**MEANING OF MAHA SHIVRATRI**

**(Compiled by the Hindu Temple Ventura County)**

The roots of the festival, and its modern significance, are entwined in ancient Indian mythology. There are many versions of the Maha Shivratri festival in Puranas. Temple has compiled many of them here.

1. According to legend, Maha Shivaratri marks the occasion when Shiva first performed the *Tandava Nritya* – also known as the dance of primordial creation, preservation, and destruction. It was through this dance of devotion that Lord Shiva saved the world from destruction.
2. Maha Shivaratri also marks the occasion of Shiva's marriage to the Goddess Parvati, and the day he became one with Mount Kailash. In the yogic tradition Shiva is revered, not as a God, but as the *Adi Guru* – the very first Guru from whom the science of Yoga originated. Maha Shivaratri is a night of stillness and quietude, inspired by and devoted to the stoic grace and discipline of Lord Shiva.
3. According to lore, Maha Shivratri is celebrated on the day when **Lord Shiva saved the world by drinking poison that emerged from the ocean during Samudra Manthan**. This poison got stored in his throat thus making it blue which is the reason that Lord Shiva is also known as Neelkanth (blue throat)
4. Legend says that Maha Shivratri is celebrated as the day when Lord Brahma – The creator of the universe and Lord Vishnu – The protector of the universe, got into an argument about their supremacy over each other. While engaged in the fight, a shining “Lingam”(Shiva Linga) appeared in between the two of them, going up into the sky, through the clouds and seemed to have no beginning or end. Awestruck by its magnitude, Brahma and Vishnu decided to compete to find one end each – with the winner establishing supremacy over the loser. Brahma started his journey into the sky and Vishnu descended into the depths of the world.In his journey, Brahma came across a Ketaki flower that had been placed at the top of the Lingam, but had floated down. He lied by saying he had reached the top, using the flower as his proof. This angered Shiva and he revealed his true form in front of them. He punished Brahma, and cursed him that no one would ever pray to him. Lord Shiva made them realise that there was a third power mightier than them, Shiva – The creator, preserver and the destroyer of the universe. Since, this was the first time Shiva manifested himself as a Linga, the day is considered to be extremely auspicious and is celebrated as [Maha Shivratri](https://mocomi.com/maha-shivaratri/" \t ").
5. A legend explains the all-night worship of Shiva on Shivratri. There was once a poor tribal man who was great devotee of Shiva. One day he went deep into the forest to collect firewood. However he lost his way and could not return home before nightfall. As darkness fell, he heard the growls of wild animals. Terrified, he climbed onto the nearest tree for shelter till day-break. Perched amongst the branches, he was afraid he would doze and fall off the tree. To stay awake, he decided to pluck a leaf at a time from the tree and drop it, while chanting the name of Shiva. At dawn, he realized that he had dropped a thousand leaves onto a Linga to keep himself awake, the tribal plucked one leaf at a time from the tree and dropped it below which he had not seen in the dark. The tree happened to be a wood apple or bel tree. This unwitting all-night worship pleased Shiva, by whose grace the tribal was rewarded with divine bliss. This story is also recited on Maha Sshivaratri by devotees on fast. After observing the all-night fast, devotees eat the Prasad offered to Shiva.

WHY WE WORSHIP SHIVLING ON MAHA SHIVRATRI DAY

According to Shiva Purana, mostly Shiva is worshipped in the infinite column or Shivalinga, and linga worship is considered to give you more virtue than worshipping Him in the statue form.

Shivlinga means “ the form “, it means the Aadi and Ananth ( which is infinite and existing from times immemorial).

Shiva has neither start nor end and that is indication of Linga, the infinite pillar or column.The word Linga is used with reference to a Symbol, interference or Prakruthi (nature). And since the Linga is an infinite column of energy, to make it finite, we have the nature or gravitational force ( the oval shape on the Linga which embeds the pillar into itself) pulling the linga's energy into it and thus balancing it.

It is depicted in this way because, at the time of dissolution, along with the 5 elements of the nature (cosmic), the entire world merges into the Linga and originates from it again, at the time of creation.

According to the Shaiva sect , Shiva is the Deity of all, that is Creation, Sustenance and Dissolution. Only in the concept of Trimurthi, Shiva is the Deity of Dissolution.