

THE MESSAGE OF MAHASIVARATRI

BY SWAMI VENKATESANANDA

Mahasivaratri is one of the holy days that my guru, Swami Sivananda observed with great intensity and devotion.

There are numerous stories in our myths and legends to illustrate the popular belief that Lord Siva is pleased with even unintentional and accidental 'devotion'. The implication is obvious: how much more glorious is devotion which springs from wisdom and understanding!

The Mahasivaratri brings us all closer as co-pilgrims and provides us with a taste of the beauty of togetherness. Even so, we are pilgrims in the world; we are all proceeding to a common destination. The spirit of togetherness in that pilgrimage illumines our path, lightens our burden and enlightens our understanding.

Lord Siva is usually pictured as the supreme meditator. '*Sivam*' is auspiciousness, prosperity, welfare. These flow, not from feverish activity but from fervent meditation. Siva is also the highest exemplar of total renunciation. Human weal, peace and happiness (at both the individual and collective levels) flow from renunciation and not from acquisition. These are but words until one experiences them as living truths, until one has a taste of the freedom that flows from renunciation, and the peace and the happiness that flow from divine grace. This is the purpose of pilgrimage.

During the pilgrimage people help one and other, serve one and other lovingly for the sake of God. As co-pilgrims, we soon realise that happiness is sharing, that joy is to the giver. All these are impossible if there is no spirit of renunciation.

We learn all these lessons during Mahasivaratri. When we have a taste of the sweetness of self-discipline, it becomes natural to us. Imposed discipline is imposition, not discipline and it only gives birth to imposters. If you observe Mahasivaratri with faith and devotion for the sake of which you give up smoking, drinking and other evil habits just for one day, and if you taste the joy of such self-discipline, then the mind naturally seeks such a disciplined life.

Only a disciplined man of peace can promote peace and human welfare. Lord Siva is the archetype of such a person. The Mahasivaratri is the emergence of such a person in you.