffering is the *trishul*. And it is in the hand of Shiva.

✦ Significance of Nandi (Bull)



Bull has been used as a symbol of *dharma* (righteousness) from a long time, throughout the world. Lord Shiva riding on the bull simply means that when you are righteous and truthful, the infinite consciousness, the innocent consciousness is with you.

✦ Significance of River Ganga flowing from Lord Shiva's Head

Ganga means knowledge; knowledge that purifies your soul. Head is always the symbol of knowledge. Heart is the symbol of love.

If **Ganga** were to be love, it should have come out of the heart of Lord Shiva. It is coming out of the head, because it simply means knowledge.

Knowledge is liberating, knowledge brings freedom, knowledge is purifying. All these are the characteristics of knowledge. Knowledge is also movement; motion. So **Ganga** (knowledge) has to come out of Lord Shiva's (the divinity's) head.

✦ Significance of Lord Shiva's Third Eye

The third eye is associated with alertness and awareness.

✦ Significance of Shiva's Blue Body

Blue means like the Sky. Blue signifies all pervading, infinity which has no limits. It has no shape. Shiva does not have a body. Shiva was never a person at all.

To symbolize the unfathomable, the infinite Divinity and to make that Divinity comprehensible to people, the ancient Rishis made a form.

Knowledge has no shape but it infiltrates each and every particle of the universe. The whole world is filled with Shiva - *whose body is in the whole universe*.

✚ Significance of Shiva Linga

Lingam means identification, a symbol through which you can identify what the truth is, what the reality is. What is not visible but yet can be identified by one thing, that is *lingam*.

When a baby is born, how do you know whether the baby is a male or female? Only through one part of the body can you identify whether this baby is a boy or a girl. That is the reason the genital is also called *lingam*.

Similarly, how do you identify the Lord of this Creation? He has no form! So then they said that there should be a sign to identify Him. So the sign, by which you identify both the male and female forms, combining them both to form one single symbol to identify the Lord who has no form or identity; who is all pervading in this entire *Brahmanda* (Creation), is **Shiva Lingam**.

Shiva Linga is very ancient, in fact most ancient. From the form, you go to the formless, through the **Shiva Linga**. It is a symbol that is the representation of the cosmos and the creator of the cosmos, as one.

It is the **Shiva** and the **Shakti**, the two principles in the creation. The silent unmanifest and the dynamic manifestation together are represented as **Shiva Linga**. **Shiva Linga** is not just Shiva, but the completion of the total Supreme Consciousness.

✚ Significance of Shiva Tandav

The whole creation is the dance of *one* consciousness (*Shiva*). The one consciousness danced and manifested into a million species in the world. So this infinite creation is the dance of Lord Shiva or **Shiva Tandav**.

The whole world is a place of Shiva.

✚ Significance of Kailasa - The Abode of Shiva

The abode of Shiva is in *Mount Kailasa*, and the *smashana* (the cremation ground). *Kailasa* means '*where there is only celebration*', and *smashana* is where there is only *void*. The Divinity dwells in the void as well as in celebration. And in you there is void, in you there is celebration.

✦ Significance of Vibhuti on Shiva's body

Shiva's temple is the consciousness. ***Shiva is not in the stones or in temples, he is in the consciousness of the human beings.***

Our body all becomes ashes, ***so ash signifies the last, the ultimate.*** Vibhuti does not mean the ashes one puts on the head. Vibhuti signifies the blessings that get bestowed, the great things, the ultimate things. The devotee always thinks big and so he wears the ultimate (on his head).

Shiva means in the consciousness of the universe. That which encompasses the whole Universe, that something in which every life is. Reminding everyone of the unfathomable, incomprehensible, the mystical Shiva Tattva.

<http://www.artofliving.org/in-en/symbolism-behind-form-shiva>

The Nataraja Form of Shiva



Photo credits: Santhosh Kumar/foter/CC BY

The Divine energy pervading the
entire creation
is eternally dancing.

- Sri Sri

Union of Nature and the Divine

Natraja is a very beautiful symbol of the union of nature and the Divine. Natraja holds fire in one hand which represents the fire element, and a *damru* in his other hand which depicts the space element. Many forces in the universe are represented by a shape similar to that of a *damru*, like a chromosome, or shapes of galaxies and so on. Time also is said to have a conical representation. ∞ is the symbol (shape of the *damru*) which represents infinity.

Shiva's hair is open and flying representing the air element.

One foot on ground symbolizing *prithvi* (earth element), another in the air. One hand is the symbolic *abhaya hasta* symbolizing protection and the other points to his feet symbolizing surrender. ***With one foot already in the air, he has already taken a step towards the devotee. He says "You are dear to me".***

Shiva is dancing (in the form of Natraj). Life should be like this. If both feet are stuck on the ground then you cannot dance. Even to walk you need to take one foot up.

The entire creation is full of bliss. The entire creation is dancing in bliss. The entire creation is longing for bliss. And Natraja represents that Ananda Tattva (bliss) that the whole world is longing for.

Every atom in the world is filled with the potential for action yet it is at peace. Shiva, the principle of infinite peace and bliss is not inert. It is peaceful, yet dancing.

Underneath his feet, there is *demon* (which represents desires). So he is standing with his foot on top of desires. ***If desires eat us up then we are in trouble. Only when we rise above desires and we are dancing on it, then it is a dance of joy and bliss.***

This is not just imagination, this is the truth. This energy awakens within us and we rise in dance. This is true. The Divine energy pervading the entire creation is eternally dancing.



In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says to Arjuna, "You are very dear to me". When you know that you are dear to someone, trust and love arises in the heart.



Mantras and Chanting

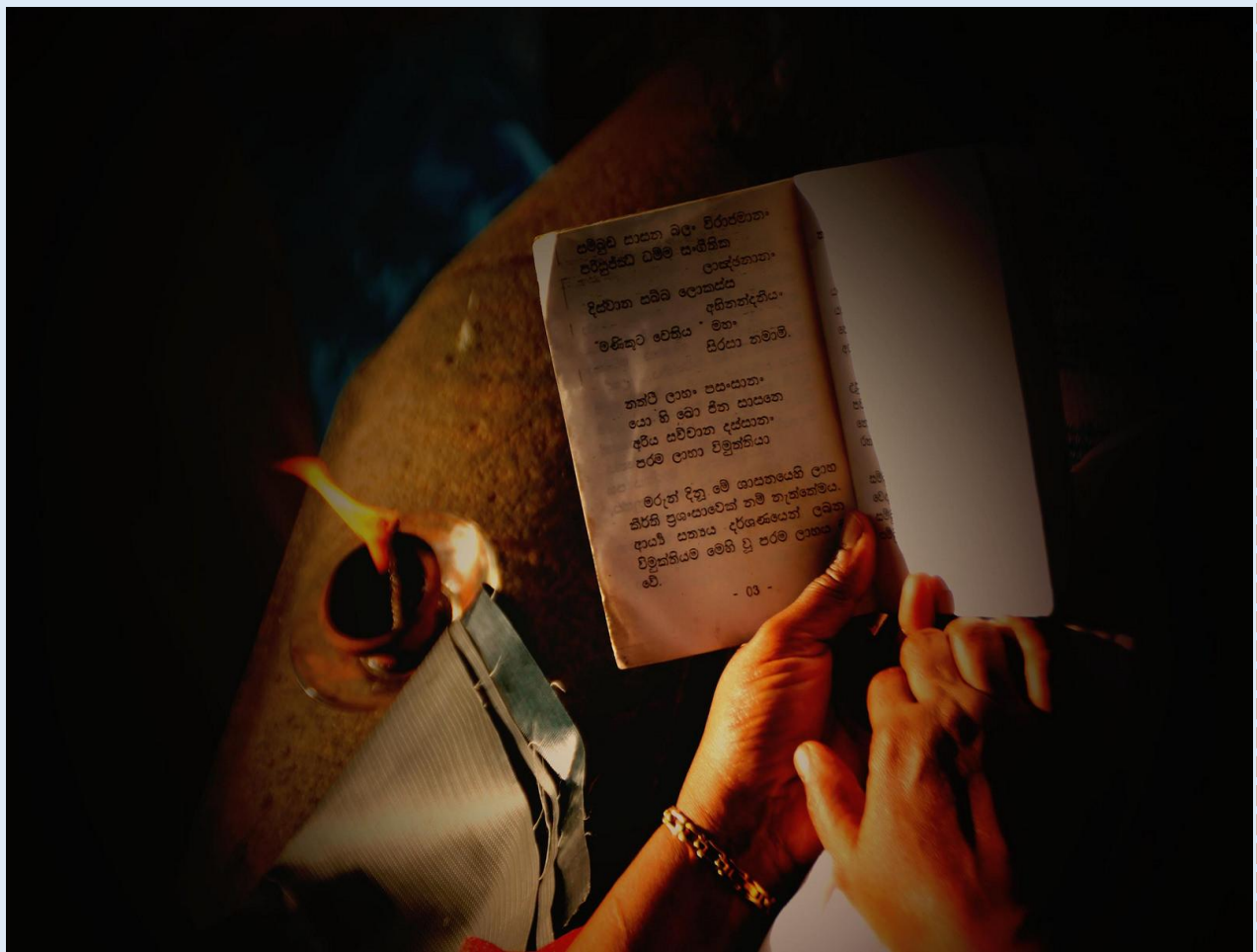


Photo credits: Manu Prabha/foter/CC BY

Chanting in Sanskrit is beneficial because it is the oldest language known to mankind, and so it has a deep impact on the consciousness.

- Sri Sri

Bringing You Back to the Source

Mantras are those sounds which you hear from deep within during meditation, and the aim of any mantra is to bring you back to the source.

Mantras have got certain vibrations; certain energy. They are universal.

Even in the churches in Latin America, the word or manta 'Marnah nath' is used which means 'My Lord'. Its translation in Latin and Sanskrit is so close. In Latin, the word use for 'Lord' is 'Nath', and in Sanskrit also the word 'Nath' means 'Lord'. So the word 'Marnah nath' which is used in Christianity is actually a Sanskrit word.

Chanting in Sanskrit is beneficial because Sanskrit is the oldest language known to mankind, and so it has a deep impact on the consciousness.

How many of you feel that singing and chanting mantras creates some vibrations? *(Everyone in the audience raise their hands)*

In Vedic chanting, many times you don't know even the meaning but it has some effect.

Why Japa (Chanting)?

When someone is in love with somebody, they go on taking their name so many times. They write their name everywhere, on the stones, on the walls, everywhere. Have you noticed this? ***That is japa.***

When someone writes a letter to their lover, they write, 'I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you', so many times. Why do they do that? They could have written it only once, that is enough. But no, the mind wants to repeat it. In the same way, ***when you are in love with the Divine you say, 'Om Namah Shivaya, Om Namah Shivaya, Om Namah Shivaya', and go on repeating that.*** This is japa!

✚ The 'Om Namah Shivaya' Mantra

Om Namah Shivaya is one of the most powerful mantras. Chanting this mantra builds the energy in your system and also clears the environment. (This mantra is not only limited to Hinduism, as Hinduism is not a religion but) people have been chanting this mantra for thousands of years.

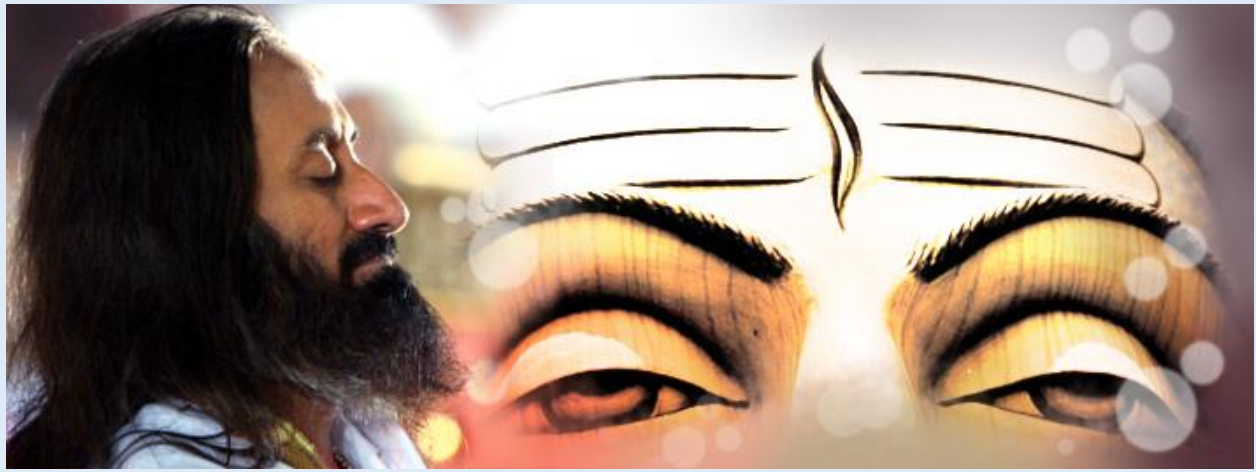
Om Namah Shivaya, these words are very important because 'Na', 'Ma', 'Shi', 'Va', 'Ya', these five letters indicate the five elements - Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether and 'Om' is the sound of the universe. ***Om*** means peace and love. So when there is peace, love and harmony in all the five elements then there is bliss and there is joy!

Why do we chant 'Om Namah Shivaya' 108 times

Shiva is the master of all the planets. That is why 'Om namah Shivaya' is chanted 108 times. Nine planets going through 12 houses creates different effects. To magnify the positive effects and reverse the negative effect one does the *japa* of 'Om namah Shivaya' 108 times.

✚ Mrityunjaya Mantra

*om tryambakam yajamahe sugandhim pushti-varadhanam |
urvārukam-iva bandhanān mṛtyormukṣīya māṃṛtāt ||*



Markandeya Rishi chanted this mantra. This is one of the most revered mantra in the Vedic tradition. After the Gayatri mantra is the Mrityunjaya mantra and there is a history behind this.

'*Mrityu*' means '*death*' and '*Jaya*' means '*victory over*' (death).

Death is for what? Is it for the soul or the body? Soul has no death. It goes from body to body, and body changes all the time. Every day, our body is changing. Every moment, so many cells are dying and new cells are being born. Our body is a township. Like in a town new children are being born every day and some old people are dying, same thing is happening in our body.

Mrityunjaya here means victory of the mind over the ephemeral, and leaping on to the eternal.

When the mind realizes that *I am the eternal being*; that there is something in me that is not changing, then there is no fear.

Fear is one of the signs of death. When you win over the fear and win over the small mindedness of identification with the perishable then you move to the imperishable. ***When you identify with the imperishable, you have won over death as death is only for the perishable and perishables will anyway perish.*** We are a combination of both (spirit and body). Our spirit is

imperishable and the body is perishable. Often our mind is attached to the perishable and it feels it is dying. ***Mrityunjaya mantra takes our mind from the limited identity to the unlimited identity***, i.e., 'Shivoham', which means, I am part of Shiva. ***I am Shiva.***

In it is a prayer to Lord Shiva: *Let Shiva make me strong. Let him give me relief from the bondage.*

The desire to be free from bondage takes you out of bondage.

+ Rudrabhishekam



Rudrabhishek is an ancient chanting which was downloaded from the *Akasha* (space). When the ancient sages sat in meditation, they heard these sounds (of the mantras), and they started transferring to other people what they heard (and that is how the Rudrabhishek was downloaded).

The effect of Rudrabhishek is, it creates positive energy and removes negative vibrations. The main thing is the vibration, that is it. If you ask me, 'Do you know the meaning of all the chants? I will say, 'I also don't know.' It's the vibration of the chants that is more important than the meaning. When Rudrabhishek happens, nature flourishes; nature becomes joyful and happy.

Mainly, it creates more positive ions; more so when people are meditating.

The First Part of Rudrabhishekam

There are two parts to Rudrabhishekam, the first part says, 'Namo, namo, namo, namo'.

Mana means *mind*. The word *mind* in English comes from the Sanskrit word *Mana*.

Nama is the reverse of the mind. *The mind going to its source is called Nama.*

When the mind goes outside to experience the world, it is *Mana*. When the mind goes back to its source, it is *Nama*, and when it goes to its source what does it find? It finds that *everything is made up of one consciousness*.

Today, scientist are talking about the *God Particle* - the one particle by which everything has been made. Thousands of years ago the Rishis said the same thing, that everything is made up of *one thing*, and *that* they called *Brahman*.

That which is neither male nor female, which is nothing but a Tattva (Tattva means principle), by which everything is made, is called *Bramhan*. And when that *Bramhan* becomes personal, it is called *Shiva Tattva - the innocent divinity that is in everything*. That is why we say, 'Namo, namo!'

In the trees, in the greenery, in the birds, even in the thieves, and in a dacoit, everywhere, it is the same *one* principle that present.

The Second Part of Rudrabhishekam

Then, the second part will say, 'Chame, chame, chame, chame.' You have heard this, isn't it?! This means, '*Everything is in me*'.

'Me' in English comes from the Sanskrit word '*Ma*', which means '*Myself*'. '*Ma Ma*' means '*For Me*' and '*In Me*'. So, everything is in terms of '*Myself*'. *The second part is 'Everything is for me, and everything is in terms of me*. Even for the numbers they say, '*Ekaachame*', which means, one, two, three, four, they are all my form.

Like that, '*Sugamchame*', happiness for me!

'*Abhayanchame*', fearlessness, happiness, health, all the good things in the universe, let them all come to me, and they are all part of me. That is it!

As this is being chanted, usually milk and water runs through the crystal, drop by drop. This is the ancient method. It is done with water, or by putting herbs in fire.

What they do is, they keep a fire and they put different herbs for the different chants. This is the ancient method.

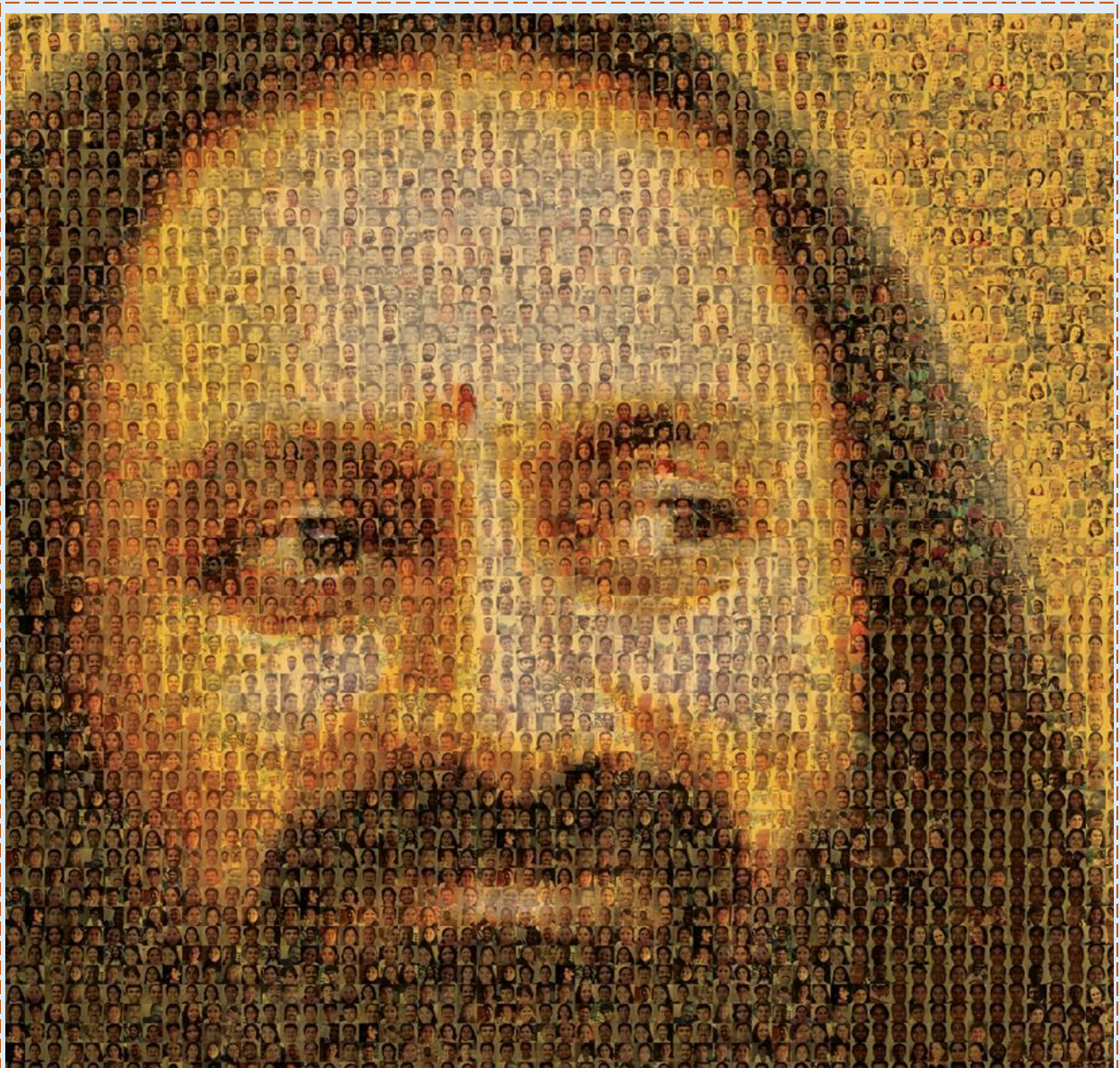
Rudrabhishekam On Mondays

When done on Mondays it is even more special. Monday is the day of the moon, and the moon and mind are connected. Mantra, mind, moon, they are all connected somewhere. So in India, it is a tradition to have this chanting in the Ashrams every Monday.

All the five elements are used in pooja. Pooja means honoring all the elements. So, fire, water, incense sticks, fruits, flowers, rice, whatever nature has given to us, those things are used (for worship) along with the chanting.

Just doing it as a ritual is not that effective because it is said that *the Veda Mantras are effective when people are awake from within*; for them, these mantras have more meaning. So, these mantras help you to go deep into meditation.

<http://www.artofliving.org/in-en/rudrabhishekam-ancient-sounds>



A note of thanks to
His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar
for this very insightful knowledge and for giving us a glimpse
of the Shiva Tatva which is within the reach of each and
every one of us.

- By the volunteers of the webteam