

SRI SATHYA SAI CENTRAL COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA
National Spiritual Wing

R3 – SHIVARATRI

1. Name of religious event / Observance / Celebration:

Shivaratri (Shiva – auspicious and Ratri – night)

2. Picture:

2.1 Picture or symbol pertaining to the particular observance/celebration



2.2 The date/period of the religious event

“Shivaratri falls on the 14th day of the (Krishna Paksha) dark fortnight of the Magha month of the Hindu calendar”

http://www.srisathyasai.org.in/Pages/AshramInfo/Maha_Shivarathri.htm

3. About the festival:

“The very word ‘Shivarathri’ means auspicious night. According to Hindu belief, the moon is the presiding deity of the mind and the 16 phases of the moon represent the 16 aspects of the mind. On Shivarathri, which falls a day prior to the new moon, only a streak of the moon is visible. This is symbolic of the waning influence of the mind, when 15 aspects have already merged in the Self and only one aspect remains. Hence on this day, it is easier to control the mind and direct it towards God. Therefore, the night is spent in contemplation and adoration of God, so that the vagaries of the mind can be totally subdued and transcended to attain realization of the Atma.

“Maha Shivarathri is generally celebrated by performing Akhanda Bhajana (continuous devotional singing) throughout the night. Shivarathri, as a festival has gained a lot of importance in Prasanthi Nilayam because it is during this festival that Baba, the supreme Iswara (Godhead), chooses to reveal His divinity. Baba, out of His infinite love for humanity, materializes lingas (an oval shaped object which is the fittest symbol of divinity) in the Shivarathri evening from within His being. This emergence of the Linga is called ‘Lingodbhavam’”. Baba has explained, “The Linga is just a symbol, a sign, an illustration, of the beginningless, the endless, the limitless - for it has no limbs, no face, no feet, no front or back, no beginning or end. Its shape is like the picture one imagines the Niraakaara (Formless) to be. In fact, linga means - leeyathe (that in which all forms and names merge) and gamyathe (that towards which all names and forms are proceeding, to attain fulfillment). It is the fittest symbol of the All-pervasive, the All-knowing, the All-powerful”.

http://www.srisathyasai.org.in/Pages/AshramInfo/Maha_Shivarathri.htm

Shivarathri is indeed a very auspicious day. It is the fourteenth day of the lunar fortnight, when the Moon is waning and the Sun is in the sign of Aquaries. The festival is, however, related to the Moon rather than the Sun. That is the reason why it is called Shivarathri (the night of Shiva). Unlike other nights, this particular night is the night of consecration, dedication and illumination.

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The mind is intimately associated with the Moon. Chandhra (the deity of the Moon) is the presiding deity of the mind. He loses one sixteenth of his brilliance every day after the Full Moon day and continues waning until on this night when he is left with just one sixteenth of his power. The waned Moon maybe taken to stand for the mind with all its vagaries and waywardness reduced after it has been conquered by sadhana (spiritual discipline).

On this night there is just a minute part of the mind left to be conquered and that can be done by keeping vigil and dwelling on the Glow of God. The vigil that is prescribed is symbolic of the eternal vigil one has to observe, while the rite of fasting is symbolic of divesting the senses of the pleasures they crave for.

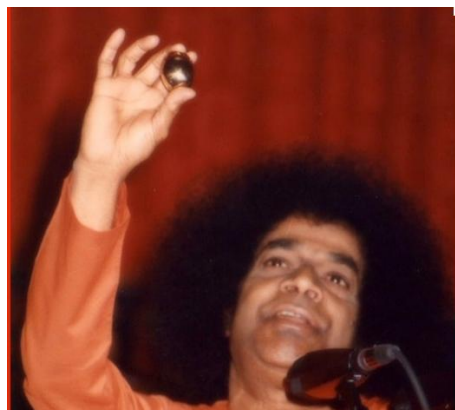
The night-long bhajan (congregational singing of devotional songs) is significant of the life-long consciousness of the Divine Presence that every one should cultivate. The rites and vows laid down for Shivarathri being absent in other nights of the year, their observance on this day comes as a reminder that they are useful. There are three types of men - the multi-centred, the uni-centred and the non-centred. The first group, who allow their senses, mind and intelligence, to wander where they will, is a very populous group. So also is the third group, which comprises people who flit from one object to another, hop around from one thing to another in listless flippancy.

For earning the concentration and single-centredness, which is characteristic of the second group, the festival of Shivarathri is very propitious. The bhajans and the ceaseless flow of keerthans (songs) and namasmarana (remembering God's name) on this occasion help in the attainment of single-centeredness. You must realise that bhajan, naamasmaran and puja (ritualistic worship) are not for pleasing or propitiating God, but for our own spiritual progress. Frequently people flatter the rich and the powerful - especially when they are in their employment or are beholden to them for some precious help - in order to induce them to shower gifts on them.

But God does not shower Grace on people because they sing His praises. Nor does He come down upon them because they do not deify Him. Recitation of the Divine attributes only enables us to dwell on elevating ideals and approximate ourselves more and more to the Divinity that is our true nature. We become what we contemplate. By constant thought an ideal gets imprinted on our heart. When we fix our thoughts all the time on the evil that others do, our mind gets polluted by the evil. When, on the contrary, we fix our mind on the virtues or well-being of others, our mind is cleansed of wrong and entertains only good thoughts.

Immerse your mind in good thoughts and world will be good; soak it in bad thoughts and the world will be unpleasant for you. So, recollect only good; think, plan and do only good; speak and act only good. Then as a result you will approximate God, the source of all good. This is the message of Shivarathri.

SWAMI ON THE SACRED LINGUM



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*This is a day dedicated to the Shiva that is in each of you. From the Himaalayan ranges down to Cape Kanyaakumari, the entire land is resounding today to the authentic Declaration "Shivoham" "Shivoham" and to the adoration, "Om Namasshivaaya." Since thousands pray here, and elsewhere in lakhs and crores, the Linga is emanating from Me, so that you may derive the Bliss that pervades the World through Lingodhbhava (emergence of the Linga). The manifestation of the Linga is a part of My Nature. These Pandiths (scholars of spirituality) explain it as reminiscent of an epochal event in the past when Shiva challenged Brahma and Vishnu to gauge the height and depth of the Linga Form He assumed. They failed and had to accept defeat. But, the Linga emerges, as a result of prayer and Grace. You have to recognise in this event a glimpse of Divinity, a sign of infinite Grace. Just as Om is the sound symbol of God, the Linga is the Form symbol or the visible symbol of God, the most meaningful, the simplest and the least endowed with the appendages of attributes. Lingam means, that in which this jagath (world of change) attains laya (mergence or dissolution), Leeyathe. All Forms merge in the Formless at last. Shiva is the Principle of the Destruction of all Names and Forms, of all entities and individuals. So, the Linga is the simplest sign of emergence and mergence. **Divine Discourse Shivarathri 1969-Sathya Sai Baba***

*Linga is the symbol of the beginningless and endless People ask, "Why does Swaami produce the Lingam (Formless Form of God) from within himself on this day?" But, let Me tell you, it is impossible for you to understand the attributes of the Divine and to measure its potentialities, or, to gauge the significance of the manifestation of Divinity. It is agamya (unreachable) and agochara (un-understandable, mysterious). Therefore, in order to bear witness to the fact that the Divinity is amidst you, it becomes necessary to express this attribute. Or else, the atmosphere of hatred, greed, cruelty, violence and irreverence will overwhelm the good, the humble and the pious. The Linga is just a symbol, a sign, an illustration, of the beginningless, the endless, the limitless-for it has no limbs, no face, no feet, no front or back, no beginning or end. Its shape is like the picture one imagines the Niraakaara (Formless) to be. As a matter of fact, linga means--leeyathe (that in which all forms and names merge) and gamyathe (that towards which all names and forms are proceeding, to attain fulfilment). It is the fittest symbol of the All-pervasive, the All-knowing, the All-powerful. Everything is subsumed in it; everything starts from it; from the Lingam arises Jangam (Universe), from the Jangam arises sangam (association, attachment, activity) and as a result of the sangam, one realises the lingam (attributeless Aathma). Thus, the circle is completed--from the beginningless to the Beginningless. This is the lesson that Lingodbhavam (emergence of the Linga) teaches. The lingashareera (the physical body) that is inhabited by the Aathma is but a vesture worn for this particular sojourn! Many a vesture has this soul worn, though its reality is eternal! **DIVINE DISCOURSE ON SHIVARATHRI 23rd FEB1971***

Understand the true meaning and inner significance of Sivaratri. Hiranyagarbha Lingam is present in everybody's hridaya (spiritual heart) and is on the right side of the body. The principle of Hiranyagarbha permeates My whole body. It assumes a form when I will it. Whoever has seen this Lingam at the time of its emergence will not have rebirth. One should see its form as it emerges. In order to sanctify your lives, such sacred manifestations have to be shown to you every now and then. Only then can you understand the divinity in humanity. This Lingam will not break even if it is dropped from a height with force. This is amruthatwam (symbol of immortality). It is changeless. You cannot see such a manifestation anywhere else in the world. It is possible only with Divinity. This is the manifestation of changeless Divinity. For the past twenty years, devotees did not get the opportunity to witness Lingodbhava. The reason was that lakhs of devotees used to gather in the Poornachandra Hall to witness this grand spectacle. Since the Poornachandra Hall cannot accommodate large gatherings, there used to be stampedes. As a result, devotees were put to a

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*lot of inconvenience. In order to avoid this, Lingodbhava was discontinued. Not only this; three types of Lingams emerge. They are bhur, bhuvah, and suvaha. Bhur refers to materialisation (body), bhuvah to vibration (prana), and suvaha to radiation (Atma). I often say, you are not one, but three: The one you think you are (physical body), the one others think you are (mental body), the one you really are (Atma). On every Sivaratri, all the three Lingams used to emerge. Even now, the other Lingams had started to emerge, but I prevented them, because there are many things to be told to you. In the future, you will be a witness to many more manifestations of Divinity. Understand that this bliss can be experienced only in the proximity of the Divine and nowhere else. **Divine discourse Sivaratri, 15 February 1999***

*Tonight, Lingodbhavam will take place. I created this Linga in answer to his (B. N. Narasimhamurthi's) prayer. But another Linga will emerge from within. In this manner, I can create any number Lingas. Everything is in My hand. The Lingas that come from the hand, from the stomach, from the mouth --all are one. Wherever you see, there is the principle of Atma. Understand this unity. Along with your education, develop Atmic feeling. When you develop Atmic feeling, evil qualities like hatred, jealousy, etc., will not come near you. You will not be perturbed by pain and suffering. You will be in a state of non-dualism. That is true bliss. **Divine Discourse Shivarathri 1st March 2003***

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6i5Jds6Sj7w> - 2003 Shivarathri – Manifestation of Lingum

SWAMI ON LORD SHIVA



*Every form conceived in the Shaasthras and scriptures has a deep significance. Shiva does not ride an animal called in human language, a bull. The bull is the symbol of Stability standing on four legs, Sathya, Dharma, Shaanthi and Prema (Truth, Virtue, Peace and Love). Shiva is described as having three eyes, eyes that see the Past, the Present and the Future. The elephant skin which forms His cloak is a symbol of the bestial primitive traits which His Grace destroys. In fact, He tears them to pieces, skin them, and they become totally ineffective. His Four Faces symbolise Shantham (Equanimity), Roudhram (Terror), Mangalam (Grace) and Uthsaham (elevating energy). While adoring the Lingam on this Lingodbhava Day, you must contemplate on these truths of Shiva that the Linga represents. **Divine Discourse Shivarathri Day, February 1969***

***Harmony in the Lord's family**-----Men today are too much immersed in selfish pursuits. Animals and birds display less selfishness than man. The purpose of festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi is to remind men of their inherent divinity and awakening in them the sense of oneness of all mankind. Easwara's family consists of Shiva, Parvathi, Ganapathi and Subrahmanya. When you consider the vehicles of the four, you find that by nature they are antagonistic to each other. Shiva's vehicle is Nandi (the Bull). Parvathi's vehicle is the*

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lion. By nature the bull and the lion are inimical towards each other. On Easwara's head there is Ganga. In His forehead He has fire. There is natural antagonism between water (in the Ganga) and fire in the Lord's forehead.

*Ganapathi has the elephant's face and His vehicle is a rat. There is a natural antagonism between Parvathi's lion and Ganapathi's elephant-head. Likewise there is natural enmity between the serpent around Easwara's neck and Ganapathi's vehicle, the rat. There is also enmity between Shiva's serpent and Subrahmanya's peacock. In spite of the natural enmity of these different vehicles of Easwara's family, there is no discord at all among them. Perfect harmony prevails among the members of the family and their different vehicles. This harmony and unity is an example to the world. **Divine Discourse 31st Aug- 1992***

SHIVARATRI RITUALS

Devotees of Lord Shiva observe the Shivaratri Festival by following the prescribed rituals with sincerity and devotion. All through the day, devotees abstain from eating food and break their fast only the next morning, after the nightlong worship. Ritual baths of Shivalinga in the numerous Shiva temples by Shiva worshipper, mainly women, is another significant feature of Shivaratri customs and traditions. Devotees strongly believe that ritual worship of Lord Shiva on the auspicious day of Shivaratri absolves them of past sins and they are blessed with Moksha

As a tradition devotees wake up early in the morning of the Mahashivratri day and take a ritual sunrise bath, preferably in the holy waters of river Ganga. They also offer prayers to the Sun God, Vishnu and Shiva as a part of a purification rite observed on all-important Hindu festivals. After wearing fresh new clothes devotees visit the nearest Shiva Temple to give the customary bath to the Shivalinga

On a Shivaratri day, Shiva temples are thronged by devotees, mainly women, who come to perform the traditional Shivalinga pooja and seek blessings from the God. At times there is so much rush in the temples that devotees have to wait for their turn to observe pooja. At their turn for worship, devotees circumambulate the Shivalinga, three or seven times, and then pour water over it. Some also pour milk. Sounds of bell and shouts of ‘Shankarji ki Jai’ or (Hail Shiva) reverberate in the temple premises.

SPIRITUAL BATHING OF THE SHIVALINGUM

Following the rituals prescribed in the Shiva Purana, every three hours, Shivalingam is given a special bath with milk, yoghurt, honey, sandalwood paste and rose water. Puja, meditation and chanting of ‘Om Namah Shivaya’ accompany the ritual bath. Following the bath, vermilion paste is applied on the linga. Traditionally, leaves of a forest tree Aegle marmelos (bilwa, maredu, wood apple) are used for Shiva puja. Thereafter, Bilwa leaves, which have to be a stalk with three leaves, is kept on top of the Shivalinga. Ber or jujube fruit is a special offering to the god on this day. Beetle leaves are also offered by some. Some also offer bilwa leaves in the belief that the Goddess Lakshmi resides in them. Others believe it is offered for its cooling effects on the hot-tempered deity. Many devotees also decorate the linga with flowers and garlands and offer incense sticks and fruit.

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What is the purpose of bathing the Shiva Linga? As he performs this act, the devotee prays: O LORD, I BATHE THEE WITH THE MILK, CURD, GHEE AND HONEY, DO THOU KINDLY BATHE ME WITH THE MILK OF WISDOM. DO THOU KINDLY WASH ME OF ALL MY SINS, SO THAT THE FIRE OF WORLDLINESS, WHICH IS SCORCHING ME, MAY BE PUT OUT ONCE AND FOR ALL. MAY I BECOME ONE WITH THEE- THE WITHOUT A SECOND –Yoga lessons for children Vol 1, Pg 323

SIGNIFICANCE OF PUJA ITEMS

According to the **Shiva Purana**, (The **Shiva Purana** is one of the [purānas](#) dedicated to Lord [Shiva](#)) there is a special significance of the six essential puja items used in the Shiva worship.

Bathing of Shivalinga with water, milk and honey and wood apple or bel leaves added to it, represents purification of the soul.

The vermilion paste applied on the linga after the ritual bath represents virtue.

Offering of fruits symbolizes longevity and gratification of desires.

Burning of incense sticks yields wealth.

The lighting of the lamp symbolizes attainment of knowledge.

Offering of betel leaves marks satisfaction with worldly pleasures

Reference for above: <http://www.mahashivratri.org/shivaratri-rituals.html>

4. Suggested programme or method of observing the event:

Suggestion/Guide for South Africa at centre level (a programme):

- Conduct bhajans
- Veda chanting – Rudram, Shivopasana Mantra
- Sing the Shiva Ashtakams (Lingashtakam, Vishwanath Ashtakam, Bilwashtakam or any other hymns.
- Have a talk on the significance of Shivaratri or show videos of Bhagawan’s discourses on Shivaratri or the videos of the Lingodbhava for about 10 - 30 minutes.
- Abhishekam (Jamum) to the Lingum at 3 hour intervals (6pm, 9pm, 12am, 3am)
- Chanting of “Om Namah Shivaya” throughout the night or during Abhishekam
- End with Aarathi
- Total Duration is 12 hours (6pm to 6am the following morning)

5. Verbal dedication / prayer / chant / other - with meanings:

1) http://media.radiosai.org/images/mp3player.swf?file=http://stream.radiosai.org/SPECIAL_SHIVARATHRI_2010.mp3&autostart=true



SPECIAL_SHIVARAT
HRI_2010.mp3

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2) *E.g. Of Shiva Bhajan*



Hara Shiva Shankar
a Bolenath full versic

Hara Shiva Shankara Bholenath Shirdi Purieswara Sainath

Oh Lord Shiva, the Most Auspicious One, the Destroyer of all evil tendencies, You are one of Divine Innocence and the Compassionate One, the same Lord who appeared in Shirdi as Shirdi Sai.

Shiva Shiva Shankara Bholenath Parthi Purieswara Sainath

Oh Lord Shiva, the Most Blissful and Auspicious One! You are the kind Lord with the purest heart on this earth, who now as Sai Shiva is the Lord of Puttaparthi.

Ahi Bhushana Shiva Gourinath

Oh Lord Shiva, the One adorned with snakes, who is the Master of Gouri, the energy principle of this universe.

Parama Sumangala Sainath

Oh Lord Sai! You are Lord Shiva incarnate! You are the Embodiment of Supreme Auspiciousness of this universe.

Girija Ramana Paramananda Samadhi Priya Ganganath

Oh Lord Shiva, You are the Master of Girija, the daughter of the mountains and the energy that represents this entire creation. You are the Lord of Ganga, the celestial River that arises from Your Being. You are the Ever-Blissful One who is always in a state of equipoise.

3) Swami Chanting OM NAMA SHIVAYA

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-JVPRU119o&playnext=1&list=PL449DC1A6A3CD1476>

6. Any personal offering / sacrifice / practice

Complete Dry fast for the 12 hour AND preparation of around 14 days prior to Shivaratri, curbing the senses

7. Other material for preparation / discussion:

7.1 Any other recommended material that could be used for additional information / preparation, such as VCDs, DVDS, books, charts, etc

8. Bibliography / Reference Section for all references used

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9. Divine Discourse:

Gurupournima Day, 6 July 1963, 6:30PM. (Sathya Sai Baba, Sathya Sai Speaks III 5, 19.)

This is not Swami's illness; this is an illness that Swami has taken on in order to save some one. Swami has no illnesses, nor will he get ill at any time. You must all be happy; that alone will make Swami happy. If you grieve, Swami will not be happy. Your joy is Swami's food.

(Then, Baba signaled to Kasturi to speak. After his short speech was over, Baba wanted the mike to be held before him. He asked through it "Vinapisthunda!". But, though he asked again and again, the voice was so indistinct that no could make out what it meant.

He then signed for water. When it was brought, he sprinkled a little with his shaking right hand on the stricken left hand, on his left leg. He stroked his left hand with the right. Immediately, he used both hands to stroke his left leg, and that touch was enough to cure it. He doffed the disease in a trice! He started to speak! It was the same musical voice.)

For those who have no refuge, God is the refuge (Dikku lenivaniki devude gathi). That is exactly the reason I had to take on the disease that one helpless devotee was to get. He had to suffer this dire illness, as well as the four heart attacks that accompanied it, and he would not have survived it. So, according to my duty (dharma) to protect devotees (bakthasamrakshana), I had to rescue him. Of course, this is not the first time that I have taken on the illness of persons whom I wanted to save. Even in the previous Sariram at Shirdi, I had this responsibility. The suffering that you saw was too much for this particular devotee, so I had to save him by going through it myself. This is my play (leela), my nature. It is part of the task for which I have come, sishyarakshana.

People who were near me during the last week were asking me to give them the name of the person whom I had saved. I told them that it would make them angry against that person, for Swami, they would say, "had to undergo much pain in order to save that one person." Then, they replied that they would honor the person because of the extraordinary devotion that persuaded Swami to run to his rescue that Saturday morning.

Some people even asked me whether it was this person or that, giving names of those who had attacks of paralysis, especially on the left side! This is even more ludicrous, because when I save a person I save him completely. I do not wait until he gets the disease, and I do not leave him a fraction of a disease so that he may be identified later. It all looks funny to me, the guesses and surmises that you make.

Even in Shirdi, Dada Saheb, Nadaram, Balawanth, all were saved by these means. Balawanth was destined to get plague, but the bubo was taken over and the boy saved.

This is perhaps the longest period when I kept the devotees wondering and worried. That was because of the heart attacks, which had to come later on the devotee, from which also he had to be saved. Then, there is another reason why the 8-day period had to be observed. I shall tell you why. This means I must tell you about myself, about something I haven't disclosed so far, something that I was keeping within myself for the last 37 years. The time has come to announce it. This is a sacred day, and I shall tell you.

You know I declared on the very day when I decided to disclose my Identity, my mission, and my Advent that I belonged to the Apasthamba Suthra and the Bharadwaja lineage (gothra). This Bharadwaja was a great sage, who studied the Vedas for a full one hundred years; but, finding that the Vedas were endless (anantha), he did penance (thapas) for prolonging life, and from Indra he got two extensions of a century each. Even then, the Vedas could not be completed, so he asked Indra again for another hundred years. Indra showed him 3 huge mountain ranges and said, "What, you have learned in 3 centuries form only 3 handfuls from out of the 3 ranges that make up the Vedas. So give up the attempt to exhaust the Vedas. Perform a ritual (yaga) instead, which I shall teach you; that will give you the fruit of Vedic study, full and complete."

Bharadwaja decided to perform the ritual; Indra taught him how to do it; all preparations were completed. The sage wanted Shakthi to preside over and bless the ritual. So he went to Kailasa, but the time was not opportune for presenting his petition. Shiva and Shakthi were engaged in a competitive dance, trying to find out who could dance longer. Eight days passed thus, before Shakthi noticed Bharadwaja standing in the cold. She just cast a smile at him and danced along as before! The sage mistook the smile as a cynical refusal to notice him, so he turned his back on Kailasa and started to descend. To his dismay, he found his left leg, hand, and eye put out of action by a stroke. Shiva saw him fall, came up to him, and consoled him. Bharadwaja was told that Shakthi had indeed blessed him and his ritual. Then, Shiva revived him and cured him, sprinkling water from the Kamandalu. Both Shiva and Shakthi granted him the boons of a sage (rishi); they would both attend the ritual, they said.

After the ritual was over, they were so pleased that they conferred even more boons on the sage. Shiva said that they would take human form and be born in the Bharadwaja lineage, thrice: Shiva alone as Shirdi Sai

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Baba, Shiva and Shakthi together at Puttaparthi as Sathya Sai Baba, and Shakthi alone as Prema Sai, later. Then, Shiva remembered the illness that had suddenly come upon Bharadwaja at Kailasa on the eighth day of waiting in the cold on the ice. He gave another assurance. "As expiation for the neglect that Shakthi showed you at Kailasa for 8 days, this Shakthi will suffer the stroke for 8 days when we both take birth as Sathya Sai and, on the eighth day, I shall relieve her from all signs of the disease by sprinkling water, just as I did at Kailasa to cure your illness."

It was the working out of this assurance that you witnessed today, just now. This had to happen, this stroke and the cure. The assurance given in the Thretha era had to be honored. I may tell you now that the poor, forlorn devotee who had to suffer the stroke that I took over was a convenient excuse, which was utilized.

You see, a railway engine is not made available

to haul just one car; when a number of cars are ready, then the engine is put into action. So too, the disease had to be gone through, the devotee had to be saved, the assurance had to be carried out, the mystery had to be cleared, the Divinity had to be more clearly announced by the manifestation of this Grand Miracle. All these were accomplished by this one incident.

Let me tell you one more thing: Nothing can impede or halt the work of the Avathaara. When I was upstairs all these days, some people were foolishly saying, "It is all over with Sai Baba," and they turned back many who were coming to Puttaparthi! Some said I was in samadhi, as if I were a spiritual aspirant (sadhaka)! Some feared I was the victim of black magic, as if anything can affect me! The splendor of this Avathar will go on increasing, day by day. Formerly, when the Govardhanagiri (a mountain) was raised aloft by the little boy Krishna, the cowherd maids and boys (gopees and gopalas) realized that Krishna was the Lord. Now, not one Govardhanagiri but a whole range will be lifted, you will see! Have patience, have faith. Tomorrow morning, I shall give every one of you the Namaskaram Blessing that you missed today.

8. The Story of King Chitrabhanu

In the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, Bhishma, whilst resting on the bed of arrows and discoursing on Dharma, refers to the observance of Maha Shivaratri by King Chitrabhanu. The story goes as follows – Once upon a time King Chitrabhanu of the Ikshvaku dynasty, who ruled over the whole of Jambudvipa, was observing a fast with his wife, it being the day of Maha Shivaratri. The sage Ashtavakra came on a visit to the court of the king.

The sage asked the king the purpose of his observing the fast. King Chitrabhanu explained that he had the gift of remembering the incidents of his previous birth. The king said to the sage that in his previous he was a hunter in Varanasi and his name was Suswara. His only livelihood was to kill and sell birds and animals. One day while roaming through forests in search of animals he was overtaken by the darkness of night. Unable to return home, he climbed a tree for shelter. It happened to be a Bael tree. He had shot a deer that day but had no time to take it home. So he bundled it up and tied it to a branch on the tree. As hunger and thirst tormented him, he was kept awake throughout the night. He shed profuse tears when he thought of his poor wife and children who were starving and anxiously waiting for his return. To pass away the time that night he engaged himself in plucking the Bael leaves and dropping them down onto the ground.

The next day he returned home and sold the deer and then bought some food for himself and his family. The moment he was about to break his fast a stranger came to him, begging for food. He served the food first to stranger and then had his own. At the time of his death, he saw two messengers of Lord Shiva. They were sent down to conduct his soul to the abode of Lord Shiva. He learnt then for the first time of the great merit he had earned by the unconscious worship of Lord Shiva during the night of Shivaratri. The messengers told him that there was a Lingam at the bottom of the tree. The leaves I dropped fell on the Lingam. His tears,

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which had shed out of pure sorrow for his family, fell onto the Lingam and washed it and he had fasted all day and all night. Thus, he unconsciously worshiped the Lord.

As the conclusion of the tale the King said that he lived in the abode of the Lord and enjoyed divine bliss for long ages and now he has reborn as Chitrabhanu

REF:<http://vishvarupa.com/om-sathya-sai-baba/2009/01/night-of-shiva-siva-celebration-mahashivaratri-2009-maha-shivarathri-2009-february-23rd-2009/>