

Shree Peetha Nilaya

SERVE A DEITY NEWSLETTER

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JAI GURUDEV

This is the fourth of the new series of
Serve a Deity newsletters aiming to
connect you deeper with Lord Shiva and
Kanchi-Kamakshi.

Enjoy!

**Shree
Peetha Nilaya**



SHIVA & KANCHI-KAMAKSHI PUJARI TEAM INTRODUCTION



Jai Gurudev Everyone,

Shiva is one of the *trimurti*: the three main deities of the Hindu tradition. As such, he is one of the most popular figures of the faith. He is a wellspring of love, of service, of boons, and is the perfect example of a *yogi* and *bhakta* of Sriman Narayana, the Supreme Lord.

Shiva is amazing. We can each relate to him so differently, and he can take such an important role in our lives. Beyond the nature of him as the supreme consciousness, the destroyer, or greatest among the *devas*, Shiva is so kind and benevolent and quick to bestow grace. He is incredibly dear to all, especially to all the practicing *yogis*. In the Bhutabhrteshwarnath Mandir at Shree Peetha Nilaya, Shiva primarily takes the form as the Mrityum-bageshwara Lingam. As Swami Aniruddha, one of the *pujaris* for the Shiva-Kamakshi Mandir recalls:

When I came in 2008 to The Ashram, I heard and read about the Mrityum-bageshwara Lingam, the *lingam* we are serving now in our shrine. His name means “the lord who conquers death”. The fact that Mahavatar Babaji had blessed the *lingam* and that he was said to have tremendous healing power was intriguing. By pouring water over the *lingam* and chanting 11 times the *Mahamrityumjaya-mantra*, the water becomes charged with this energy.

Guruji said it has the same power as the twelve *gyotirlingams* in India. But what else to say, other than to express my gratitude for being allowed to serve him and Kanchi-Kamakshi, who is very dear to me too. Their simplicity, love and mercy is freely showered on us all so that we may grow in our love and devotion to *guru* and God. Hara Hara Maha-deva!

Shiva, much like Narayana, has many forms. This allows for us to connect with him in his various aspects. He helps us to connect with our soul, our *atma*, which is beyond this material world. This makes sense because one interpretation of his name means, 'The Pure One', or 'One who is not affected by the *gunas*'. Likewise, he longs for us to go beyond the limitations of the mind and to become pure and truly spiritual. What this means will vary according to tradition, but for us, it means to become singularly focused upon Sriman Narayana and attain the Lord, as Shiva himself exemplifies.

There are so many beautiful stories between Shiva and the Lord, and due to their closeness, these stories are examples of many aspects. They are so dear and close to one another and are linked in ways that we could also long to be.

Also known by the name, 'The Auspicious One', he sometimes acts in mysterious ways, subtly, and sometimes it's hard to be aware of these. His blessings span far and wide and uplift us all. Paramahansa Vishwananda has said in the past that, to realise God, you must have the blessing of Shiva. Among all his infinite qualities, the example of his Love for God should be most noted. He is the

greatest servant—the Lord's greatest devotee. Serving him is serving the Lord. It is true, we are incredibly blessed to be servants of the greatest devotee of the Lord. He transforms us in the best possible way. Shiva opens our hearts and minds to the endless possibilities of Love.



DEITY IN THE SPOTLIGHT: SHIVA



Mahadeva, Shankara, Nilakantha, Gopishwara... these are just some of the famous names of Shiva, the great destroyer. Shiva is the destroyer, and often known as Mahadeva 'Great God', Shankara 'Beneficent', Nilakantha 'The Blue-Throated One', Bholanatha 'The Simple One', Rudra 'Who eradicates problems from the root/ the wild one', Adi or *Maha-yogi* 'first *yogi*, or great *yogi*'. His names reflect some of his primary attributes and aspects. In the Shaivite tradition, he is seen as the ultimate consciousness or the state of consciousness itself. In the Vaishnava tradition, he is seen as the foremost of all devotees of the Supreme Lord Sriman Narayana. Considered among his famous *avatars* are Durvasa, Adi Shankaracharya, Hanuman, Bhairava, and Virabhadra. He is worshipped as formless, form, and a type of semi-form known as a *lingam*.



ONE STORY OF SHIVA



One of Shiva's aspects is Nilakantha, or, 'The Blue-Throated One'. One story of Shiva took place during the Samudramathan, the churning of the Milky Ocean. At a time where the *devas* were without strength and immortality, they were losing their positions to the *asuras*, the demons. The *devas* heard that they could take back their positions and gain a renewed strength through *amrit*, the divine nectar of immortality. However, they knew it would be impossible through their own efforts alone, and so they came to Lord Vishnu for help. Lord Vishnu advised the *devas* to work alongside the *asuras* and jointly churn the ocean of milk to attain this divine *amrit*.

They used Vasuki, the *nagaraja* who typically adorned Shiva's neck as the churning rope, and Mount Mandara as a churning rod, later supported by the great incarnation of Lord Narayana as Kurma who held up the mountain upon His back. Through the intense churning process, many things emerged from the Milky Ocean. Among these was Lakshmi, the divine consort to Narayana, the *apsaras* or divine nymphs, the wish-fulfilling cow Kamadhenu, as well as the Kaustubha jewel of Lord Narayana, Chandra, the moon, and Dhanvantari, who brought with him the divine *amrit*.

Prior to these, however, was the emergence of the horrible poison called *halahala*. This poison at the time was so severe and intense during the churning of the ocean that these great beings feared the destruction of the entire universe!

The whole process can be seen also metaphorically. Symbolically, the churning represents the spiritual journey, with all kinds of people aiming to go beyond the limited; towards immortality, towards realisation and towards liberation from birth and death. However, this spiritual journey requires purification. There is much poison (negativity) released within each one of us. And here we connect with Shiva: during the release of *halahala*, the *devas* were in fear for their lives and called upon Shiva for protection. In his great compassion, Shiva drank the *halahala* and because of that, his throat turned blue. With this mercy, with this incredible feat, Shiva became known as Nilakantha, 'The Blue-Throated One'.

It is during our own spiritual journey that we can come to Shiva for support in moving through the purification process. He will drink the poisons of the mind that lie waiting dormant within us, until the moment of purification. He reveals his compassion and

takes it upon himself as the great *yogi*, to relieve the world of that which is lying in between and preventing our realisation and devotion to Sriman Narayana.

Shiva is said to have his abode on Mount Kailash, in a spiritual plane of existence in the Himalayas. With a life of perfect balance and paradox, he is seen as both an ascetic *yogi* and householder.



DEITIES AT THE ALTAR OF KAMAKSHI- SHIVA

MRITYUM-BAGESHWARA LINGAM

'This *Shiva-lingam* is very special. When we did the inauguration of the temple in Steffenshof Mahavatar Babaji blessed this *Shiva-lingam* and He gave the name Mrityum-bageshwara, which means 'the lord which is above death, the lord of death'. Death is one fear that everyone has, because fear of the unknown, fear of not knowing what is on the other side where we will go. But by praying to Lord Shiva, especially on this day, he grants one the removal of fear from death and gives you an easy passing to the other side.'
Paramahansa Vishwananda

THE SYMBOLISM OF A LINGAM

A *lingam* is comprised of an upper part and lower part, (a round cylindrical part and a lower basin-like part) which combine to make up Shiva-Shakti. '*Linga*', meaning symbol, marks an abstract aspect of Shiva. In between form and formless, the *lingam* is representative of the masculine and feminine energies and their perfect synergy.



ARUNACHALA SHILA - Photo 1

It is said that, much like Krishna is the wondrous hill known as Govardhan, the hill called Arunachala is Shiva. Our *Shila*, meaning 'stone', is just a piece of this mountain and is worshipped as Shiva himself, just as Govardhan Shilas are worshipped as Krishna Himself.

MANIFESTED LINGAM - Photo 2

A little sparkling orange *lingam* that was manifested by Guruji. It is a beautiful small *lingam* that sits on the back altar right next to the Arunachala Shila and in front of the *Maha-yogi* Shiva.

MAHA-YOGI SHIVA - Photo 3

On the back altar, to Kanchi Kamakshi's left hand side, sits the *Maha-yogi* Shiva. Peacefully meditating upon the Lord, Shiva stands by Shakti Ma's side eternally.

BHAIRAVA - Photo 4

One of Shiva's intense forms, this Bhairava or Kala Bhairava actually looks happy and joyful with his *vahana*, a dog (*shvan* in Sanskrit), close in service behind him.

His flaming hair represents his fiery anger in pursuit of purifying all in his presence. His name means 'terribly fearsome form' and is the name taken from a famous *lila* of Shiva. He is known as the *guru* of Shani-dev (Saturn) and he also inhabits the great *Shakti-pithas*, protecting the entrances to the abodes of the Divine Mother. On Navaratri, before beginning ritual service to the Divine Mother, we first give service to him with a *Bhairava-puja*.



KAMAKSHI AND HER UTSAVA - Photo 1 (Procession *murti*)

Kamakshi-devi, or Kanchi-Kamakshi, is a form of Parvati, of Shakti Ma, and is the consort of Shiva. She has manifested in many different forms as the consort of Lord Shiva as Gauri, Uma, Parashakti, Durga, Kali and Tripurasundari. As Lalita Tripurasundari, she embodies the *shakti* of all three primary aspects of the Divine Mother, the wives of Vishnu and Brahma and Shiva - Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Parvati. Mrityum-bageshwara and Kamakshi-devi are also known as the eternal couple, Shiva-Shakti. Together they represent both the consciousness of God and the energy of creation.

The story of the manifestation of the Sri Yantra comes from the great form of the Divine Mother in the city of Kanchipuram, when a miracle occurred through the intercession of Adi Shankaracharya and the Divine Mother. In this *lila*, Kamakshi once opened her eyes and burned a reverse-image of the Sri Yantra into the ground. That's another reason why she is known now as Kanchi-Kamakshi, meaning 'one who has cast a loving eye onto the land of Kanchi'.

She carries with her a goad, lasso, lotus and sugarcane. Some consider Kamakshi as the motherly embodiment of the *guru*. She uses her goad to urge one forward on the spiritual path, while her lasso represents her control over the three *gunas*—the strings or ropes with which one is attached to the material plane. Her lotus represents beauty and purity, and the sugarcane represents this sweetness of the Divine she awakens within us.

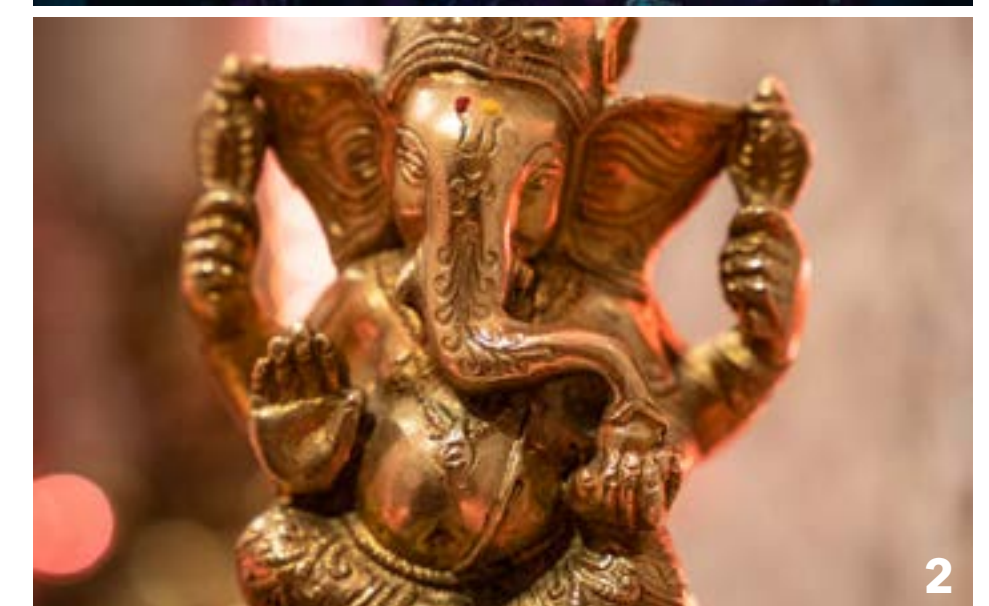
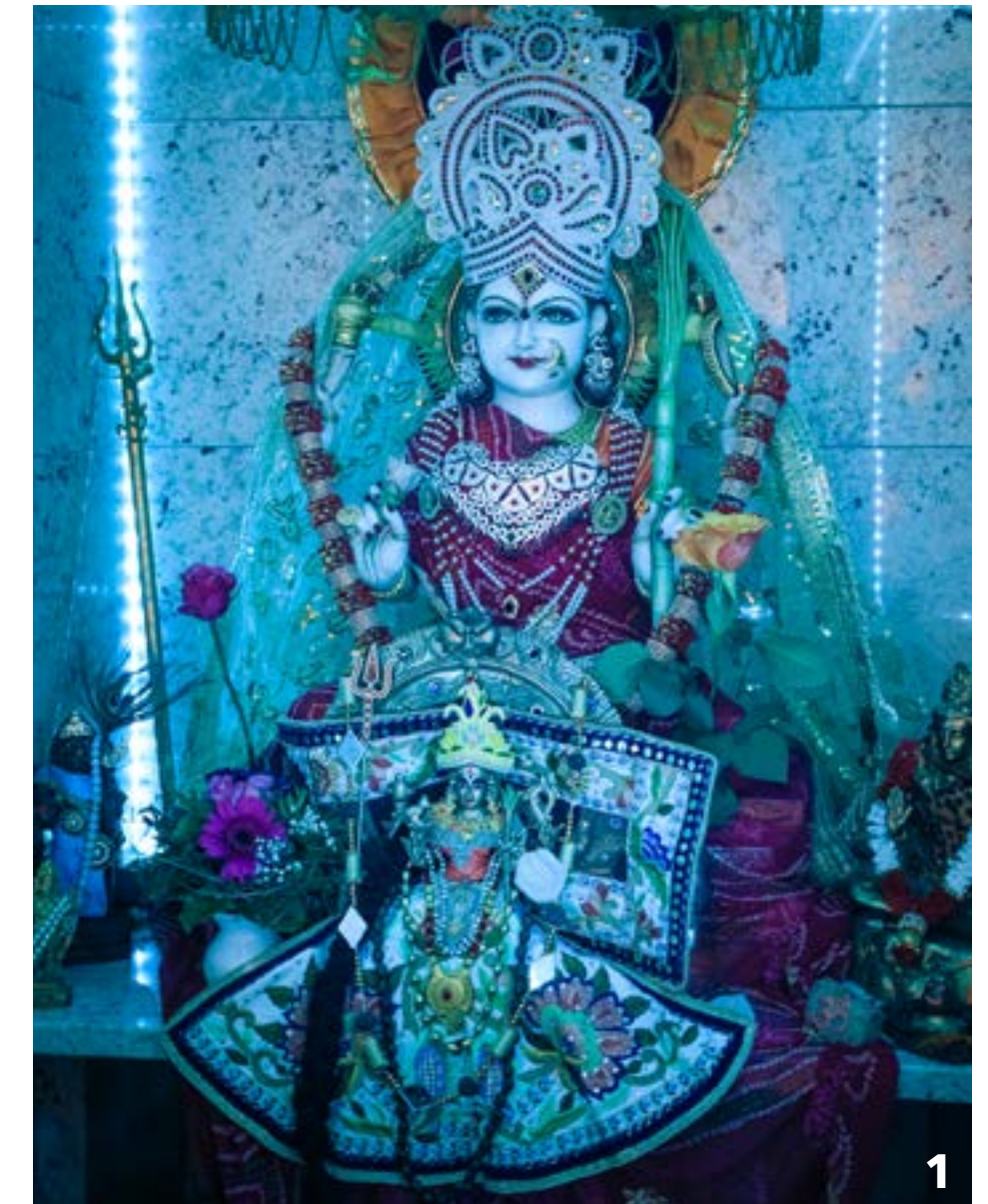
For years, this large *murti* of Kamakshi-devi was worshipped during Navaratri and became the primary image of the Divine Mother in Bhakti Marga. Her name means 'Eyes that awaken desire for the Divine'. She is the goddess of love and devotion.

She is venerated at the *mandir* daily through *puja*, and the chanting of the *Lalita Sahasranama Stotram* praising her 1000 Names.

GANESHA - Photo 2

Ganesha, Shiva and Parvati's first son, is an elephant-headed god with a large belly. The destroyer of obstacles, he paves the way for a successful spiritual path. We begin daily prayers with a glorification to him, asking that he may

bless our practices. Above the altar is a wooden *murti* that was painted by Gurudev. It depicts one of his broken tusks in his hand, the tool with which he transcribed the *Mahabharata*. Seen as one of the wisest of deities, we often pray for his assistance and wisdom. You can also see his *vahana* (celestial vehicle), a little mouse, staying near his feet. On the altar there are two matching oil lamps with a Ganesha on the tops of each.



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MURUGA/KARTIKEYA/SKANDA - Photo 1

Muruga is the second son of Shiva and stands as a black stone *murti* holding a spear. Muruga is also known as Skanda, Kartikeya, and Subramanya. Ever youthful, Skanda is a primary deity in Tamil Nadu and even Mauritius! He is both a great general and celibate *yogi*, known traditionally as the ideal philosopher-warrior. The mount that he rides is a peacock, which you can see in this *murti* of Kartikeya.

TANDAVA SHIVA - Photo 2

Above the altar is a picture of Nataraj, the dancing aspect of Shiva. Doing his famous and secretive *tandava* dance, Shiva's dance is said to be a part of the cycle of creation, preservation, and dissolution. This *rudra-tandava* is depicted as violent and intense. The *Shiva Tandava Stotram* is a beautiful hymn that glorifies this form of Shiva and his incredible dance.



INTRODUCING OTHER FORMS OF SHIVA AT SHREE PEETHA NILAYA

HARI POORNA BHAKTA SHIVA - Photo 1

This large stone *murti* stays seated with eyes half open in meditation on the front lawn at Shree Peetha Nilaya. His name means 'the complete devotee of Hari' or 'perfect *bhakta* of Hari'. He is fully devoted to Sriman Narayana, completely focused upon Him at all times and despite the outside conditions, never falters from that devotion. He inspires many who come to Bhakti Marga in their spiritual endeavors to render that sort of perfect service through meditation. Shiva is for all of us the perfect example of how a true devotee should go through life.

WHITE SHIVA-LINGAM - Photo 2

A stunning white marble *lingam* that was once the primary deity at the Shiva-Kamakshi altar, now adorns the Babaji Cave and Saints Museum at Shree Peetha Nilaya. He stands upon an ornate silver *yoni* (base structure which represents the Divine Mother) and is the main deity of worship during Maha Shivaratri. During that time, he is worshipped with *abhishekam*, water, and bilva leaves followed by decorative vestments and beautiful flowers and *vibhuti* (holy ash).



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2

VARIOUS FAMOUS FORMS, INCARNATIONS, AVATARS AND LILAS OF LORD SHIVA

RUDRA

This ancient form of Shiva is described in the *Rig Veda*, the oldest of the *Vedas*. At the time of dissolution of creation, Shiva takes the form of Rudra to eradicate the old universe, and make way for the cycle of the new.

VIRABHADRA

During the scene of Daksha's *yajna*, the king offended Shiva and his daughter for marrying each other. Omitting Shiva and Sati from the ceremony, the King had gone too far. Nevertheless, Sati attended the *yajna*, going against Shiva's advice. At the *yajna* Daksha insulted his daughter in front of the guests and, hearing further offenses against her beloved husband, Sati (an incarnation of Parvati) had enough, and set herself on fire through her *yogic* power. This self-immolation triggered within Shiva a deep sorrow. In such a state, he plucked a lock of hair from his head and threw it to the ground. Two furious forms emerged by the names of Virabhadra and Bhadrakali. The former was an angry form of Shiva: dark skinned and wearing a garland of skulls with three burning eyes and hot fiery hair. Virabhadra was ordered to destroy the *yajna*, Daksha, and the offending sages alongside him.



HANUMAN

Hanuman is perhaps the most famous of Shiva's incarnations. Appearing in the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, Hanuman is a monkey-god and one of the *vanaras*. Son of the wind-god Vayu, Hanuman is the devotee, companion and messenger to Lord Narayana's avatar as Lord Rama. A symbol and worthy image of true *bhakti*, Hanuman also demonstrates in the *Ramayana* his incredible *yogic* abilities. Many consider him to be a perfect example of the relationship between Shiva and Vishnu.

ARDHANARISHWARA

This form of Shiva is depicted with a split body, where one half is his female counterpart, Parvati, and one half is himself. Half male and half female, this form represents their being beyond the material limitations. They are fully centered upon the Self, which is beyond duality, beyond gender. This form represents also the perfect synthesis of masculine and feminine energies of the universe, of both *purusha* and *prakriti*, and how Shiva-Shakti are inseparable: the power to create and the consciousness of creation itself.

GOPISHWARA

One of the most illustrative examples of *bhakti*, Shiva was enamored with the idea of joining the legendary *Rasa-lila* of Sri Krishna. The problem was that this dance between Krishna and His beloved Radha and the rest of the *gopis* was exclusive only to *matajis*. However, his longing to be with his Lord and experience this *maha-bhava*, this form of intimate and beautiful love between God and His close devotees, was overwhelming. Here's how the story goes, in Guruji's own words:

'In the *Rasa*, Shiva himself came as Gopishwara Mahadeva. So, he also wanted to unite himself with Krishna. He also wanted to enjoy that which even the *devas* and also the great *rishis* can't enjoy. So, Shiva himself, seeing that Parvati was going out dressed nicely, asked Parvati, "Where are you going?" Parvati said, "Well, this is a secret. I can't tell you." But, of course, you know, Shiva sensed that there was something going on. You see, when you tell somebody, "No!", it increases the curiosity inside and they want to know more. After some time, she was still doing her makeup and Shiva was behind her. So, finally Parvati said, "Ok, listen, Krishna is doing the *Maha-rasa*..." You see, the *Rasa-lila* was not

only one day. It was a whole month. Every day there was *rasa*. But the *Maha-rasa* was one only. So, when Parvati was going, Shiva said, "Please, tell me where you go every day like this, dressed nicely? I am your husband. You should dress nicely for me only! For whom else are you dressing nicely?" So, that's why Parvati had to say. Otherwise, big problem! She would not be allowed back into Kailash probably. So, Parvati said, "Listen, Krishna is doing the *Maha-rasa*."

'Just the mere word of Krishna, forget about the *rasa*, just the mere word, the name, hearing the name of Krishna, Shiva was in great ecstasy and, of course, when he heard the word '*rasa*', the excitement was even much more. So, then he wondered, "The Lord is doing *rasa*. How can I not participate in that?" So, then he said to Parvati, "Listen, I also want to come!" Parvati was in a big dilemma. How shall we bring Shiva to the *Maha-rasa* where only *matajis* are allowed. No men. Even Balarama was not allowed. Balarama, who is Adishesh, the brother of the Lord Himself, was not allowed. So, Parvati was in a fix, "How will I bring Shiva and how can I say 'No' to Shiva?!" You know, when Shiva gets angry, it's quite difficult to calm him down.



And as he is the destroyer, he would destroy everything. Even the *rasa* would not work, would not function. So, better give him a solution. So, Parvati came to the conclusion, and said, "Shiva, ok, fine. You come, but you can't come like this, because the *Maha-rasa* is between *prakriti-shakti* and the Lord Himself.

'It is His cosmic creation, His own will with Him.' And, of course, Shiva knew this, so he said, "Ok, fine. I will not come like this, but I'll dress up." So, Shiva dressed up in a wonderful sari, with beautiful makeup and, of course, Shiva, when you look at him, he's not a very elegant person. So, Parvati said to Shiva, "You have to cover your head and if Krishna asks you anything, don't answer.

'Just nod, yes, no! But don't even remove the veil from your face. Don't remove the cover from your face.' So, Shiva agreed.

'They all were dressed nicely in the most beautiful costumes. They arrived in Vrindavan. Here the *Maha-rasa* had already started. Krishna was dancing with the *gopis* and all the other deities, and *devis* were there also participating in the *Maha-rasa*. Of course, the Lord knew who it was, but the Lord approached Parvati, said, "Mata, I am happy

to see you!" Parvati was wondering, "Why has He come now to say 'hello' to me? For sure He senses something." And, of course, Shiva - you know Shiva is so big - was standing there and Parvati was small next to Shiva. He doesn't pass unnoticed. Of course, the Lord knew the *bhakti* inside of Shiva and why really he came there. So, Krishna said to Parvati, "What's the name of your *sakhi*? What's the name of your friend?" Parvati tried to avoid it, tried to divert the mind of Krishna by not even looking at Krishna and Krishna said, "Mata, tell me, what is the name of your *sakhi*?" Then Parvati said, "Listen, she is very new, I saw her on the way and I brought her. "Aaaah", Krishna said, "Wonderful!" So, then Krishna was saying to Shiva with his head covered, "Tell me your name please!" Krishna was going around Shiva looking at him from every side, up and down and saying, "Oh, how beautiful you look! Please, tell me your name!" Of course, Parvati was getting very nervous. Parvati tried to interfere, saying, "Let her be. She doesn't know how to dance properly. So, come, let's go and do the *rasa*!" But, of course, Krishna would not let go just like that. He is famous for that, no? Then He said, "Let me see your face!" Krishna said to Parvati, "Tell your *sakhi*, tell your friend, just show me her face!" Of course,

Parvati said, "No, no, no, I can't!" But Krishna carried on, carried on, carried on. Finally, they started dancing.

'Of course, Krishna is *Tandava* and Shiva is also *Tandava*. And the *Tandava* Dance only these two can do. Only Krishna and Shiva. Nobody else in the whole universe can dance the *Tandava*. So, they were dancing and then there was one moment where Krishna did one posture which only Shiva can do. If you are a woman you can't do that posture. Only a man can do that. So, of course, Shiva was so much in great bliss dancing with Lord Krishna, he forgot that he had to act as a woman and he did that posture. At that moment when he did that posture he realized what he had done. "Oops, I'm caught." At that moment Krishna said, "Who are you? This is the *Tandava* I just did right now. Only Me and Shiva know that! How can you do that? For sure you are nobody else but Shiva!" At that moment Shiva had to reveal himself.

'So, Shiva removed the pallu, the veil but, of course, Krishna knew from the beginning itself. Shiva also knew that Krishna knew, but this is the sweetness between them, you know. This is the love that they carry for each other. And Krishna was so happy that Lord Shiva was

there. And, of course, all the other *devas* were jealous and said, "Why didn't we have this idea first?" It was so easy just to dress like this, you know, and then come, simple! So, but this *bhakti* which Shiva had, this longing that he had, that's what the Lord of the Universe, you know, has blessed him, has graced him with that. And this is the Love that they share.'
-Paramahansa Vishwananda

To enter true *gopi-bhava*, one must first get the blessing of the great Gopishwara (meaning lord of the *gopis*) Shiva. This great form of Shiva is now venerated in Vrindavan.

Often during Maha Shivaratri, the first of the forms celebrated in Shree Peetha Nilaya is Shiva as Gopishwara, and the white *lingam* is decorated and adorned as a beautiful *gopi* in commemoration of this important *lila*.

ATTRIBUTES OF LORD SHIVA



TRIPUNDRA

Shiva's *tilak*, usually made with three horizontal lines of *chandan* (sandalwood paste) or *vibhuti* (holy ash) across his forehead or the *lingam's* front-facing portion, has a deep spiritual meaning. It is typically understood to represent his mastery over the three *gunas*, the modes of nature, the three worlds, and the various trinities spoken about throughout Hindu culture.

TRISHUL

Shiva's trident weapon similarly shows his conquering nature over the material world, and of being beyond *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva guna*.

VIBHUTI/ASH

Often depicted as being covered in ash, this reminds us all that material existence is impermanent and that we should be focused on the three things that remain eternal - *atma* (soul), *paramatma* (supersoul, or God), and the divine eternal relationship between them.

DAMARU/DRUM

The hourglass-shaped hand drum is used as part of Shiva's eternal cosmic dance in his form as Nataraja.

RUDRAKSHA MALA

Prayer beads made from the seeds of a tree which bears a blue fruit with seeds called *rudraksha*. *Rudraksha*, translated as 'the tears of Rudra, (one of Lord Shiva's names) are said to be created after one of Shiva's tears fell to the earth. It is said that where the splattering of the teardrop fell, such trees grew from that spot. He wears these malas showing the importance of prayer and meditation.

MATTED HAIR

Matted hair or dreadlocks shows his rejection of worldly ideals and demonstrates his nature as being beyond worldly matters, as he is truly spiritual and immersed in constant meditation and service.

CRESCENT MOON

The deity named Chandra, the Moon-god, rests upon the crown of Shiva. At one point, Chandra was cursed and became devoted to Shiva, and through such devotion, became partly released from the curse. In addition,

it refers to the connection between Shiva and Soma, which is another name for Chandra.

THIRD EYE

Shiva is often depicted with a third eye, referring to his state of enlightenment.

GANGA

From the toe of Narayana, the cosmic Ganga water comes onto Earth to uplift and purify. By itself, the purification is so powerful it would destroy the universe, but Shiva stands as a protective barrier, taking it upon himself as the great Gangadhara, or 'bearer of the river Ganga', so that it pours off his hair onto the world.

BILVA LEAVES

Bilva, or bael leaves are used in worship of Shiva, and particularly *lingams*, because when they are flipped upside down, placed upon him, and cool water poured over them, they help keep Shiva especially cool, which is enjoyable for him.

VAHANA

His vehicle is named Nandi, the great bull and great devotee of Lord Shiva.



QUALITIES THAT LORD SHIVA REPRESENTS

Lord Shiva is the one of the oldest gods of the Hindu pantheon. He was worshiped by the wild tribes as a divine shaman. For them, he was Pashupati, the lord of the beasts, surrounded by the wild ones of the jungle. In the *Rig Veda* he is known as Rudra, full of wrath and destruction, but later in Hindu history he became known as Shiva, the **benevolent** one, **filled with auspiciousness**.

He is the sweet personal god as Shambunatha and the **innocent** one as Bholanatha, the most easily propitiated. He is **totally impartial** to everyone, be it a deity or demon, angel or ghost; for him a devotee is a devotee. He is the friend of the unfortunates, those rejected by society, the goblins and the ghosts. Those who are despised by others find a safe place close to him.

He is Yogishwara, the supreme *yogi* **uncaring of material wants**, wearing nothing but a tiger skin, *rudraksha*, a snake and ash, ever immersed in the immensity of his divine bliss. And he is the **perfect bridegroom** who places Parvati so close to his side that it creates the androgynous form of Ardhanarishwara: half man and half woman.

He is the eternal lover of his beloved. So much so, when Sati (the previous incarnation of Parvati) sacrificed her body at Daksha's *yajna* through her *yogic* powers, Shiva was filled with agony and picked up her corpse to wander the whole universe holding her. The whole creation was filled by his grief and the universe trembled, unable to bear Shiva's grief for the death of his beloved.

He is the **perfect family man**, and his family is the best example of unity in diversity. Shiva's family shows how different types of creatures can live together in peace and harmony. Lord Shiva's vehicle is an ox, Nandi, while he carries a snake around his neck. Parvati's vehicle is a lion. Shiva's son Ganesha's vehicle is a rat, while Kartikeya's vehicle is a peacock. These are all animals which by nature are predators of each other.

Shiva is Mahakaal, the **destroyer**, and Nataraja, the **dancer**, that with his dance destroys the universe. And he is Nilakantha, the drinker of the poison to **protect the world**; he is the one who stopped the descent of the divine Ganga and thus **saved the earth** from being drowned in the deluge of her waters.

There is no end to his mercy and kindness. He is prepared to sacrifice himself for the sake of the world and humanity.

Lord Shiva is like a diamond, he has a thousand facets, a thousand nuances, a thousand faces, a thousand different personalities, that are part of a whole that amazes those who are ready to look at him with different eyes.

SHIVA QUOTES FROM GURUJI

'You know what Shiva stands for: the destroyer of the pride and the ego. And that, on that day, he uplifts through his grace, he uplifts the mind, he destroys the mind so that your heart can take over, so that it can rise to the Feet of Lord Narayana.'

Maha Shivaratri, Speech 1&2, 17.02.2015

'You are the consciousness, you are the *atma*. So surrender the rest you don't need to the Feet of Shiva. He knows how to destroy it.'

Maha Shivaratri, 28.02.14

'There is nothing which is called yours. Your *atma* is who you are. Even this body doesn't belong to you. It is made up of the five elements and what it will become, it will become the five elements. That's why Shiva stands for the destruction, showing you that everything that you collect here, everything that you call is "mine", at the end is not yours.'

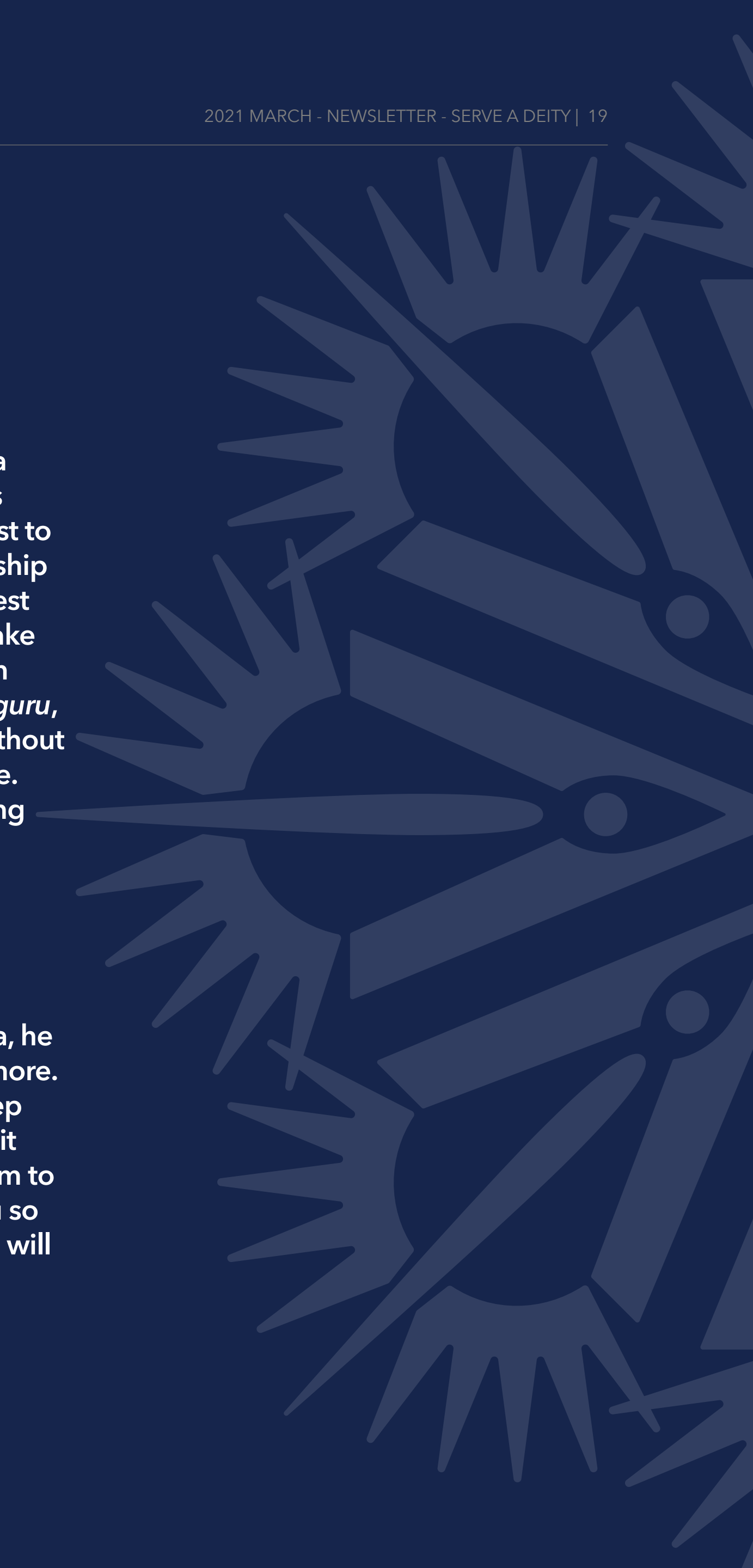
Maha Shivaratri, 28.2.2014

'...There are four messages that Lord Shiva wants from you. Four things that He wants from you. First: know yourself. Try your best to know yourself. Second: know the relationship between you, God, *guru*. Third: try your best for the consciousness and the truth to awake inside of you and help others also to attain that. And fourth: he said surrender to the *guru*, because without the grace of the *guru*, without the grace of the Master nothing is possible. But with the grace of the Master, everything becomes even more easy than you think.'

Maha Shivaratri, 28.02.2014

'On this night (Maha Shivaratri), whatever expression that you express towards Shiva, he multiplies it 100 times to give you much more. If you ask him sincerely for something deep within you today, He can't refuse you. But it has to be that it will help you. If you ask him to grow spiritually, if you ask him to help you so that your love inside of you grows, that he will happily do.'

Maha Shivaratri, 10.03.2013



PUJARIS EXPERIENCE OF SERVICE TO SHIVA

Divinely Supported Aksharananda

He's like this silent support on your journey. Shiva is this constant support, he's constantly lifting you. It's not that he has a consciousness of God, he IS the consciousness of God. He has become the practice, he's not doing the practice.

That's who he is for me. That's what he always has shown me. As I've served him, more and more I've seen that. He infuses that into you. As I've served him, he's infusing that quality of himself—of being that quality, of being the practice more and more. For me to be able to serve both Shiva and Kamakshi-devi is like I lose myself, and lose the sense of what I want to do, lose the sense of any pain in me, of all my difficulties. I get the opportunity to lose myself in him. It's just service, and it's just love. It's through this service that I get to learn what it means to love. Service is what he knows best. He is the greatest devotee, the greatest servant of the Lord, and Krishna said, the devotee of my devotee is dearest to me. That's the grace that he gives. His mind is not getting

in the way of his Love for God. Many think about the different *bhavas* that exist and 'this is the expression of love that I feel right now' or 'this one is the highest'. 'This is what I feel right now'. For him, there is no 'best' one. For him, it's ANY of them; it's all of them at the same time! There are no limitations in his Love for God and for us. That's that wisdom of what it means to serve, of what it means to love. That's what I feel he pours out to us. That tiny drop of sincerity, of love within us towards Sriman Narayana, he takes it and multiplies it. He takes the small desire to change, to transform, and he accelerates it. The devotee longs for others to experience Divine Love as they do. This is what it means to be a *Maha-yogi*, to be absorbed in this Love. That's who Shiva is to me.

The many forms of Shiva show that he's beyond any limitations of the outside world and of the mind. I hope that he gives to us all this grace and wisdom of Love so we each find our way to him, whatever way that may be, expressed however is best for that moment.'



Meeting the Divine in Person Swami Aniruddha

In 2012 one of my wishes came true! We went to the Himalayas to the four holy shrines in the mountains: Char Dham, namely Gangotri (the source of the holy Ganga), Yamunotri (the source of the holy river Yamuna), Kedarnath (the place of Shiva), and Badrinath (the pilgrimage place for Vishnu).

The story actually starts long before, in 2004, when I traveled for six months through India, seeking answers for my spiritual quest.

The contact with this holy land, the encounters of great seekers and souls, as well as the stories and experiences I witnessed there, left a deep impression on me.

During this journey, I became quite ill at some point. I spent more than a month in some *brahmanas* house, in Varanasi - Kashi, with an outside temperature of over 45 degrees Celsius, with mosquitos enjoying my blood, having little food and many sleepless nights caused by the illness.

When I finally got permission from a doctor to restart my traveling, I ended up in Rishikesh, the gateway to the Himalayas.

Since I had clear instructions from the doctor to avoid excessive efforts, direct sunlight, and so on, I wasn't really able to go deeper to the mountains as far as I would have liked to. I was told to generally take it easy.

On this journey I kept hearing of these holy places in the Himalayas, the four sacred shrines. I had a longing to visit the Himalayas also with the romantic thought of finding my *satguru* there. Though at that point, I wasn't able to satisfy this dream. Anyhow, the time in Rishikesh was priceless anyway...

Let's jump back again to the year 2012. In the beginning of the year, Guruji told me that I would soon have a vision of the Divine Mother. And you can imagine how excited I got about that. I wondered how this was going to manifest itself and began noticing many expectations arising within myself. I thought that it would be safer to put all of them aside. Of course, I thought, who knows—maybe He is just creating an expectation, to teach me the negative outcome of it? So, I tried to keep it low profile, thinking that if it has to happen, it will, and if not, She is still always there. And as the saying goes: normally things happen when you least expect it.



So, the months passed by and I was informed that I was invited by Guruji to travel with Him to the pilgrimage to the four holy places.

I was really happy about that, because it meant also that I would spend my 30th birthday there. In fact, when I was asked what I wished for my birthday, I thought that the only thing which could crown the experience of this pilgrimage would be to go to 'Go Muk' the glacier and source of Ganga.

Funny enough, when Yamunashree - the trip coordinator - sent us the tour plan, I saw that on the 15 June we were to walk from the Gangotri temple to the camp halfway between to the source. And on the 16th, on my birthday, we had a 'free' day. For those who wanted to go to the glacier they could go, and for those who didn't want, they could hang out in the camp. Hari bol! Even that was arranged somehow!

So off we went for the pilgrimage. From Shree Peetha Nilaya to Frankfurt airport, from Frankfurt to New Delhi, and from Delhi we went straight north to Haridwar and Rishikesh, reaching step by step higher into the mountain region. The long bus drives on the bumpy mountain roads were honestly more exhausting than the actual

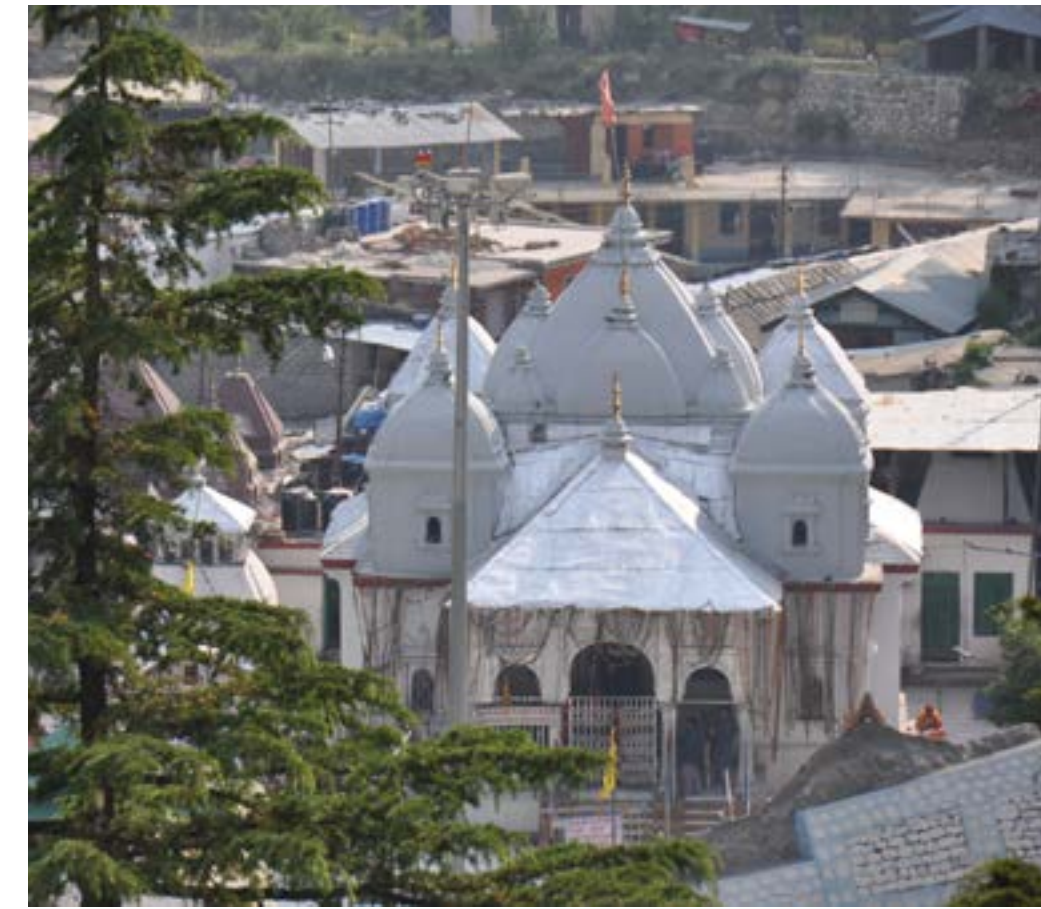
physical walking up the mountains. But it was definitely worth it.

A dream became real—traveling to the Himalayas! Not to find my Master like many years ago I wanted but with my Master. Could it get any better?

When we reached Gangotri, we had *darshan* of Ma Ganga, I took a bath and enjoyed the whole environment. There were the pilgrims, *sadhus*, the sound of prayers, bells and the rushing of the river which filled the fresh mountain air. It felt just so close to heaven and I couldn't wait to finally get started with our trip to the camp.

Late morning, we packed our stuff and got ready for the 15 km long trek up the mountain, which is about halfway to the glacier. Some paperwork needed to be done before we could actually start. I guess it was to make sure we wouldn't get lost in the snowy peaks.

Myself, I come from the Alps. And having a great love for mountains and also long trails, I was really excited to hike with Guruji, who is obviously not such a big fan of mountains and hikes, coming from a tropical island.



I was pumped. I ran in front to the first people of the expedition, and back to the last ones, enjoying sometimes the peace of the sacred Himalayas and sometimes the presence of devotees and obviously mostly being close to Guruji.

I was allowed to carry His bag which gave me great pleasure, and so while walking, the hours passed by. Some pilgrims returned from the camp or glacier, crossing our path, but there were very few. It was a very intimate, special time with Guruji.

At some point we encountered an Indian couple who had apparently done the whole trail up to the glacier, about a 30 kilometer trail, and now were on their way down to Gangotri. They must have started very early in the morning. I remember they were conversing with Guruji in Hindi.

The lady seemed quite exhausted and asked us how much further it was to get to the base. We had been walking for about 4 hours already. We had had some breaks, so maybe in three hours they could reach the base, depending on how fast they could walk. The poor lady seemed a bit in despair - another three hours!

They were simple people. She was a bit chubby, wearing a skirt, and he was quite slim. They both were in their late to middle age, wearing simple clothes, like people from a mountain village. And like most of the pilgrims, they wore only sandals in the rocky paths.

Like I said, when she heard about the distance, she seemed distressed and was kind of lamenting. Her husband or companion was trying to encourage her.

That was my interpretation from the nonverbal communication, as I do not understand Hindi. So, after exchanging some words with Guruji, they said farewell and went on their way down the mountain, and we carried on walking up to the mountain.

Once they were out of sight, Guruji explained what they were talking about and confirmed that she was tired from the long journey. I felt somehow bad for them - being exhausted and still having a long walk ahead. I know how that feels. Not to mention, they had no backpacks filled with energy drinks and power 'Riegel' with them. They basically just walked with what they had on them.



So, I got an impulse to share some of our food with them. You can imagine how much 'power food' our people were carrying up... dry fruits, Riegel, isotonic drinks, etc. (Everybody made sure during this trip to have enough food, so as not to run out of fuel for the body.)

So, I collected a few muesli Riegel and ran with my bag on my back and Guruji's bag in front after them, trying to catch them, while Guruji kept on walking with some devotees. After a few minutes I got closer to them and I shouted out: 'Jay matadi, jay matadi!' which is the way people greet each other up there and which means literally, 'glory to the revered mother.'

When they noticed me, they stopped and waited for me. So, I approached them with folded hands repeating 'Jay matadi, jay matadi.' Well, it was the only thing I knew that somehow made sense to them.

When I reached them, I handed over the 'power food' which I collected. At first, they just took one, but after insisting they happily took all of it. So, we stood there in this narrow mountain path. Having on one side the deep valley with the rushing river and on the other side the steep mountain wall. Surrounded by

the snowy peaks which reached up to 7-8000 meters in height.

While they enjoyed the snack, the lady noticed a picture of Guruji hanging on the backpack. I said to them—'mere Gurudeva' — 'My Guru' and they smiled and nodded.

The atmosphere was peaceful, pure, and filled with some magic and majesty. The lady started to talk to me, and I understood nothing besides: Calcutta, Calcutta! The words accompanied with her hand signs made me understand that she was from Calcutta.

So, I tried my Hindi: 'Aap se Calcutta hain?!' Which means something like 'You are from Calcutta?', and she nodded excited. 'What a sweet chubby mama', I thought, and what a sweet visage. I just repeated, 'Jay matadi, jay matadi'. Somehow, they never replied with the same, which was somehow strange because normally everybody does, but I didn't think much about it.

After I deciphered that she was from Calcutta, she turned to the man and said: 'aur vah kashi se hai.' Which means essentially that he was from Kashi or Varanasi. 'Ok...' I thought, 'nice'. But again I didn't catch on.



He was a bit smaller than her and definitely slimmer. His appearance was very simple and very calm. Humble and loving as well. He nodded also when I made clear I understood that he was from Kashi.

Somehow it seemed that she had a lot to say. He on the other hand was mostly quiet. But she was going on with this Calcutta and Kashi thing and I just kept on nodding to them...

I was so happy that I could offer them something, and so happy that they were happy. Like I said, just the whole panoramic setting and journey couldn't have been better. It was indeed a dream becoming real.

So, with folded hands I saluted them again and again accompanied by the words: 'jay matadi, jay matadi!' They carried on their way and I went back to catch up with the group. Once I reached them, and once I walked next to Guruji, He asked me:

'...and how was it?'

And I said: 'Very nice, they were very happy.'
He said: 'Good. Do you know who they were?'

And I said: 'No! Why?'

Gurudev asked, 'What did they tell you?'

I: 'Well I didn't really understand!'

Gurudev: 'Where did she say that they were from...?'

I answered surprised: 'Well, that's the only thing I understood as she insisted and repeated it many times. She is from Calcutta...!'

He: 'Ahh?! From Calcutta, and who resides in Calcutta?'

I wondered, 'What do you mean? Are you saying... no?!'

Gurudev with a smile said 'Yes! Just think, where did she say he was from?'

I felt like I had been hit by somebody: 'Oh my god, she said from Kashi.'

He: 'Hmm, so who is from Kashi? And who is from Calcutta?'

I: 'Are you saying that I just met the divine couple, Shiva and Kali?'

Guruji, with a smile: 'Yes, when we encountered them, they didn't reveal it, but when you walked after them, I had an inner vision of them. Mysterious is the Lord's play...'

Stupefied by this, I took the moment to remember them and the episode with them. I stored the experience in my heart. Probably the vision which Guruji promised was thereby

also fulfilled. Not in a form or a vision as I had expected, but in a physical encounter. My heart knew no bounds of happiness. Also, that I offered them something, and that they accepted it, made me happy.

And above all, I contemplated again on how blessed and lucky I was, how lucky we are, to be in the presence of Guruji, who is nothing less than the Supreme Sriman Narayana. He is granting us not just a moment with Him but a whole lifetime: His association, service and love.

I have rarely shared this encounter as it is one of my greatest treasures. I am very happy that I have the opportunity to recall that day and to share it with all of you. May we all be blessed by the divine couple, Shiva and Shakti, and may we, through their grace, attain the ultimate Feet of *guru* and God.

SAINTS WHO WORSHIPPED LORD SHIVA

ADI SHANKARACHARYA

Adi Shankaracharya was an *avatar* of Lord Shiva, born in the eight century CE, who left his body after a fulfilled yet short life of thirty-two years. He consolidated and is credited with formalising the tradition of *Vedanta* (Vedic philosophy) thereby surmising the relationship between the soul (*atma*), the totality as Brahman, and the relationship between them. His *Vedanta* became known as *Advaita Vedanta*, also known as non-dualism. Many stories come from his incredible feats and history as a leader in the Hindu faith. His name is now famous around the world, having established many *ashrams* and initiated many disciples throughout India.

Adi Shankaracharya also wrote a beautiful praise of Lord Narayana by the name *Bhaja Govinda*. It was a praise of *bhakti*, highlighting the utmost importance of devotion towards God as a means of spiritual development and liberation from birth and death.

One day, Adi Shankaracharya was walking through the marketplace with his disciples. They saw a man dragging a cow by a rope. Adi Shankaracharya told the man to wait and asked his disciples to surround them. 'I am going to teach you something' and continued... 'Tell me who is bound to whom? Is the cow bound to this man or is the man bound to the cow?' The disciples said without hesitation 'Of course, the cow is bound to the man! The man is the master. He is holding the rope. The cow has to follow him wherever he goes. The man is the master and the cow is the slave.' 'Now watch this,' said Shankara and took a pair of scissors from his bag and cut the rope. The cow ran away from the 'master' and the man ran after his cow. 'Look, what is happening', said Shankara. 'Do you see who the master is? The cow is not at all interested in this man. The cow, in fact, is trying to escape from this man. This is the case with our MIND. Like the cow, all the nonsense that we carry inside is not interested in us. We are interested in it, we are keeping it together somehow or the other.

We are going crazy trying to keep it all together under our control. The moment we lose interest in all the garbage that fills our heads, and the moment we understand the futility of it, it will start to disappear. Like the cow, it will escape and disappear.'

'My soul is Thy Temple, my Lord.
My works are Thy servants, my body is Thy house.
The objects of my senses are offered to Thee, my sleep is meditation on Thee in the silence.
All my steps are taken around Thee.
What my words say is prayer that I dedicate to Thee, Lord.
And all that I do is out of devotion to Thee.'
Adi Shankaracharya



SRI TRAILANGA SWAMI

Trailanga Swami was born around 1530-1607 in Andhra Pradesh, India. At 40 years of age, after the death of his parents, he lived his life as a recluse in a cottage. After 20 years of intense spiritual practise, he was initiated in *sannyasa* by his *guru*, Bhagirathananda. He then went on a pilgrimage and eventually settled in Varanasi in 1737. Trailanga Swami said that, to attain liberation, one must attain a state of desirelessness. He was often known for his innocence and frequently walked around naked. Sri Ramakrishna himself said that Trailanga Swami was an incarnation of Lord Shiva. He chose when to enter *maha-samadhi*, just before which he sat motionless, and allowed people to worship him with water. He left his earthly body around the age of 280 on 26 December, 1887.

A month before his *samadhi*, Trailanga Swami ordered for a *murti* to be made of him so that his devotees could pray to him when he left his body. The fateful day came when he left the body. The disciples put his large body in a wooden coffin, tied it and walked to the side of the Ganga. On their way there, they dropped the coffin

accidentally and the lid came off slightly. One of the disciples decided to have one last *darshan* of his Master. When he pulled the coffin lid to the side, he was amazed to see the coffin filled only with flowers. As he looked up, he could see his Master walking on the water near the other side of the Ganga. He is still worshipped to this day in his *ashram* in Varanasi.



PILGRIMAGE PLACES OF LORD SHIVA VISITED BY GURUJI



RAMANATHASWAMY TEMPLE IN RAMESHWARAM, TAMIL NADU

Guruji has visited many famous pilgrimage places where Shiva is worshipped. Most notably, perhaps, are the twelve *dyotir-lingams* of which Guruji has visited many. The most recent one rests in Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu, and goes by the name Ramanathaswamy. The *Ramayana* suggests that Lord Rama prayed to Shiva there to be absolved of sin prior to the war against Ravana. Asking His dear devotee, Hanuman (an incarnation of Lord Shiva), to bring a large *lingam* from Himalaya down to the south of India for His personal worship, Hanuman took too long in this pursuit. During His wait, Rama made His own *lingam* out of the sand along the seashore. This sandstone *lingam* remains to this day in the sanctum of the Ramanathaswamy Temple. Hanuman did, however, manage to bring a *lingam* with him from Mount Kailash to Rameshwaram. So

there actually are two notable *Shiva-lingams* inside the temple. This second *lingam* is called Vishwalingam. Both *lingams* were worshipped by Rama prior to His crossing to Lanka on the bridge during the great war with Ravana. The temple is huge and very beautiful with many pilgrims coming daily and it holds the largest single corridor of any Indian temple. It is considered one of the holy Hindu *char dhams*, the four divine sites to visit.

It is an exciting temple filled with water wells called *tirthas* and the ocean outside the temple is considered as the first of the *tirthas*. The common practice is to be purified by bathing in each of the *tirthas* of the great temple. Starting with the ocean, pilgrims dunk themselves, while clothed, into the open ocean and then proceed toward the temple. Still soaking wet, they place their belongings with their self-provided guards and enter into the inner temple complex.

One by one, the *pujaris* and servants of the temple have buckets of water tied with ropes to their hands. The buckets are then thrown into the wells, pulled quickly up, and thrown upon the devotees! Each *tirtha* is said to hold the holiness of various rivers and bodies of water. One after another, each *tirtha* is visited in a maze-like procession of pilgrims. It almost feels like a waterpark! The exciting experience is so vividly memorable and by the end of the procession of *snaan* - of bathing in the *tirthas* - one is deemed purified and prepared for *darshan*. The pilgrims funnel into the sanctum to behold the blessings of Shiva in his forms as the Rameshwara Jyotir-lingam and the amazing Vishwalingam.



VARANASI, ALSO KNOWN AS BENARES OR KASHI

Along the banks of the river Ganga in Uttar Pradesh India, Varanasi is considered the holiest of the seven holy sites. This is one of the 7 holy pilgrimage sites which bless pilgrims with *moksha*. One of the *jyotir-lingams* resides in Varanasi.

The great saint Tulsidas wrote the *Ramacharitamanas* in the city of Varanasi. Some of Guruji's favorite saints, including Kabir and Ravidas, were born there and Guru Nanak spent a great deal of time there as well. The famous incarnation of Shiva, the saint Trailanga Swami, also spent much time in Varanasi. Lahiri Mahasaya, the disciple of Mahavatar Babaji, also has his *ashram* in Varanasi and it is visited quite frequently by Kriya *sadhaks*. Hindus believe that by dying and being cremated here, one attains liberation from *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death. People from all around the world have their bodies sent to Varanasi to be cremated there with the aim of attaining *moksha*. Guruji did once recount that when people are cremated in Varanasi, they do attain Shivaloka, but once their *punya* has run out, they will again have to reincarnate on Mother Earth again to strive for God-realisation.

Famously, the *ghats*, the prayerful embankments along the river, hold a great beauty and sanctity.



FEEDING LORD SHIVA WITH HIS FAVOURITE FOOD

VEGAN RICE PUDDING WITH COCONUT MILK

Shiva is simple and he enjoys minimalist offerings. However, he especially likes anything with milk or dairy, as long as it's gathered with the principles of *ahimsa* in mind. Some simple offerings can be any milk or vegan substitute mixed with a little saffron. One food recipe besides *panchamrit* or plain milk offerings that stands out is sweet milk rice pudding.

Ingredients (about 2.5 liters of cooked pudding)

- 3 cups unsweetened and unflavored non-dairy milk (such as oat or almond).
- 1 cup full-fat coconut milk (from a can)
- 1 cup medium grain white rice
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 1/4 cup maple syrup, plus more to taste
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon orange zest
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 2 tablespoons vegan butter
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, or to taste

Preparation

1. Place the non-dairy milk, coconut milk, rice, raisins, maple syrup, vanilla, orange zest, cinnamon, and nutmeg into a large pot.
2. Stir the ingredients together and place the pot over medium heat.
3. Bring the liquid to a boil.
4. Lower the heat and allow the mixture to cook at a low simmer, stirring occasionally and scraping the bottom of the pot with a spoon to remove any rice that sticks.
5. Allow the mixture to cook for about 20 minutes, or until it reaches your desired thickness.
6. Remove the pot from the heat.
7. Stir in the vegan butter, if using, and salt.
8. Taste test and add more maple syrup if desired. Adjust any other seasonings to (Shiva's) liking.
9. Let the pudding cool. Serve and offer to Shiva cold!



PREVIOUS DEITY JOURNEY PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK



Some Feedback from the Journey with Shiva at The Ashram

As I was preparing the *vibhuti* pots, I remembered this *mantra* that Guruji gave us three years ago: *om natomam om shivaya namaha*. So I started chanting inwardly, not knowing for what purpose we were pouring the *vibhuti* in the big pot. Later during Shivaratri, I understood. Guruji took the pots to pour the *vibhuti* on the last *lingam*. At the same moment, the musicians were singing *om natomam om shivaya namaha*. It gave me once again the feeling that God drives us, all the way, as He wants.

Participant from Journey with Shiva 2020

At the moment, having a connection with a deity for me means that they appear in front of my inner eye and allow some communication. Before the 'Journey with Shiva', Shiva only did that once with me in this lifetime. Now his presence is almost permanent.

Leonard, Germany 2020

Some Feedback from the Journey with Radha-Krishna at The Ashram

I was in the shop buying some incense and perfume and had this thought to buy hair for Krishna, but I did not understand why. Because my Krishna *murti* already has hair. But I bought it. And the day after, I learned that we would participate in a 'turban' workshop and it was much easier to fix the turban on Krishna's hair. At this moment I understood why I had bought another 'hair' for Krishna.

Participant from Journey with Radha-Krishna 2020

I felt very inspired by the stories shared by the *pujaris* which showed that miracles happen as soon as you open yourself to the Divine at His service.

VenudhariniDasi, Slovakia 2020



BEHIND THE SCENES WITH OUR DEITIES

A Different Connection Every Day Nityaparamananda

I am the newest *pujari* here for Shiva and Shakti, compared to Swami Aniruddha and Aksharananda. But for the time I was allowed to serve here, it has been incredible. Once during my service, I was thinking about decorating him according to each of his 108 names. In that phase, each time I was doing *abhishekam* in the morning, I was trying to decorate, dress or paint him according to one of his 108 names.

This deepened the relationship I have with him, but what actually does it mean? Each day prior, or even many days before, I had to think and contemplate about the meanings of the name and somehow express them through dressing Shiva.

For example, what does the name *om gangha dharaya namaha* mean: 'Salutations to he who holds the Ganga river in his hair'. So I had to think: how do I do this so that Shiva looks like the Ganga is flowing out of his hair? Also I had to go into the deeper meanings and try to understand with the heart and mind what this actually means spiritually. So I read stories

and investigated. I thought to myself, how do I relate to these names that describe him?

Another example, *om bhimaya namaha* - 'Salutations to he whose strength is awesome' or *om havise namah* - 'Salutations to he who receives oblations of ghee' or *om digambaraya namah* - 'Salutations to he whose robe is the cosmos' or *om asta murtayie namaha* relating to the eight forms of Shiva.

On that day, Swami Aniruddha and I discussed what forms there are of Shiva. We decided amongst one another: 'Let's go all in!' You have to think about Shiva as the *lingam*, Hanuman, Tandava Shiva, the small *lingam*, Arunachala Shiva, Meditating Shiva, *rudraksha*, *om*, and many other forms. So we took the big Hanuman from the temple and placed him beside the *lingam*. Then we sneaked into the Babaji Cave and we brought over the large Tandava Shiva. We got all the other forms of him and placed them all around the altar to somehow express this name of him—the one with eight forms. With each of his 108 names, there is a little story that I can relate to and remember when I served him.





Often after I was finished dressing him, people would walk by the corridor in the temple. Looking in to see him, you might suddenly hear a 'woow! what is this?!' They would ask questions about the decoration and the meaning of it. Somehow, they too connected with Shiva. They were interested in 'knowing' him also in this aspect.

Once Guruji asked me, 'Do you know me?' And I said, very innocently, 'Yeah a little bit, you as a person.' And He looked at me with intense eyes and said: 'You do not know me at all'. So I was meditating about this and He, of course, is right.

It is impossible to really know them. It is impossible to really know Shiva, to know Narayana, to know the Divine. The names try to describe an aspect of Shiva that actually describes him, though the names are never truly able to describe him in his totality.

Though by doing this again and again for each name, I had a different connection with him. Like I really started to get to know him more, and better. I must say, he continually surprises me again and again.



I think this is about our path: to try to get this relationship and not to focus on the technical aspects. To really feel it in our hearts and look inwardly: 'What does he want? How does he want to be decorated this morning? How does he want to be served?'

Sometimes I sit in front of Shiva in the morning and literally have no clue how to dress him. I do not know what to do, so I sit down and meditate. I go inside myself, and, after a while of relaxing the mind, I allow whatever it is that 'he wants' to come. Somehow I try to perceive a feeling, a picture in my mind, or an idea, and I aim to accomplish this with the means I have.

Actually, I don't really do anything. It is just like I am following his guidance. He is guiding me!

That is for me real *puja*: when you continue serving the deities more and more and it gets more and more clear what the Divine wants. And that is this relationship that we try to cultivate with the Divine and it is so beautiful. It is very sweet and it is for the heart. The heart in the end opens up and allows you to perceive - to feel certain revelations of God which are beyond the mind.

This is a big grace that we are allowed to serve here in the Bhutabhrteshwarnath Mandir; it is simply a huge blessing. And to be able to serve our own personal deities too, where there is no difference. Thank you for letting me share my experiences.

The Secret Sweetness of Lord Shiva Ruchita

In the romantic imagination of every young girl, the perfect love story is marked by events that make the relationship unique, unrepeatable and, above all, authentic. Novels, films, but also and above all the collective imagination supports the expectation of these events which, we are sure, will seal our love story. More or less unconsciously, I too have been waiting for these events to happen in my life, and during the years, when God was not exactly one of my priorities, I was particularly attracted to two 'special moments'. The first was the idea of 'love at first sight', that feeling of romantic love that develops between perfect strangers at their first meeting or first glance, and the second was what is defined as 'our song', that song which becomes the emblem of that specific love relationship with that specific person, so much so that song and person merge assuming a new and inseparable identity from each other: listening to that song will invariably bring to mind the memory of that person and the love relationship with that person.

I was very disappointed and quite upset when, over the years and as my relationships unfolded, I realized that these two aspects were always missing, and as a result of the clash between imagination and reality, they were pushed into oblivion.

I was far from being able to imagine that God had decided to keep those experiences untouched and intact for me to experience in what, as I discovered years later, is the only perfect love story, namely the love story with him.

Love at First Sight

'He loves you dearly and he wants you fully for him. That's why he takes a certain aspect in your life, you know. He will take an aspect to remind you that you belong to him as he belongs to you.'

Paramahansa Vishwananda, Shivaratri 2019

I was at one of the many New Age fairs I loved to visit, when I noticed in a corner a stand full of spiritual junk. I slipped in without hesitation and started looking around. At a certain point I laid my eyes on a large painted batik depicting a handsome young man with blue skin, sitting in meditation, eyes half-closed.



A snake adorned his neck like a precious jewel, a half-moon adorned his long hair. I still remember with incredible clarity, that the very moment I laid my eyes on that face, I said to myself, 'I want it.' It was an 'I want' filled with a sense of ownership, as when you know that something belongs to you and is yours by right. No doubt, no hesitation. I would never have left that stand without that batik, no matter what.

I happily took it home, and it graced the wall opposite my bed. I could not take my eyes off that face and I wanted it to be the last thing my eyes rested on before falling asleep and the first thing my eyes rested on in the morning. I remember that sometimes I would get close to the batik and stare at that face up close, just like that, without any specific purpose, just enjoying its beauty.

Two years went by like that. One day by chance I took a friend in front of that batik to let him admire it and after looking at it, he said, 'He is quite a beautiful Shiva.' I turned to him and asked, 'Who?'

That was the moment I discovered the name of the One with whom I had 'fallen in love' at first sight.

It was the same friend who said to me one day on a car trip, 'I have a new CD with a song on it

that I'm sure you'll like.' He turned on the radio and after a short musical interlude, a deep voice began to recite the mantra *om nama shivaya*. He had repeated it not more than three times when I was overcome with a strong emotion. My heart began to beat so fast that I was almost frightened, and before I knew it my face was flooded with tears. I continued to cry throughout the entire *bhajan*. Although I was quite disconcerted by the suddenness of the situation, once the *bhajan* was over, I had to listen to it again and again and again. It seemed to me that I could no longer live without hearing the name Shiva, Shiva, Shiva. The enchantment ended when my friend, after 15 times, steadfastly refused to listen to the *bhajan* again, threatening to make me get out of the car and leave me on the side of the road! I had to give in. But, in return, he gave me the CD.

And so, I had found 'The Song', the song that sealed my love story with 'that' God painted on the batik; finally, I too could say to my Beloved, 'This is our song.' And still today, after more than 15 years, when I listen to that *bhajan* I feel the same emotion, enriched by the sweet awareness that, in that moment, my soul was answering the call of the Lord: finally, I was again able to hear His voice saying, 'You belong to Me'.



UPCOMING LIVESTREAM DEITY JOURNEYS



We are happy to present to you a new format of the Deity Journey.

Due to the Covid-19 situation The Ashram is closed.

We have scheduled the following journey Online:
- Journey with Gaura-Nitai
on **26 March**

For further information and if you would like to sign up, please go to the BM Event calendar and register on the event.

Please check back closer to the day of the event to get a link to access the broadcast.

More Deity Journeys will follow in 2021.

[Journey with Gaura-Nitai](#)

bhaktimarga.org/livestream-journey-gaura-nitai

UPCOMING LIVESTREAM SPN EVENTS



Virtual pilgrimage in Mauritius will take place on **7-18 March.**

For more information go to: events.bhaktimarga.org/virtual-pilgrimage-shivaratri-holi-mauritius

Livestream Maha Shivaratri will take place on **11-12 March.**

Vasant Navaratri will take place on **13-21 April.**

Ram Navami will take place on **21 April.**

Hanuman Jayanti will take place on **21 April.**

For more information go to: events.bhaktimarga.org



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Message



Wallpapers



We are so happy that you are part of our service to God in the home of Guruji. We invite you to continue to be a part of it and to stay in touch with us daily, weekly and for special events. Here's how:

Connect Every Day

Feel like you are part of our morning prayers and evening *arati* with our livestream.

theashram.bhaktimarga.org

We post 30 stunning photos daily to give you the opportunity to receive *darshan* wherever you are.

[instagram.com/bhutabhrteshwarnathmandir](https://www.instagram.com/bhutabhrteshwarnathmandir)

Connect During the Week

You can also stay connected with our Telegram channel for the Temple Satsangs: morning *Srimad Bhagavatam* and evening *Divya Prabandham* satsangs given in the temple by Swamis and members of the Bhakti Marga Academy. Just sign up here:

https://t.me/SPN_Temple_Satsangs

Note: To connect this way, you will need Telegram downloaded on either your phone or laptop.

We hope that you enjoyed reading this new style of newsletter. Our next Serve a Deity newsletter will be centered around Rukmini-Panduranga and should be coming out in summer 2021.

Much Love

Shiva & Kanchi-Kamakshi *Pujari* Team:
Swami Vishwaaniruddhananda,
Nityaparamananda and Aksharananda
and all contributors of this newsletter.

**MAY SHIVA
DESTROY
EVERYTHING
WHICH STANDS
BETWEEN YOU
AND LORD
NARAYANA.**

