

The significance of the form of Lord Shiva

Shiva is the last deity of the Hindu Trinity. He is responsible for the dissolution of the universe. Literally, Shiva is one in whom the universe “sleeps” after destruction and before the next cycle of creation. All that is born must die. All that is produced must disintegrate and be destroyed. This law cannot be violated. The principle that brings about this disintegration, the power behind this destruction, is Shiva.

Another explanation of his role as destroyer is that we invoke Shiva to give us the capacity to destroy all our attachments and unwanted thoughts.

Let us try to understand Shiva from different standpoints.

From the highest standpoint, Shiva is the formless, Absolute reality. Shiva's name itself means auspiciousness. This is our own true nature.

From the cosmic standpoint, Shiva represents the Lord of the Universe – the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world.

From the departmental standpoint, we worship Brahma for creation, Vishnu for sustenance and Shiva for destruction. Since there can be no destruction without creation and vice versa, we cannot attribute creation to one deity and destruction to the other. Our distinction between these three powers is merely to help clarify the various processes of life.

In another aspect, as a particular form that manifested on earth, Shiva is said to have appeared in numerous incarnations as an enlightened master (Guru) who teaches the knowledge of the Self to his disciples. This form is known as Dakshinamurthy.

One explanation for Ganga sitting on the head of Shiva is that we should learn to keep the head cool and win the world. This is possible only through knowledge and devotion.

On Shiva's forehead is the crescent moon and in his neck is poison. The former represents the nectar of life and the latter, death. The pair of opposites indicate that we should be able to accept pain as well as pleasure in life and that we should have inner balance and equipoise in the midst of all good and bad experiences.

The poison, kept in his neck, without being swallowed, is significant. He did not become poisonous or bitter himself. In the same way one should be able to go through all experiences of life and still abide in his own true nature, without becoming bitter.

A snake garland adorns his neck. The snake represents the mind that spits out its

poison of negative thoughts. Yet if we keep the mind under perfect control, so that it is quiet within and does not agitate us or others, it will lie peacefully in meditation.

The ashes all over his body indicate that our bodies will turn to ashes one day and hence we should rise above the identification with the body even while we are living.

He is three eyed. The third eye located between the eye brows is the eye of wisdom while the other two represent love and justice. Thus Shiva exemplifies a good ruler who has both love and justice and also looks at this world with the vision of Knowledge that destroys all ignorance and passion.

So Shiva is the faith whereby we reach the Truth.