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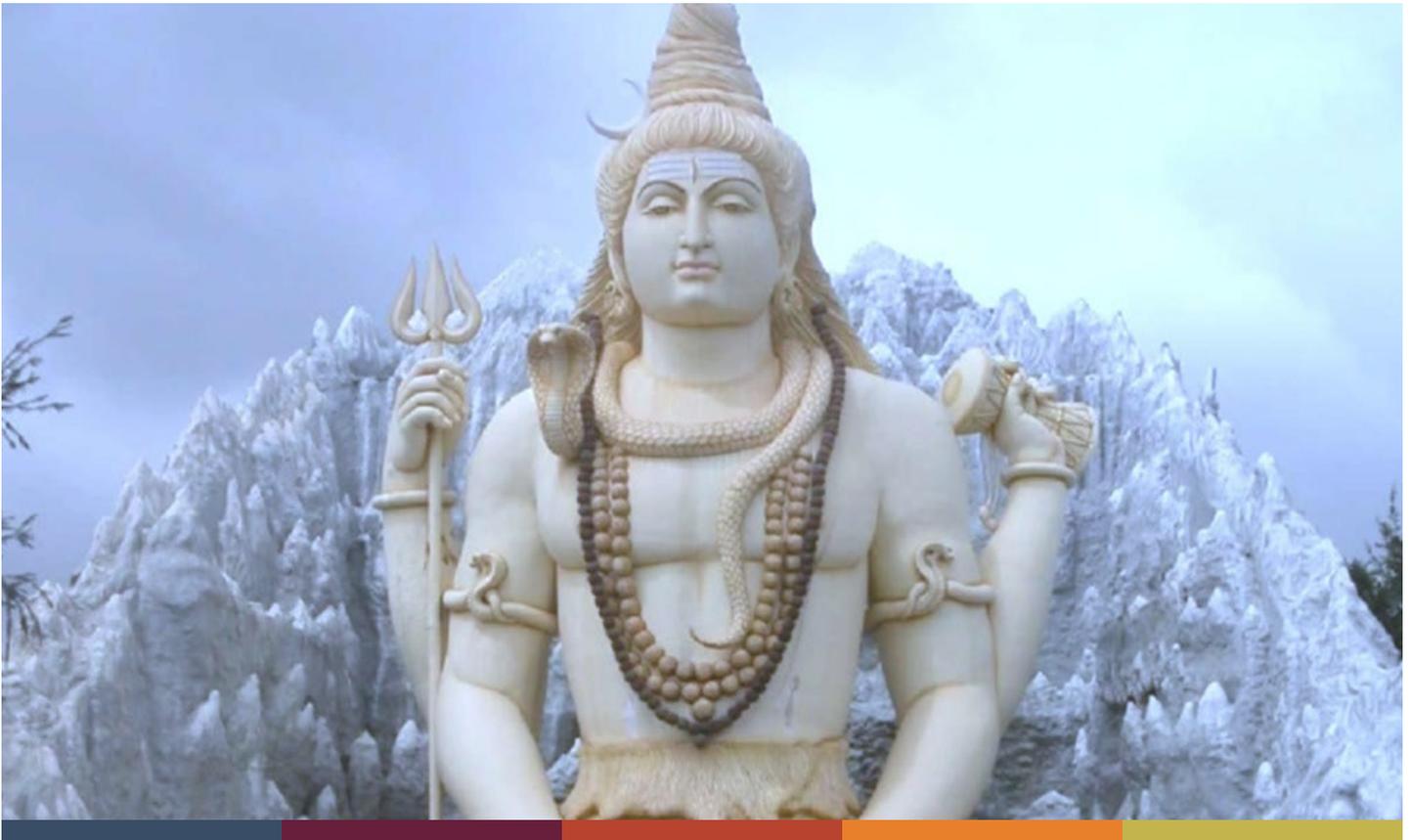
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# Sai Dharmam

SRI SATHYA SAI BABA CENTRE OF COOKSVILLE



Mahashivratri, the Hindu festival, is the celebration by which Lord Shiva (an important deity in Hinduism) saved the world and Hindus worship his feat. Mahashivratri Festival or the 'The Night of Shiva' falls on the moonless 14th night of the new moon in the Hindu month. This usually occurs during the months of February or March. Celebrating the festival of Shivratri, devotees decorate temples with lights and observe day and night fasting while performing ritual worship of the Shiva Lingam to appease Lord Shiva.

Mahashivratri came to be during the Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean of milk) - a pot of poison emerged from the ocean. This terrified the mightiest Gods and demons as the poison

was capable of destroying the entire world. They sought help from Lord Shiva. To protect the world from evil, Shiva drank the deadly poison but held it in his throat instead of swallowing it. This made his throat turn blue, and he was given the name Neelakantha -the blue-throated one. This was on the 14th day during the dark half of the month of Phalgun, Shiva first manifested himself in the form of a Linga. Thus, this day is especially auspicious and is celebrated as Mahashivaratri.

According to another legend, there existed the other two of the triads of Hindu Gods: Lord Brahma and Vishnu. They were fighting superiority. Horrified at the intensity of the battle, the other gods asked Shiva for help. Shiva, to bring about their self-

realization of their useless fight, turned into the form of a huge column of fire. Determining by its size of destruction, they decided to find one end of the universe each of them to establish supremacy over the other. Brahma assumed the form of a swan and went upwards and Vishnu as Varaha went into the earth. But light has no limit and though they searched for thousands of miles, neither could find the end. On his journey upwards, Brahma came across a Ketaki flower passing down slowly. When Lord Brahma asked where she had come from, the Ketaki replied that she had been placed at the top of the fiery column as an offering. When Brahma was tired of trying to find the end, Brahma

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# Setting New Year's Resolutions

With the start of a new year, many people write resolutions to make positive changes in their lives, set new goals, or reaffirm existing goals. The tradition is said to have begun in ancient Babylon where at the start of each year, the people made promises to their Gods to return borrowed objects or pay their debts. This common tradition in the Western Hemisphere has parallels to many other ancient civilizations and religious creeds; however, the concept is harmonious is the idea of self-improvement.

New year's resolutions can vary from changes in personal lifestyle such as: clean eating or exercising daily to spiritual development such as practicing mindfulness. Or to achieving milestones with respects to education or careers. It is easy to set goals and recognize the changes people desire in their life. They wish for self-betterment, however the most difficult feat is commitment

and constant pursuance - self-discipline. Especially when hurdles arise along the road. Swami says, "Keep steadily on; do not move forward two steps today and retrace them tomorrow. The ants, poor little weak things, they move one behind the other in an unbroken stream, conscious of the goal and of nothing else, overcoming obstacles that come in the way."

A resource I have personally used to help define my goals is the S.M.A.R.T approach by George T. Doran, which originated as a corporate guide but can also be applied to personal goals. This guide helps define goals to ensure they are: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-Bound. Taking these principles into consideration can truly help in recognizing all aspects of the goal. More importantly, strategically plan for how they intend on reaching their target!

Swami has advised the same, that "[...] if

you know the road and the goal, then you can discover whether you are progressing or not". Planning the small steps to take or achieving short-term milestones along the path is a useful strategy to hold oneself accountable and increase self-motivation. Despite how prepared you are, however, unforeseen obstacles may arise.

Only with positive attitude, focus, faith and divine guidance from Swami can you overcome an obstacles.

Remember, even with a bump on the road in sight, ants do not step backwards and only march forward to face the challenge. Only by facing the challenge, ants are able to reach their final destination. ✨

## Devotee Speaks



How do you put a price on help? Is it by hour, by amount, by the degree of need? What if it was a life that was saved by the unseen hand of the Creator? More than life saved, it was a new lease on life for a man I hold dear, my father.

My family and I had travelled to Puttapparthi with the Canadian Sai Pilgrimage in 2010. While there, slowly by the day, my father began to develop a fever and a very swollen leg – so swollen it resembled a small tree trunk. Immediate help was available – our team doctor from Canada assessed my father and immediately got us seen at the Prashanthi General Hospital. There, the assessing doctor took one look, asked a few focused questions, and immediately told us to proceed to Columbia Asia Hospital in Bangalore.

At the time, I remember wondering why would we be asked to leave Puttapparthi when there is a Super Specialty Hospital right on premises. Was it because we were foreigners? Putting aside this doubt, we proceeded immediately to arrange transportation and make our way to Columbia Asia. Miraculously, just as we pulled in to the triage area, my dad's leg burst open at a focal point and began to ooze blood. Had

this happened any earlier, he would have lost blood in the car.

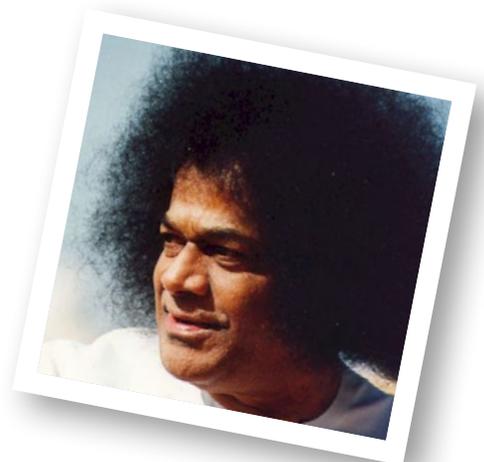
The story gets very complicated thereafter, but in short, my father proceeded to battle for his life with widespread infection, an intestinal bleed, and a prolonged stay in the ICU lasting 1.5 weeks. All this in a new country to us with complete change in our travel plans. We were blessed though, because old family friends and fellow Sai devotees that we had known from my childhood lived in Bangalore and helped us from A to Z daily, with a place to stay, transport, food, prayers, moral support and old memories.

When we arrived back in Canada, my father had a hidden central venous line sticking out of his neck, something he would never have been allowed to take a flight with had it not been for a Dr. Sundar (who turned out to be a Sai Devotee himself) and his amazing help in a time of need.

Flash forward and several things have taken place, but perhaps the key take away is that my father has had a new lease on life. Medically speaking, how he escaped the jaws of death in a new country in the span of 2 weeks, kept his leg, and now lives to tell about it is unfathomable and priceless.

Had we stayed in Puttapparthi at the Super Specialty Hospital, he could not have made it to the airport in a short enough span of time being so sick to safely make it home in the 72-hour window of life my father was given before he absolutely had to check in to an ICU in Mississauga, as per Dr. Sundar.

That is why Bhagavan had sent us to the perfect hospital for our needs. My doubts melted and have never since resurfaced. That is the power of the Creator – for this we are eternally grateful to Him. ✨



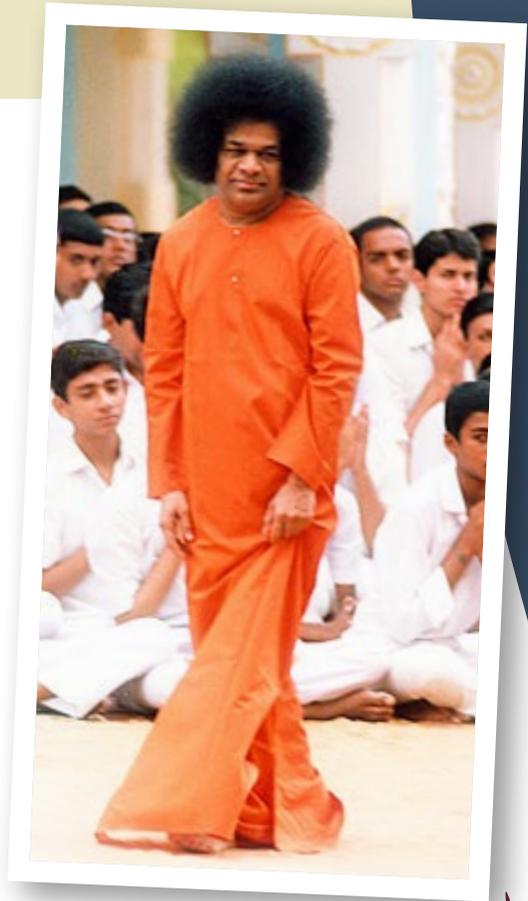
# What is Life?



Life is a challenge, meet it! Life is a dream, realize it! Life is a game, play it! Life is love, enjoy it! To live in the moment is often taken for granted. Many always think about the next time or think that they'll always have time. Time is essence. Time is perceived differently by every individual based on how they value time. Some like myself wake up just in time to rush out the door, while others give themselves plenty of time to peacefully start their day. My brother, who is recovering from a stroke does just that. The value for time that he has is profound. His understanding with the number of seconds, minutes and hours in a day allows him to complete his tasks and duties at his own pace. It allows him to set himself up for success, but most importantly allows him to do it with a peace of mind. Understanding your priorities and doing your duty first will allow you to maximize your time.

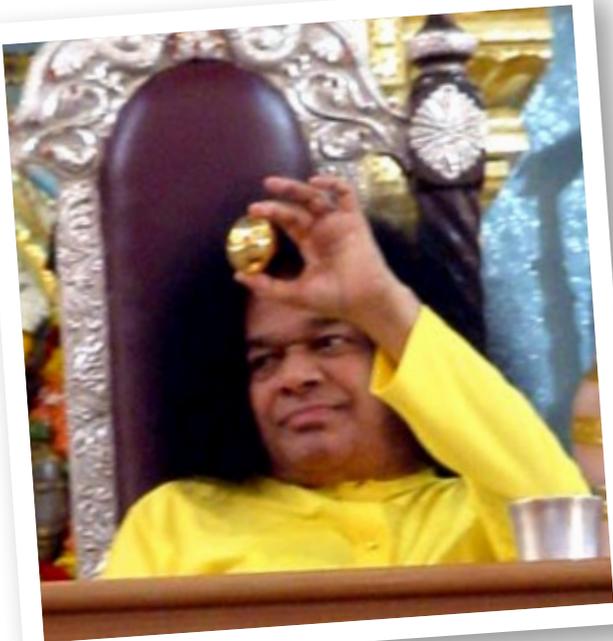
When my brother had a stroke, it was a challenge he had to go face-to-face with - he met it. We decided to stop postponing family vacations and took our first one together in 11 years - we realized it. Constant therapy was required post stroke - he's playing it. His will power and drive to come back stronger - he's enjoying it. Through these stages of his life, time is all that we have had - understanding the value of it is what differentiates one individual from another. Everything changed in a second, with one phone call for me to truly understand the value of time. One should never have to think back to the time they wasted, but rather all that they were able to accomplish during that time.

"Don't waste time. Time waste is life waste." - Sathya Sai ❁



## Maha Shivaratri - The Night of Shiva

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then decided to end his search and take the flower as a witness that he found the end. At this, the angry Shiva revealed his true form. He punished Brahma for telling a lie, and cursed him that no one would ever pray to him. The Ketaki flower too was banned from being used as an offering for any worship. She had done the wrong thing as a witness of Lord Brahma's lies. Worshipping Shiva is believed to bestow one with happiness and prosperity. Mahashivaratri is also believed to originated from this story.

Immediately after Mahashivaratri, almost like a miracle, the trees are full of flowers as if to announce that after winter, the plants of the earth have been newborn. This perhaps is the reason why the Linga is worshipped throughout India as a symbol of nature. The Vishvanatha Temple at Kashi in Varanasi celebrates the Linga (symbolic of the pillar of light) and the manifestation of Shiva as the light of supreme wisdom. The festivals of Mahashivaratri occur in various parts of India. In southern Karnataka, for example, children are allowed to get into all kinds of mischief and asking for punishment which is the rule of the day. This probably comes back from the mythological incident of Shiva punishing Brahma for lying.

Mahashivaratri is thus not only a religious but also a cosmic definition of the Hindu universe. It makes ignorance disappear, gives out the light of knowledge, and makes one aware of the universe, shows the spring after the cold and dry winter, and calls on the supreme power to take notice of his creations. ❁

