



Dear Yagya Friends,

Greetings! This is the month of Shivaratri, our annual yagya series in honor of the vedic "Night of Shiva".

Our Shivaratri Yagyas begin on Saturday, Feb. 19th and there is still time to participate. You can be a part of all 12 days for a contribution of \$51. The signup page can be reached by [clicking here](#) or visiting the puja.net site.

On the Puja.net site you will find links to yagya video, text and translation of Sri Rudram, 10 podcasts on Shiva, and an MP3 library of over 100 Slokas and Hymns to Shiva. You can find a list of everything available by [clicking here](#).

I want to offer special thanks to Sri Seetharama Shastry in Kanchipuram and Pandit Vachaspati Mishra in Varanasi. They deserve recognition and our gratitude for their hard work making these special yagyas possible.

Thank you all for your interest and support. I hope you enjoy our Shivaratri program and this newsletter.

Ben Collins



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Shivaratri Stories

There are wonderful stories behind all the important rituals in the timeless Vedic tradition, and Shivaratri is no exception. Hearing the stories helps one to understand what is happening and why.

The Story of King Chitrabhanu

In the Mahabharata towards the end of the great battle, Bhishma has been defeated and is resting on the bed of arrows. He is at peace and is quietly speaking about the nature of Dharma. He tells the following story about Maha Shivaratri and King Chitrabhanu.

King Chitrabhanu and his wife were fasting during the day

of Shivaratri. The sage Ashtavakra came to visit the king and asked why he was fasting on this day?

King Chitrabhanu explained that he had the gift of remembering the incidents of his previous birth. "In my past birth I was a hunter in Varanasi and my name was Suswara. I earned my living by killing and selling birds and animals."

"One day I was walking through the forests in search of animals but I was not paying attention and it quickly became too late for me to return home before dark. I climbed a Bilva tree where I would be safe from the wild animals for the night."

"I had been lucky that day and killed a deer. I didn't want to lose it to tigers that roamed the forest, so I bundled it up and tied it to a branch on the tree."

"It was a cold night and I was uncomfortable and awake the whole night long. I was so hungry and thirsty, but I never dared to come out of the tree out of fear that a tiger or other animal might carry me off."

"I cried and shed many tears when I thought of my poor wife and children who were hungry and wouldn't have any idea where I was. To pass the time in the long cold night, I was plucking the Bilva leaves and dropping them on the ground."

"Finally the Sun came up and I was able to return home. On the way I sold the deer and bought some food for myself and my wife and children. As I was walking home, I was so hungry and sat for a moment to eat a little of the food. As I was about

to eat, a stranger came up to me and asked for some of my food. As is our custom, I served him first and then ate a little of my food before returning home.”

“Many years later, at the time of my death, I saw two messengers of Lord Shiva. They were sent to take my soul to the heaven of Lord Shiva. During our journey, I learned for the first time of the great merit I had earned by the unconscious worship of Lord Shiva during the night of Shivaratri.”

“ They explained to me that there was a Lingam at the bottom of the Bilva tree. The leaves I picked throughout the cold night fell on the Lingam while my tears, shed out of concern for my family fell onto the Lingam and washed it. Because of the circumstances at the time, I fasted all day and all night.”

"Although my worship was inadvertent, I lived in Shiva's heaven for many years and now I am reborn as Chitrabhanu and I observe Shivaratri every year by fasting and supporting the priests who recite Rudram and perform the yagyas."



Shiva and the Ocean of Milk

Originally, the devas were not immortal and so they churned the celestial Ocean of Milk in order to obtain amrita; the nectar of immortality. Before the amrita was obtained, a highly toxic poison emerged from the ocean. The gods and demons who had been cooperating in this churning process were very afraid because the poison was so strong that it could kill all life in the universe.

They quickly appealed to Vishnu, who as the protector of creation, was responsible for solving this problem. Vishnu gathered Brahma the Creator and Shiva the Destroyer in the hope that the three of them could arrive at a solution. Vishnu knew that the poison was too strong for him and he appealed to Shiva, saying that Shiva was worshipped as “Maha Deva” and so he should have the first drink.

In his compassion for the universe and its inhabitants, Shiva drank the poison. Some versions of the story have his wife Parvati grabbing his throat out of concern and some versions say he bound a snake around his throat.

In any case, rather than swallow it, he held the poison in his throat which turned blue due to the strength of the poison. Shiva is known as Neelakantha, The Blue Throated One.

Out of concern, the Rishis advised the gods to keep Lord Shiva awake during the night. To keep him awake, the gods took turns performing various dances and playing music all night long.

As the day broke the strength of the poison had greatly diminished and all danger had passed. Shiva was pleased with the devotion and concern shown to him and blessed them all, saying that whomever observed these rituals would be blessed with the fulfillment of his or her wishes. The night of Shiva (Shivaratri continues to this day.

It is also said that on this day, Shiva and Parvati's wedding took place.





Maha Rudra Yagya **February 20 - March 2**

Every yagya has as its fundamental purpose, the removal of obstacles to the development of material and spiritual fulfillment. In each person's life, there always seems to be some impediment to be destroyed so that light and success can enter. In that sense, every yagya includes the power of Shiva (in the form of Rudra, the Destroyer) to destroy what we don't want, in order to leave room for what we do want.

This time of year is linked particularly to Shiva because his night; Shivaratri, takes place at the end of the winter season. It signifies the end (destruction) of Winter to pave the way for the growth of Spring when light, warmth, and green replaces winter's cold grey darkness. The Maharudra Yagya is particularly powerful and effective at this time of year. This yagya is called Maha Rudra because of its grand scale. It requires 11 priests to chant a particularly long and powerful

section of the Yajur Veda called Sri Rudram, 11 times each day for 11 consecutive days. Rudram praises Shiva in each of his 11 various forms.

Each chanting of Rudram takes about 40 minutes while offerings of 11 different ingredients (milk, ghee, coconut water, sandalwood paste, vibhuti, rose water, Panchamritam, orange juice, lemon juice, yogurt and honey) are poured over the Shiva lingam. For the last recitation of Rudram each day, the homa fire is lit and the recitation is made while ghee and samhit (special wood) are offered into the sacrificial fire. Finally, at the end of each day, another mantra hymn from Yajur Veda, called Chamakam, is recited. Chamakam is a request to Shiva to grant us every material and spiritual desire.

In this yagya 11 priests are chanting Rudram 11 times for a total of 121 recitations each day. Since this yagya is repeated for 11 days, it brings the total number of recitations 1,331 plus 11 recitations of Chamakam.

All Vedic mantras used in traditional rituals rely on repetition for their power. The more repetitions of a mantra and the greater the number of pundits, the greater the effect.

This yagya will be performed in Kanchipuram a town about 1 hour south of Chennai famous for its many temples and for the of the Shankaracharya Mutt. Within the city there are over 1,000 Shiva lingams and it is also one of 5 special sites for Shiva each dedicated to one of the 5 elements (earth, air, fire, water, and space). Kanchipuram is special for the earth element.



1008 Modaka Yagya for Ganesha February 19

On Saturday, February 19th, we begin our Shivaratri yagya series with a full day yagya for Ganesha. What makes this month's Ganesha yagya special is that we are offering 1,008 modaka balls in the yagya fire.

Ganesha is the ruler of obstacles and also beginnings who is always honored first during any yagya or puja. Because jyotish (astrology) is the study of events based on their beginnings, he is the patron of jyotishi's everywhere. His strength is strategy and intelligence, symbolized by his two goddess consorts; Buddhi giving intellectual strength, and Siddhi effective action.

Ganesha has an elephant's head and large belly and one of his tusks is broken off. As the story goes, Ganesha's foods are sweet; and his favorite is modaka balls. They are a mixture of raw sugar, sesame seeds, coconut, and ghee wrapped in rice flour dough and steamed or fried. Even for humans, there is nothing like a good modaka ball!

One evening after over indulging in these sweets, Ganesha was walking home in the dark. He tripped over a root and fell, splitting open his belly and spilling out the modaka balls. This greatly amused the Moon who was watching from above and he laughed and made fun of Ganesha. Of course Ganesha was not amused and he broke off one of his tusks and hurled it at the Moon. So when you see Ganesha, look for his missing tusk as an amusing reminder of the futility of vanity.



Why participate in Ganesha Yagyas?

Ganesha is known as the easiest of the devas to reach and one who gives his blessings quickly and generously. To understand the benefits of the Ganesha Yagyas, it is easiest to look at the different forms of Ganesha because those are the qualities that we attract to our lives and which grow as a result of his yagyas. Each form of Ganesha is symbolic of his "power" or benefit that grows in our lives as a result of his yagyas.

- As Vigneshwara, or Vignaraja, he is controller of obstacles;

creating them and removing them as is most beneficial to us.

- As Ekadanta, the Single Tusked One, he represents the value of knowledge and dharma and the conquering of arrogance.
- As Siddhidata, the Perfected One, he is the giver of success and abundance.
- As Dhumravarna, the Smoke Colored One, he helps us overcome pride.
- As Vakratunda, the One with a Curved Trunk, he helps us overcome jealousy.
- As Mahodara, the One with the Big Belly, he pushes us to conquer infatuation and obsessive desire.
- As Gajanana, the One with the Elephant Face, he helps us conquer greed.
- As Lambodara, the One who is Corpulent, he helps us conquer anger and cruelty.
- As Vikata, the One who is missing his tusk, he helps us conquer vanity.





Varanasi Ganga Yagya March 3

Each year on the day after Shivaratri, we perform a special Ganga yagya on the banks of the river in Varanasi, north India. After the previous 12 days of intense purification coming from the Maha Rudra Yagya, this calm and soothing yagya is the perfect conclusion to our yagya series.

Interestingly there is a very close connection between Shiva and Ganga as the following story illustrates.

There once was a King by the name of Sagara who had 60,000 sons. He performed a special Ashwamedha yagya in which a horse is allowed to wander. Indra, fearful that the King's power might rival his own, stole the horse and hid it in

the underworld.

The King's son's searched for the horse everywhere and finally found it, although in the process they disturbed the meditations of the sage Kapila. Mistakenly believing that Kapila had stolen the horse, they mocked him. The sage opened his eyes and burned them all to death in a glance and they were forced to wander as ghosts.

One of the descendents of King Sagara by the name of Bhagiratha, decided to bring the celestial river Ganga from heaven to cleanse their souls and bring them relief. He prayed to Brahma, who granted his wish but when Brahma spoke with Ganga, she felt insulted at having to leave her heavenly home.

She decided to wash the Earth away as she fell from heaven, but Bhagiratha quickly appealed to Shiva who trapped Ganga in his hair and only let her out in small streams. Of course streaming through Shiva's hair purified her waters and gave them their legendary healing powers.





Shiva, Shivaratri and Jyotisha

By Steve Hubball

This year Shivaratri, the night of Shiva, takes place on March 3rd/4th, depending on your location in the world. It is the time when the Moon enters Chaturdashi, the 14th tithi (lunar day) of Krishna paksha (the waxing fortnight), the day before Amavasya (the New Moon) when the Moon is in the Vedic month of Magha.

Those of you who are born at this very sacred time will no doubt have a very powerful spiritual destiny and performing Shiva pujas and yagyas will be very important for you.

But we should all connect with the energy of Shiva, as

Shiva (meaning 'auspicious') represents 'pure silence', the Transcendent, in which the whole of Natural Law is lively and available in that complete and total silence.

This silence is full when the Moon enters Amavasya (New Moon), and therefore Shivaratri is symbolic of the full dark night, complete darkness, ignorance and Kali Yuga; the Dark Age.

Lord Shiva is said to appear at the beginning of Kali Yuga to rid the world of darkness and ignorance, and therefore Shivaratri is celebrated to rid the world of ignorance and evil.

It is said that the planetary alignment on Shivaratri is such that there is a huge expansion of energy in the human physiology, so that many devotees choose to fast during the day and stay awake throughout the whole night.

Vedic science teaches us that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the Veda and the human physiology, that every individual is truly cosmic and that the Vedic Devatas are really Cosmic Administrators or aspects of Natural Law that organise the entire universe.

These Devata also exist within us. This is clearly stated in the Vedic texts as: *yatha pinde tatha brahmande*, which can be translated in many ways, such as "As is the atom, so is the Universe" or "As is the human body, so is the Cosmic Body" or "As is the Microcosm, so is the Macrocosm", or succinctly as "As Above, So Below".

In the human body, Shiva (in the form of a lingam) is said to correspond with the entire brain. Interestingly, when we see a radial section of the human brain, the central ventricles have the exact shape of a trident, and the brain's choroid plexus looks exactly like a string of Rudraksha beads!

In the Jyotish chart, Shiva is represented by Jupiter. He is the Guru, the ultimate spiritual teacher and bestower of wisdom and Divine Grace. Where is Jupiter placed in your Vedic chart? If he is in Lagna, or aspecting Lagna, then you are truly blessed. If he is in Pisces, then you are also blessed, and if you have Jupiter in Pisces Lagna then you have the full blessing of Lord Shiva!



There are many ways to worship Lord Shiva, but the simplest is with the panchakshara (5 syllable) mantra *Namah Shivaaya*. We can add the bija 'om' at the beginning and say *Om Namah Shivvaya*.

The bija should really be determined from our Vedic horoscope. In which house is Jupiter placed in your Vedic chart? If he is in Lagna or Lagna trine (i.e. 1st, 5th or 9th houses) then you should use the mantra *Om Namah Shivaaya*, and the picture or murti (statue) should be of Shiva standing.

If he is the Jala Lagna, or trine (i.e. 4th, 8th or 12th houses) then the best mantra is *Hrim Namah Shivaaya*, and Shiva should be lying down or reclining.

If Jupiter is placed in Asta Lagna or trine (i.e. 7th, 3rd or 11th houses) then the best mantra is *Klim Namah Shivaaya* and Shiva should be sitting.



If you are familiar with Jyotish, you should know that the most important planet in your horoscope is your Atmakaraka. The Atmakaraka represents your soul together with its karmic bondage. This planet can be any one of the 9 grahas, excluding Ketu, as Ketu represents moksha (liberation of the soul).

The Atmakaraka is simply the planet that has reached the highest longitude in the sign (although we have to subtract

Rahu's longitude from 30 degrees as Rahu is always retrograde).

Interestingly, the ancient Vedic text, the Shiva Purana, teaches us that the entire creation comprises eight forms of Shiva who reside and pervade in the Universe like pearls on a string. These eight forms of Shiva are Sarva, Bhava, Rudra, Ugra, Bhima, Pashupati, Ishana and Mahadeva, and exactly correlate with the 8 planets or Atmakarakas.

Essentially, these eight atma forms are the sources of the universe, and worshipping Shiva in one of these eight forms is said to remove the blemishes of karma that bind to the soul, since our negative karmas (actions) are said to have hurt or offended one of these eight forms of Shiva.

Shivaratri is a great opportunity to worship Shiva with meditation, mantras and pujas and burn off some of our karma!

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Above is a traditional diagram of the Navagraha made from colored rice flour. Saturn is the middle square on the left.

Saturn Retrograde

1/26 through 6/13

In the Vedic system of astrology (Jyotish), Saturn will be moving in what appears to be a backward direction from the end of January through mid June. This apparent change in motion happens because the Earth passes Saturn, its rotation around the Sun being much faster. How this will affect you depends on your own chart; is Saturn a malefic or benefic planet? What other planets modify his influence and what planets does Saturn affect. Where in your chart is he placed and what houses does he rule? To have a complete picture of how Saturn will color the next 6 months, these questions need to be answered.

But there some general rules that can be applied in a meaningful way. Saturn influences us in a number of important ways. He represents obstacles, those events in life that slow us down and deny us what we want. Saturn frustrates us, making the "real world" less attractive so that we are forced to turn within to seek and discover the divine, sometimes out of desperation. Saturn frequently bugs us so that we seek to re-balance our psyche by changing our attitudes or circumstances. Saturn shows us the side of ourselves that we'd prefer to ignore, but through his unrelenting pressure we are forced to change and therefor grow.

Watch what happens in February. You'll find yourself reconsidering things, seeking change, and making plans. If you try to implement them before Saturn goes direct in June, you'll probably find that things fall apart and you have to start over. So use this time to research, plan, examine, and get ready for the next phase in your life. Then when June 13th rolls around, you'll be ready to go! And remember, the blessings one receives through Saturn are permanent. They're hard earned to be sure, but that's because the growth happens on such a fundamental level. Learn to live in harmony with the slow and deliberate rhythms of Saturn and you've really accomplished something!



March 21- 30 Family Yagyas

For ten days we will perform a series of different yagyas, each focused on developing and supporting a balanced and satisfying experience of family life.

For marital harmony and a balanced relationship - **Ardhanarishwara Yagya**, a form of Shiva that combines both male and female; half Shiva/half Parvati.

For the development of wisdom and clear thinking - **Saraswati Yagya**.

For the protection of the family and especially children - **Narasimha Yagya**

For your children's education - **Hayagriva (a form of Vishnu) Yagya**

For enlightenment and deep silence - **Meda Dakshinamurti Yagya**, a form of Shiva who teaches in silence.

For health and contentment - a daily **Mrytunjaya yagya**.

For wealth, abundance and happiness - a daily **Lakshmi Yagya**.

For balance and career success - a daily **Navagraha Yagya**.

For those who desire marriage - a special **Marriage Yagya** for Parvati and the huge Ekambeshwara Shiva temple where she did tapas in order to marry Shiva. This yagya also promotes marital harmony and overall happiness in the home.

Sign up details will be available on the puja.net website the first week of March.

"I hereby bring about unity of your hearts and unity of minds, free from malice. May each one of you love the other as a cow loves its new-born calf."

—Atharva Veda



2011 Yagya Schedule

Each month, our yagya program consists of a featured 10 day yagya series that follows the vedic tradition and observes specific yagyas at various times of the year; for example Shivaratri and Navaratri.

The monthly program generally begins with 7 days of featured yagyas followed by 1 day of Rig Veda Soma Yagyas, and 2 days of Temple Yagyas. There are always a variety of ways that individuals can participate economically.

This yagya program is in addition to the regular subscription, daily and private yagya offerings which are the same every month.

Month	Featured Ten Day Yagyas
February 19 to March 2	Shivaratri Yagyas - 1 Day Ganesha and 11 Day Maha Rudra Yagya
March 21-30	Family Yagyas
April 19-28	Rama/Sita/Hanuman Dharma Yagyas
May 5-9 and May 19-23	Rahu/Ketu, Akshaya Tritiya, and Jupiter Yagyas (May 5-9) Lakshmi Yagyas (May 19-23)
June 15-24	Dhanvantri/Mrytunjaya Health Yagyas and June 15th Total Lunar Eclipse
July 15-24	Guru Poornima (7/15) Veda Vyasa, Dakshinamurti and Shiva Nataraj Yagyas
August 15-24	Maha Lakshmi Yagyas
September 1 and September 9-13	9/1 Vinayaka (Ganesh) Chaturthi Yagya in Kanchipuram and Sept. 9-13 Shiva/Shakti and Ancestor Yagyas in Varanasi
September 29 - October 6 and October 26	Navaratri, the Nine Nights of the Divine Mother and 10/26 Deepavali
November 16-25	Hanuman and Subramanya Saturn Peyarchi (changing signs) Yagyas and Nov. 21 Solar Eclipse
December 15-24	Rig Veda Pavamana Soma Yagyas and Dec. 10 Total Lunar Eclipse



*On this path no effort is wasted, no gain is ever reversed;
even a little of this practice will shelter you from great sorrow*
Bhagavad Gita 2.40

Yagya Results

Of course everyone's yagya experience is uniquely their own and the effects of the yagyas will arrive in their own time.

Over the years we've found that obstacles are lessened and an overall smoothness of life steadily develops. It is not as if troubles and problems disappear, but they affect us less and solutions seem to be more readily available.

Many participants also report a sense of enlivened awareness that carries over to their spiritual life; meditations are deeper, mantras seem more powerful and there is a greater sense of connectedness during one's spiritual or religious practices.

The following are taken from emails we've received from yagya participants.

"Your yagya descriptions are always intriguing and they typically create so much anticipation for me. The Pavamana Soma yagya this month is no exception.

I am REALLY liking this Soma yagya very much, it is smooth yet strong. Feels like a lot is happening on a subtle level, a distinct feeling of absolution, especially on the first day. I can definitely tell when this yagya starts and stops each day."

The following was received after performing a Sudarshana Yagya to remove severe obstacles. The Sudarshana Chakra is Vishnu's weapon; a disc of light

"Just to let you know: you remember the yagyas we had done last year for our difficulties with the Justice Department here -- the process we were engaged in has finally come to an end and the results have been far, far more positive than we imagined. Enemies have become friends. The discus of light has had profound effects."

Sometimes the results are just simple.

"Thank you for all of these blessings. My meditations have been amazing. One hour is not enough anymore. Deep bliss and silence."





**Shivena vachasa tva giri schacchavadamasi,
Yatha nah sarvam ijyaga dayakshmam sumana asatthu ||**

Lord of Mount Kailash of the Vedas! We pray to attract your attention by our auspicious words.
We ask that for all our days, this entire world will be free from ills and discord, and that we may
live in unending friendship and peace. - Yajur Veda, Sri Rudram.