

Lesson 8

Shiva

The Destroyer

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Shiva meditating in Mt Kailash

Shiva is the most difficult of the holy trinity to describe. His character is the most complex amongst the three aspects of the unmanifest supreme god. He is at once merciful and dreadful - most benevolent and most ruthless when angry. He is attired in just a tiger skin with snakes round his neck and arms - a necklace of human skulls and another of his favorite brad Rudraksha - His body is covered with ash. His hair is in matted strands and hang down to his chest - but also has it piled up on top of his head in a jatta on which rests the moon (on the left side). The sacred river Ganga falls on his head from the heavens and then flows down to the earth. He visits the cremation grounds and has ghosts and spirits as his entourage. He dances the Tandav when angry - a dance that can destroy the entire world and even the Universe. His third eye in the middle of the eyebrow can burn anything and anyone - when opened in anger. This angry aspect is named rudra synonymous with the name of the child that came out of the forehead of Brahma when he was very annoyed with the four. This aspect is awesome but being a part of the unmanifest supreme god he cannot be divorced from the benevolence of Ishwar. The real meaning of Rudra is to relieve from sorrows. Perhaps death is a release from all sorrows of life and living, hence the name.

The Aryan mind did create the destroyer in the form of Shiva, but they could not take away the godliness from him, otherwise he would be wholly evil - which no aspect of the almighty can be - as the paramount nature of god is merciful and loving and yet in the nature of things what has been created must have an end and that is also the doing of the Almighty. That aspect due to the fright of death and destruction - was given the garb of an austere, frightening and ill-kept god.

Yet in the true Hindu belief, creation and destruction are a continuous cycle, and death is not the end as it opens the door to another life which could and should be for the betterment of the Being - depending on his or her karma - so the work of Shiva as destroyer is a natural course of events in the existence of every created being or thing.

In fact, Shiva is portrayed as being really naive and is called Bholenath. He is the one that circle around the world on his vehicle Nandi the bull, along with Parvati, his consort, to see if all is well down here and at that time a person asks for a boon it will be granted, but the wish should be right in the heart of the person at that very moment, when Shiva and Parvati did not have a fixed time

Shiva is of the type used by women and the one in his right ear is of the type used by men, these Kundalas also symbolize the Shiva and Shakti (male and female) principle of creation.

Snake around the neck: Like a yogi, a snake hoards nothing, carries nothing, builds nothing, lives on air alone for a long time, and lives in mountains and forests. The venom of a snake, therefore, symbolizes the yogic power.

Varda Mudra: Shiva's right hand is shown in a boon-bestowing and blessing pose. As stated earlier, Shiva annihilates evil, grants boons, bestows grace, destroys ignorance, and awakens wisdom in his devotees.

Trident (Trisula): a three-pronged trident shown adjacent to Shiva symbolizes his three fundamental powers (shakti) of will (iccha), action (kriya) and knowledge (jnana). The trident also symbolizes the Lord's power to destroy evil and ignorance.

Damaru (drum): a small drum with two sides separated from each other by a thin neck-like structure symbolizes the two utterly dissimilar states of existence, unmanifest and manifest.

Nandi: the bull is associated with Shiva and is said to be his vehicle. The bull symbolizes both power and ignorance. Shiva's use of the bull as a vehicle conveys the idea that he removes ignorance and bestows power of wisdom on his devotees. The bull is called Vrisha in Sanskrit. Vrisha also means dharma (righteousness). Thus a bull shown next to Shiva also indicates that he is the eternal companion of righteousness.

Tiger skin: a tiger skin symbolizes potential energy. Shiva sitting on or wearing a tiger skin, illustrates the idea that he is the source of the creative energy that remains in potential form during the dissolution state of the universe. Of his own divine will, he activates the potential form of the creative energy to project the universe in endless cycles.

Cremation ground: Shiva sitting in the cremation ground signifies that he is the controller of death in the physical world. Since birth and death are cyclic, controlling one implies controlling the other. Thus Shiva is revered as the ultimate controller of birth and death in the phenomenal world.

the scruff of Parvati's body. Both of them are accepted as Shiva's and Parvati's children, whatever the circumstance of their birth. This is the pragmatism of the Hindu religion.

Amongst the asurs Ravan and Banasur were given great favours by Shiva due to their great devotion to him. Vishnu as Ram had to come to the world to destroy Ravan and Krishna had to come to fight Banasur to whose aid Shiva came. It was a great fight and went on and on.

The demi gods and gods had to come to the rescue of the world, which was in danger of being destroyed. Both who fought were aspects of the Supreme, Shiva on the side of Banasur and Vishnu in the form of Krishna were equal to each other, and none could win from the other. The gods and demi gods found a way out of the impasses and we still have the world intact for good or bad god only knows!

Shiva is fond of bhung and so his followers partake it as Prasad. His worship is done by offering behl leaves, bhung, dhatura, aak and flower and fruits. Dhatura is poisonous and is not eaten by the worshipper but the rest is consumed by the devotees. He is also very amorous and cannot resist a beautiful woman. Normal for the gods is what is normal for human beings in the imagination of the Hindu.

Symbolisms in Shiva:

The unclad body covered with ashes: the unclad body symbolizes the transcendental aspect of Shiva.

Matted locks: The three matted locks on the head convey the idea that integration of the physical, mental and spiritual energies is the ideal of yoga.

Ganga: Ganga (river Ganges) is associated with Hindu mythology and is the most sacred river of Hindus.

The crescent moon: The waxing and waning phenomenon of the moon symbolizes the time cycle through which creation evolves from the beginning to the end.

Three eyes: Shiva, also called Tryambaka Deva (literally, "three-eyed god"), is depicted as having three eyes: the sun is his right eye, the moon the left eye and fire the third eye.

Half-open eyes: when Shiva opens his eyes, a new cycle of creation emerges and when he closes them, the universe dissolves for creation of the next cycle.

Kundalas (two ear rings): Since the kundala in the left ear of

for each place, so a person must devote himself absolutely to that wish for the entire twenty-four hours. It can, of course, just happen by a coincidence that Shiva and Parvati are just there when a wish is being expressed and the wish does come true however unimaginable it could be!

Since Shiva has much to do with this world, he is equally worshipped by the Hindus of all sects and temples to him and his consorts are as numerous as the ones to Vishnu and Laxmi.

The idea of Shiva being equal to the creator is accepted by the Hindus even as the creative form of the unmanifest, as his accepted form is the ling depicting the phallus of the male form and the yoni of the female form, in openly accepting the symbol of creation. Most temples represent Shiva in this form only. The Hindu did not fight shy of the act for creation (as given to the living beings) in his acceptance of the entirety of functions as ordained by nature.

Then Shiva is equated with Vishnu in his great interest in the three worlds and their working, when he is in his benevolent form becomes to help anyone who is devoted to him and prays to him. We have Hindus absolutely devoted to Vishnu, and others absolutely devoted to Shiva or Shankar or Mahesh as he is also called. There are strong feelings for Vishnu in the Vaishnavites and the same goes for those that follow Shiva. They wear distinctive markings on their foreheads if they are staunch followers of one or the other sect. Shiva actually means good because to destroy is to recreate and Shiva regenerates. Deaths stand in the gateway of life.

The first primeval sound, the holy and eternal OM or AUM represents Shiva as the omnipresent with all the qualities of the supreme in tact, thus accepting the three aspects to be really one in its deepest, meaning and is known as Onkar or as Omkar, the one who created AUM or the first sound of the universe.

Mahadev, as Shiva is also called, is the master and protector of the animal world also and is known as Pashupati. In this garb he controls and tames the wild animals. This represented by Shiva wearing a tiger skin and having live snakes round his neck. He even appears in more of an animal form in some temples on the Himalayas where he is thus portrayed beside the ling. The idols of the shrines of Kedarnath and Pashupati temple of Kathmandu in Nepal are testimonies to it. Shiva is also the master of the arts in the form of Natraj, the king of dance.

The Tandav is depicted as the dance of destruction which Shiva performed in grief and anger when he lost his first wife Sati and carried her body on his person and lived with rage and melancholy. He dances in a frenzy, which nearly destroys the three worlds. The devtas had to rush to Vishnu to save the world from Shiva's wrath. Vishnu summons his Sudarshan Chakra and cut up the body of Sati even while it was in Shiva's hands and it fell in pieces from the grasp of Shiva who had refused to give it up and thus Vishnu succeeded in pacifying Shiva.

Another form of his dance is in peace and harmony; it is very beautiful. He dances this with his second wife Uma or Parvati (who is a reincarnation of Sati). Together they dance as one and the dance is known as lasya where Shiva and Parvati become one in a form of half male and half female known as Aradha Nareeshivas. The concept of the male and female being complementary to each other and only then being complete (an equality of the sexes is accepted by the Hindus) Shiva as the male is the right side and Parvati as the female is the left side, they then complete the full human body. This depiction of Shiva is known as Sada Shiv or the auspicious god in the form which has always been and shall always be -- the giver of well-being, happiness and health. He is affectionately also called Shambhu. In this mood he is easily pleased with little effort and fulfils wishes instantly and he is called Ashutosh, being generous to a fault he lands himself into difficulties and causes great anxiety to the other demi-Gods.

There is one story of a demon named Bhasmasur who performed Shiva's worship with singular devotion and pleased him into granting him a boon that could burn anyone on whom he placed his hand. On receiving this boon, Bhasmasur ran towards his benefactor to place his hand on Shiva himself. Shiva has to run to Vishnu for help. Realizing the grave situation Vishnu turned himself into a beautiful maiden and fascinated Bhasmasur by her beautiful dance. The demon forgot about Shiva and started to copy the beautiful movements of the bewitching enchantress and soon enough without knowing he put his hand over his own head in copying the dance movements of the damsel and burnt himself to death.

Shiva does not distinguish between demons and saints and any one with great devotion for him can reach him easily. Therefore he is the god of thieves, murderers, ghosts and the lesser beings even they can please him by the path of devotion. He even created a dreadful being

known as Veerabhadra who played havoc with his own father-in-law at Daksh's yagya when Sati (Shiva's first wife) threw herself in the yagna fire, because her father insulted her husband, by not inviting him for the yagna and also for not taking out a portion of the sacrifice for him, which is a must for all gods during a yagya.

Shiva has four hands and he carries the Trishul (a three-pronged trident) in the left upper hand, a damru (drum) in the right upper hand and a kamandal (a wooden bowl with a handle) in the third, the lower right is held up right in a gesture of a blessing. His neck is blue as he had drunk up the poison which turned blue. He managed to confine the poison in his neck which turned blue. He sits on a tiger skin and has his consort Parvati very close to him. He lives on top of Mount Kailash in the Himalayas and travels on a white bull called Nandi.

Shiva with the unkempt uncouth looks, with ash smeared all over his body, with snakes coiled round his neck, arms and Jatta (mat), with the tiger skin round his waist—visiting cremation grounds and mixing with spirits and ghosts still is accepted by the mighty and holy river Ganga to fall first on his jatta, because of the fear of going down straight to Pataal Lok due to the great force of her descent from the heavens. The benign moon accepted the Jatta of Shiva as his abode as it came out of the ocean at the time of being churned by the gods and the asurs. Parvati sits with her body sensuously touching his body - yet Shiva, is untouched with either the foul or the glorious and is totally at peace within himself.

He is the only god that has children of his own. The other two aspects of the supreme Brahma and Vishnu have consorts but they have no children born of them in the manner of the living beings on the earth. Shiva and Parvati have two sons Kartik and Ganesh. Hanuman is also portrayed as Shiva's son born of Anjani, the wife of Pawan - the god of the air and wind. Kartik is supposed to have been born of six different mothers from the seed of Shiva, the six of them gave birth to six different parts and then threw them in the Ganga - but the Ganga could not bear that load and instead threw them in a forest where they assembled into one known as Shadanan because he had six faces - since he had six mothers. He was looked after by a divine woman named Kritikas and therefore got the name of Kartikeya. Shiva and Parvati on hearing of the birth of the son of Shiva brought him to Mount Kailash. Ganesh is also said to have been born in the absence of Shiva and was said to have been born out of