

Maha Sivaratri Puja at AVG

Siva means mangalam , 'auspiciousness'. Sivaratri means an 'auspicious night'. On Sivaratri, we worship Lord Siva all through the day as well as the night for *ajnana nivrtti* (removal of ignorance of the Self). Devotees observe fast during the day and remain awake during the night, absorbed in *nama japa* and *mantra japa* (chanting the Lord's names) and spend the night in a worshipful way. This helps one gain a certain mastery of the mind and sense organs. Pujya Swami Dayananda Sarasvati while referring to the *mahima* (greatness) of Sivaratri, has pointed out that spiritual practices undertaken on Sivaratri are especially effective and yield very good spiritual results.

AVG, Anaikatti observed Maha Sivaratri Puja in a traditional and solemn manner on Feb 27, 2014.

NITYA PUJA: *Nitya puja* (daily worship) began at the Dakshinamurti temple at 5 AM. *Vilva* (bael) leaves and colourful, fragrant flowers were offered as part of the worship of Lord Medha Dakshinamurti and Lord Narmadeswara.

AKHANDA NAMA JAPA: There was *akhanda nama japa* (continuous chanting) of the *pancaksari mantra* 'Om Namah Sivaya' from 7 AM to 3 PM.

PUJYA SRI SWAMIJI'S PARTICIPATION: Pujya Swami Dayananda Sarasvati has been discharged from the hospital, and he is resting and recuperating in a private guest house. It was a great blessing for everyone that Pujya Swamiji participated in the puja at the Anaikatti temple via Skype. He could be viewed on the screen kept in the

satsanga mandapam. Pujya Swamiji led the chant of *Om Namah Sivaya* around noon, and joined again around 7 PM to lead the *pancaksari mantra japa*. Swamiji also participated in the arati, chanting, and puja, and blessed everyone. Devotees were thrilled to have the *darsanam* of Pujya Swamiji on a most auspicious day.

EKADASA RUDRA ABHISEKA: The chanting of Sri Rudram commenced at 4 pm, and during each of the 11 chants, different *dravya abhiseka* (sacred, ritualistic bath using different offerings) were performed to Lord Medha Dakshinamurthy and Lord Narmadesvara.

PRODOSA PUJA: The day also happened to be the day of the *pradosa*; hence, *pradosa puja* was also performed, adding to the auspiciousness of the occasion.

MAHA ARATI: Around 8 PM, the *Maha Arati* took place.

RATRI PUJA: *Ratri puja* commenced with the first kala puja of the night of Sivaratri being performed at 10 PM. The *ardha jama puja* (worship at midnight) was performed around 2 AM. Bhajans and chants filled the air all through the night; and the last *kala puja*, marking the end of Sivaratri, was performed at 5.30 AM.

Devotees prayed for *jnana yogyata prapti* (gaining the qualification to receive self-knowledge), *jnana prapti* (gaining self-knowledge), and *jnana nishtaa prapti* (abiding in self-knowledge).

Report by N. Avinashilingam