

## DWADASH (TWELVE) JYOTIRLINGA

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A 'jyotirlinga' or 'jyotirlingam', is a devotional representation of the Hindu god Shiva. The word is a Sanskrit compound of 'jyotis' (meaning: radiance or light) and 'linga' (meaning : sign). Jyotirlinga is actually a radiant sign (phallus symbol) of the Almighty as well as the light of Lord Shiva. Jyotirlinga is a holy representation of Lord Shiva. Mahadeva or Lord Shiva, regarded as the destroyer of evil, called by different names but ultimately the Supreme-being. Being a Hindu, most of the people come across the term 'Jyotirlinga' quite a few times while growing up. Lord Shiva's jyotirlinga is highly revered among the Hindus. A jyotirlinga is a shrine where Lord Shiva is worshipped in the form of a 'jyotirlingam'.

["Naa aadi naa ant uska, wo sabka naa inka na unka, wahi shunya hai wahi aekaay, jiske bheetar basaa shivaay".]

The mythological stories states that once there was a war between the Devas (Gods) and the Danavas (demons). In that war, the demons emerged as victorious. Then the Devas decided to pray to Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva seeing this got pleased and then appeared in the form of Omkareshwar jyotirlinga and then defeated the danavas. According to Siva Mahapurana, once Brahma (the god of creation) and Vishnu (the form of God during preservation) had an argument over the supremacy of creation. To settle the debate, Supreme God Shiva pierced the three worlds, being appeared as a huge infinite pillar of light - the Jyotirlinga which later cooled into the holy mountain Annamalai (on which the temple of Arunachalesvara is located). Vishnu and Brahma split their ways to downwards and upwards respectively to find the end of the light in either direction. Brahma lied that He found out the end, while Lord Vishnu conceded His defeat. This lie of Lord Brahma angered Lord Shiva making Him to curse Brahma, that even though He is the creator of the universe, He would not be worshipped. The *jyotirlinga* is the Supreme Shiva, partless reality, out of which Lord Shiva appeared in another form, Lingodbhava. The *jyotirlinga* shrines are temples where Shiva appeared as a fiery column of light.

Originally it is believed that there are 64 jyotirlingas, while twelve of them are considered to be very auspicious and holy. Each of the twelve jyotirlinga sites take the name of the presiding deity, each considered as a different manifestation of Lord Shiva. At all these sites, the primary image is 'lingam' – representing the beginningless and endless Stambha(pillar), which symbolises the infinite nature of Lord Shiva. The Indian saint Adi Shankaracharya, who revived Hinduism in 800 CE, has mentioned 12 most important Jyotirlingas in his 'Dwadasha Jyotirling Stotram', situated in different locations of India. There are twelve traditional Jyotirlinga shrines in India.

The twelve Jyotirlingas are:

- 1) Somnath in Gir Somnath , Gujrat
- 2) Mallikarjuna in Srisailam, Andhra Pradesh
- 3) Mahakaleswar in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh
- 4) Omkareshwar in Khandwa , Madhya Pradesh
- 5) Kedarnath in Rudraprayag, Uttarakhand
- 6) Bhimashankar in Maharashtra
- 7) Vishwanath in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
- 8) Trambakeshwar in Nashik, Maharashtra
- 9) Baidyanath in Deoghar, Jharkhand
- 10) Nageshwara in Dwarka , Gujrat
- 11) Ramanathaswamy in Rameswaram, Tamil nadu
- 12) Grishneshwar in Aurangabad, Maharashtra

### *Explanations regarding different Jyotirlingas*

- 1) SOMNATH JYOTIRLINGA, GUJRAT:** Considered to be the first of the 12 jyotirlingas, the Somnath Temple is situated near Veraval at Prabhas Khestra of Kathiawad district in Saurashtra region of the state Gujrat in western India. This jyotirlinga is a highly revered pilgrimage site of India. Somnath is traditionally considered as the first pilgrimage site: the Dwadash Jyotirlinga pilgrimage begins with the Somnath temple. According to Shiva Purana, the moon was married to 27 daughters of Daksha Prajapati, out of which the moon loves Rohini the most. Seeing

the negligence of moon towards other wives, Prajapati Daksha cursed moon that he would lost all its radiance. Moon, being disturbed, came to Somnath along with Rohini and worshipped the Sparsha Lingam, after which Lord Shiva blessed moon – thus, the moon regained all his lost beauty, shine and radiance. On his request Lord Shiva assumed the name Somchandra and resided there eternally. The lord became famous by the name Somnath. Ever since the Somnath jyotirlinga has been destroyed and rebuilt 16 times. The temple is held in reverence and is also rich in tradition and history.

**2) MALLIKARJUNA JYOTIRLINGA, ANDHRA PRADESH:** The Mallikarjuna temple is situated on the Shri-Shailam Mountain, at Kurnool district of Rayalaseema - at the banks of Krishna river to the southern parts of Andhra Pradesh. It is also known as 'Kailash of the South' and is one of the greatest Shaivite shrines in India. This ancient temple is architecturally and sculpturally rich. This is the place where Shaktipeetha and Jyotirlingam exist together. Adi-deva Shankara composed his 'Shivananada Lahari' here. The presiding deities at this temple are Mallikarjuna (Shiva) and Brahmaramba (Devi). According to Shiva Purana, Lord Ganesha was married off before Kartikeya - so Kartikeya was angry. Kartikeya went away to the Kraunch mountain. All the Gods tried to console Kartikeya but in vain. Ultimately Lord Shiva and Parvati devi travelled to Kraunch mountain but were turned away by Kartikeya. Seeing their son in such a state, they were very disheartened and Lord Shiva assumed the form of a 'Jyotirlinga' and resided on the mountain, by the name Mallikarjuna. 'Mallika' means Parvati and 'Arjuna' is another form of Lord Shiva. It is believed by the people that just seeing the tip of this mountain, one is emancipated of all sins and becomes free from the vicious cycle of life and death.

**3) MAHAKALESHWAR JYOTIRLINGA, MADHYA PRADESH:** Mahakaleshwar temple is located on the banks of the Kshipra River, in the dense Mahakal forest in Ujjain (Avanti), Madhya Pradesh. The Lingam at Mahakal is believed to be Swayambhu, the only one of the 12 jyotirlingas. It is also the only one facing south and also the temple

to have a Shree Rudra Yantra, perched upside down at the ceiling of the Garbagriha (where the Shiva-linga is placed). This jyotirlinga in Madhya Pradesh is an important pilgrimage site in Central India. There are a number of legends related to how this Jyotirlinga came into existence. According to the Puranas, there was a five year old boy Shrikhar, who was enthralled by the devotion of king Chandrasena of Ujjain towards Lord Shiva. Srikhar took a stone and started worshipping as Shiva. Many people tried to dissuade him in different ways, but his devotion kept growing. Pleased by his devotion, lord Shiva assumed the form of a Jyotirlinga and resided in the Mahakal forest. The Mahakaleshwar temple is considered significant by the Hindus for another reason. It is among one of the seven 'Mukti-sthal' – the place that can liberate a human-being.

**4) OMKARESHWAR JYOTIRLINGA, MADHYA PRADESH :** Omkareshwar temple is one of the highly revered temple of jyotirlinga and is located on an island called Shivapuri in the Narmada river in Madhya Pradesh. The word Omkareshwar means 'Lord of Omkara' or the Lord of the sound 'Om'. According to the Hindu scriptures, once upon a time, there ensued a great war between the Devas and Danavas (Gods and Demons), in which the demons won. This was a major setback for the Devas who then prayed to Lord Shiva. Pleased with their prayer, Lord Shiva emerged in the form of Omkareshwar Jyotirlinga and defeated the danavas. This place is thus considered to be highly sacred by the Hindus.

**5) VAIDYANATH JYOTIRLINGA, JHARKHAND:** Vaidyanath temple is also known as Vajinath and Baba Vaidyanath dham. It is one of the most sacred abodes of Lord Shiva. It is located at Deogarh in the Santhal Pargana division of Jharkhand. This is one of the highly revered jyotirlinga shrines and the devotees believe that the worship of this shrine relieves a person from all his worries and miseries. People believe that one attains moksha or salvation by worshipping this jyotirlinga. The demon king Ravana meditated and asked Lord Shiva to come over to Sri Lanka and make it invincible. Ravana tried to take

Mount Kailash with him, but Lord Shiva crushed it. Ravana asked for penance and in turn, was given one of the twelve jyotirlingas and on the condition that if it was placed on the ground, it would remain rooted to that spot till eternity. While transporting it to Sri Lanka, Lord Varuna entered Ravana's body and Ravana felt an urgent need to relieve himself. Lord Vishnu came down in the form of a lad and offered to hold the lingam in the meantime. However, Lord Vishnu placed the lingam on the ground and got it rooted to that spot. As a form of penance, Ravana cut off his ten heads as sacrifice and offering to Lord Shiva. Then, Lord Shiva revived him and joined the heads to Ravana's body, like a vaidya (doctor) and hence this jyotirlinga came to be known as Vaidyanath. Finally from this aspect of Lord Shiva, The temple derives the name 'Vaidyanath'.

- 6) BHIMASHANKAR JYOTIRLINGA, MAHARASHTRA:** The Bhimashankar temple is located at the Sahyadri region of Pune, Maharashtra. It lies on the banks of Bhima river and is considered to be a source of this river. The legend about the existence of this jyotirlinga is related to Kumbhakarna's son Bhima. When Bhima learned that he was the son of Kumbhakarna who was annihilated by Lord Vishnu in his incarnation as Lord Ram. He also vowed to avenge Lord Vishnu. He performed penance to please Lord Brahma, who granted him immense power. On achieving this power, he started creating havoc in the world. He defeated the staunch devotee of Lord Shiva – Kamrupeshwar and put him in the dungeons. This angered the Lord and requested Shiva to descend earth and put an end to this tyranny. A war ensued between the two and Shiva ultimately put the demon to ashes. All the gods then requested Lord Shiva to make that place his abode. Lord Shiva then manifested himself in the form of Bhimashankar jyotirlinga. It is believed that the sweat which poured from Shiva's body after the battle, formed the Bhima river.
- 7) RAMESHWAR JYOTIRLINGA, TAMIL NADU:** Rameshwar temple, the southernmost of the twelve jyotirlingas, is located on the island of Rameshwaram, on the Sethu coast of Tamil Nadu. The shrine of this

temple is also known as Ramlingeshwar jyotirlinga. It enshrines the Rameshwara (Lord of Rama) pillar. It is also one of the Padal Petra Stalam of Pandya Naadu, mentioned in Thevaaram. The Rameshwara temple is popularly known for its architecture, more prominently the long ornate corridors, towers and 36 Theerthams. This has been a time-honoured pilgrimage centre considered by many at par with Varanasi. This jyotirlinga is closely associated with Ramayana and Rama's victorious return from Sri Lanka. It is believed that Ram on his way to Sri Lanka stopped at Rameshwaram and was drinking water on the sea-shore when there was a celestial proclamation: "You are drinking water without worshipping me". Listening to this, Lord Rama made a linga of sand and worshipped it and asked for its blessings to defeat Ravana. He got the blessings from Lord Shiva, who then turned into a Jyotirlinga and resided at the place for eternity.

**8) NAGESHWAR JYOTIRLINGA, GUJRAT:** The Nageshwara temple also known as Naganath temple is located on the route between Gomati dwarka and the Bait dwarka island on the coast of Shaurashtra in Gujrat. This Jyotirlinga holds special significance as it symbolises protection from all types of poison. It is believed that those who worship at this temple, become free from all poisons. According to Shiva Purana, a devotee of Lord Shiva – by the name Supriya was captured by the demon Daaruka. The demon imprisoned her with several others in his capital Daarukavana. Supriya advised all prisoners to chant "Aum Namaha Shivaya" which enraged Daaruka who ran to kill Supriya. Lord Shiva manifested in front of the demon and put an end to him. Thus the Nageshwara Jyotirlinga came into being.

**9) KASHI VISWANATH, VARANASI:** The Kashi Viswanath temple is located at the most revered site of Kashi. The temple at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh is home to the Vishwanath jyotirlinga shrine, which is perhaps the most sacred Hindu shrine. It is also one of the Padal Petra Stalam of Vada Naadu, mentioned in Thevaaram. The temple is situated at Varanasi, the holiest city for Hindus, where a Hindu is expected to make a pilgrimage at least once in life, with shivalinga as the main

focus and if possible, also pour the remains of cremated ancestors on the river Ganges. The temple stands on the western bank of the holy river Ganges and is one of the twelve jyotirlingas. Infact, it is the place where Shakti-peetha and Jyotirlingam are together. It is the holiest of all Shiva temples. The main deity is known by the name Vishwanath or Vishweshwara, meaning 'the ruler of the universe'. The temple town Kashi is considered the oldest living city in the world, with 3500 years of documented history. It is believed that Varanasi is the site at which the first jyotirlinga manifested its supremacy over other gods, broke through the earth-crust and flared towards heaven. This temple is said to be the dearest to Lord Shiva and the people believe that those who die here, achieve the liberation. Many believe that Lord Shiva Himself resided at Varanasi and is the giver of liberation and happiness. This temple has been rebuilt several times but always continued to hold its ultimate significance.

**10) TRAMBAKESHWAR JYOTIRLINGA, NASHIK :** The Trambakeshwar temple , near Nashik in Maharashtra is a jyotirlinga shrine, associated with the origin of the Godavari river. The temple is located about 30 km away from Nashik in Maharashtra, near the mountain named Brahmagiri. This temple is considered to be the source of river Godavari, which is known as 'Gautami Ganga' – the most sacred river in South India. According to Shiva Purana, it is on the earnest request of river Godavari, Gautam Rishi and all the other gods, that Shiva decided to reside here and assumed the name Trambakeshwar. Gautam Rishi earned a boon from Varuna in the form of a pit from which he received an inexhaustible supply of grains and foods. The other gods were rendered jealous by Him and they send a cow to enter the granary. The cow was mistakenly killed by Gautam rishi, who then asked Ganga to flow through the land to make it pure. Everyone thus sang praise for the Lord, who then resided beside Ganga in the form of Trambakeshwar jyotirlinga. Hindus believe that this jyotirlinga in Maharashtra is the one which fulfils everyone's desire.

**11) KEDARNATH JYOTIRLINGA, UTTARAKHAND:** One of the holiest pilgrimage sites in India, the Kedarnath temple is located on the Rudra

Himalaya range at the height of 12000 feet on a mountain named Kedar. It is approximately 150 miles away from Haridwar. The temple enshrining the Jyotirlinga opens for only six months in a year. The tradition is that while embarking on a pilgrimage to Kedarnath, people first visit Yamunotri and Gangotri and bring the holy water to offer at Kedarnath. According to the legends, pleased by the severe penance of the Nara and the Narayana – two incarnations of Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva took up the permanent abode in Kedarnath in the form of this jyotirlinga. People believe that praying at this site, one gets all his desires fulfilled.

**12) GRISHNESHWAR JYOTIRLINGA, MAHARASHTRA:** The Grishneshwar jyotirlinga is located at a village called Verul, which lies 20 km away from Daulatabad, near Aurangabad in Maharashtra. Ajanta and Ellora caves are the famous tourist sites, located near this temple. This temple was built by Ahilyabai Holkar who also rebuilt the Kashi Vishwanath temple at Varanasi. This temple is also known as Kusumeswara temple or Ghushmeshwara temple. According to Shiva Purana, a couple named Sudharm and Sudeha resided on the Devagiri mountain. They were childless, and thus Sudeha got her sister Ghushma married to Sudharm. They bore a son who rendered Ghushma proud and Sudeha felt jealous of her sister. In her jealousy, Sudeha threw the son in the lake where Ghushma used to discharge 101 lingams. Ghushma prayed to Lord Shiva who ultimately returned her the son and told her about her sister's deeds. Sudharm asked Lord Shiva to emancipate Sudeha which left Shiva pleased with his generosity. On Sudharm's request, Lord Shiva manifested himself in the form of jyotirlinga and assumed the name Ghushmeshwar.