



# Maha Deepam



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Nachiketanjali November 2013

**Karthigai Deepam** is one of the oldest festivals celebrated in Thiruvannamalai (Arunachalam), during the Tamil month *Karthigai* that comes during November-December each year. This festival begins in the *Uthiradam* (Star) day in the month of *Karthigai* and closes with the *Bharani Deepam* lit at the Arunachaleswara temple in the early hours of the tenth day. A huge lamp, *Maha Deepam*, is then lit on the peak of the holy hill of Arunachala around 6.00 pm, coinciding with the rise of the Full Moon. A specially designed huge brass vessel is used for the lamp, which holds more than 1000 liters of ghee and an immense wick made of woven cloth fibres; and the flame is visible for several kilometers around the hill. Lakhs of devotees come to Arunachalam to witness this grand event and the town reverberates with the holy chants of Arunachala Shiva.

This practice came into existence following a dispute between Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma who each considered Himself superior to the other. Lord Shiva appeared as an endless column of light (*Jyothisthamba*) and announced that whoever sees the beginning or end of the flaming light would be declared supreme. Lord Vishnu took the form of a boar and delved deep into the earth but failed to find the beginning. Humbled, He returned and accepted defeat. Brahma took the form of a swan and flew skywards to reach the end, but did not succeed either. Not willing to accept defeat, He requested a flower (*Mogali*) and the celestial cow (*Kamadhenu*) who said they have been travelling down from Shiva's head for several thousand years, to be witness to His false claim of having seen the beginning of the light. While the flower backed Him, the cow showed assent with its head, but shook its tail indicating that it is not true. Lord Shiva denounced this

falsehood and declared that henceforth Brahma will have no temples on earth; the flower will not be used in worship; and not the face but the tail of the cow will be honored for upholding truth. Lord Vishnu would be revered on earth as He upheld truth and humility.

In memory of the Lord's glorious manifestation to dispel the ego of Brahma and Vishnu and grace the world, a huge lamp is lit on the peak of the Holy hill each year on the day He appeared as a column of light.

For spiritual seekers, this event has special significance. Our ego sense and arrogance is the cause of all unhappiness and unrest in the world. It is because of the ego sense that the Divine spark in our hearts eludes us. Not outside circumstances nor even God, but our own ego comes in the way. Instead of tackling this ego sense directly, we try to search for the cause of our unhappiness in the worldly things that are manifested and imagined by this ego. Incapable of going inwards, we vainly search and wander externally.

The supreme reality, the Divine spark in our hearts, represented by Lord Shiva is nameless and formless and all pervading with no beginning or end, but we are bound by the body and have learnt to see the Lord also as a body or a symbol. The ultimate truth is beyond words, thoughts and imagination and cannot be experienced by the limited mind and intellect (represented by Brahma and Vishnu). Man however has an exalted view of the powers of his mind and intellect, but only when these are totally surrendered to the Divine Will and the ego completely destroyed that the ultimate truth is revealed and real happiness and peace are experienced.



The blazing mount that was Lord Shiva solidified in the form of the Holy hill, and also took the form of a Linga, a symbolic representation of God (in the Arunachaleswara temple) to be accessible for worship. The Lord is believed to be present in 3 forms in Arunachalam; as the Hill, the Linga, and as a *Siddha purusha* residing on the Hill in human form.

It was in Arunachala that Shiva is believed to have taken the form of Linga for the first time. The Supreme Lord controls the entire creation and each one of us too; He is everywhere, all pervading and also resides in our hearts. As Brahman, the ultimate truth, He is nameless and formless while He is also the manifested creation and the world. Man with his gross intellect and limited ego and body sense, cannot grasp the all pervading reality and needs a name and form to aid his worship. So the Lord took the form of a Linga to grace mankind.

Lord Shiva lives on Mount Kailash, but in Arunachala the Hill itself is Lord Shiva. Among the 5 *Panchabhutha* temples of Shiva in South India, representing the 5 basic elements of nature, Arunachala represents fire. Constant remembrance of Arunachala gives *Moksha* - that is the command of God!

When Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi surrendered to Lord Arunachaleswara, it is not to the externally manifested Hill or Linga but to the supreme and all-pervading Divinity in his heart. In early times, Lord Arunachala was known only within India, but after Ramana came to Tiruvannamalai, His fame and glory spread across the world.

This year, Maha Deepam will be celebrated on 17 November 2013. Details can be found on web-sites related to Tiruvannamalai, Arunachaleswara and Ramana Maharshi.

***Compiled by Sreedevi from a transcription of Sadguru Sri Nannagaru's discourses & some references from the web***

