

# The Stillness In The Chaos

Does life ever feel a little crazy, like you want to just put up your hand and ask kindly if the world could simply pause for a moment while you catch your breath? I feel like this often.

With all the constant change and movement in life, it's easy to get thrown off center. However, with the right kind of awareness, any turbulence of life, can actually point us to absolute centeredness. This paradox of finding the stillness within the movement is depicted in the immortal statue of the [Shiva Nataraj](#) or the Dancing Shiva, a Hindu statue that illustrates how the constant motion of the universe has the power to center us as well as transport us into the current of our own personal and spiritual evolution.

In this statue, Shiva is depicted with a serene facial expression, that of a slight smile. Shiva is waving several arms (every feel *YOU* could use a few extra arms?), posing beautifully and expressly as if the sculptor captured this figure mid-dance.



## Shiva and Shakti: Their Both/And Nature

In this statue, Shiva's gender is obscured. The figure in the statue is depicted with female hips, a slight bosom, and of course depicted in the gesture of dancing. In ancient Vedic wisdom, the male god Shiva represents pure and absolute consciousness, the underlying beingness of all things while

the female god Shakti is the dancer who, through her movement, creates all the change, form, and energy of the universe. It's the marriage of Shiva's consciousness and Shakti's motion that results in the birth of everything in the Universe. Truly, we are the expression of the marriage of consciousness and form, a radically expansive expression of their both/and union. Therefore, I feel that the Shiva Nataraj statue doesn't represent only Shiva, but rather the realized both/and nature of a merged Shiva/Shakti, consciousness aroused by form. For that reason, for the rest of this article, I think it's fair to reference this representation of blended genders and purposes with the pronoun, "their."

## **The 5 Acts of Shiva/Shakti**

This Shiva/Shakti image transmutes language, time, and the chaos of the universe into pure presence and depicts at least 5 steps which both help me to appreciate the ceaseless and sometimes seemingly chaotic motion of life while also pointing me to my own greater spiritual advancement.

Looking at this statue, in their upper right hand, Shiva/Shakti is holding a drum which symbolizes beating a life, pulse, and rhythm into all things in the Universe, a generative gesture which speaks to the season of spring when things are born. Modern physics attests to this universality of movement, that everything from the smallest particle to the largest galaxy— even the Universe itself—is in some form of vibration, frequency, and change. This change includes light, sound, color, and even thought. As a fellow musician, I love the idea of Shiva/Shakti creating a drumbeat for the tribe of

all things as we dance around the central fire of one radiant Source.



Shiva/Shakti's second hand on the right side is holding the *abhaya mudra*, an open-palmed gesture, one that suggests a generous holding or sustaining of what was born. If their first hand on the right side represents spring, then this hand certainly represents summertime, the season when things are growing well, life is easy, and everything seems peachy. This gesture gives us hope and can promote gratitude for the many things that are going well in our lives.



But don't get too comfortable with things as they are because in their first hand on the left, they are holding a flame, suggesting that as easily as they can birth and sustain something, they can and will burn it to a crisp. I think of this act of dissolution as the autumnal cycle, like the eruption of fall leaves, bursting into the flames of color. There is no spirit of malevolence in this killing. In fact, the serene look on Shiva/Shakti's face suggests that even the process of dying is all part of what makes life so good. It can even be regarded as a great act of compassion toward us, like when an old situation needs to die so that we can move on

to the next great adventure.

Of course, after the fire, when we are in our darkest place, frozen in the winter of our pain, our inclination may be to importune the heart of the deity and supplicate for restoration. Shiva/Shakti, however, shows us that they have other plans. Instead of opening their heart to us and restoring us to the way things were, Shiva/Shakti's other left hand is actually concealing their heart, almost as if to add insult to injury, saying, "Nah. The entrance into the heart of God doesn't come that easy, kid."

Shiva/Shakti's right leg is standing on a small, impish creature, something that either looks like a baby or sometimes a pig or demon. More than once, an inquisitive and well-meaning yoga student has asked me, pointing to the statue, "Um ... why is that person standing on a baby?" This thing that looks like a baby is called the Apasmara, and represents the unrealized, ignorant, or less-developed version of ourselves. When we've been conquered, humbled, and suffered the coup de grace, Shiva/Shakti goes one step further and stands on our corpse. Yet this gesture is actually one of great benevolence. This is because Shiva/Shakti is literally taking a stand for our highest good by putting asunder the old version of ourselves. It's like Shiva/Shakti is giving the old version of ourselves the honorary funeral rites and burial. Often, true transformation, indeed apotheosis, can *only* come after such a dark night of the soul as suggested by this statue. Transformation requires death and resurrection.

Finally, while Shiva/Shakti is doing their honorary tap dance on our ignorant selves, with the only limb that Shiva/Shakti has left, they lift their left leg upward in an invitational

gesture to rejoin a brand new cycle of rebirth, sustaining, dissolution, concealment, and revelation, and thus it continues for infinity. Surely, this eternal cycle symbolized in this statue represents a circular notion of time as well as the fact that our personal and spiritual evolution is also not linear but rather circular, each turn around the cycle lifting us in an upward spiral, ever higher along our pathway to personal and spiritual evolution.

## Join The Dance

In the statue, the Shiva/Shakti personage is wreathed in flames, suggesting the intense refinement and of our evolution. Yet, despite this intensity, even despite the fact that their hair is on fire, Shiva/Shakti comports an unwavering expression of stillness, serenity, and even joy. This statue shows us that in the eye of the storm of all this change rests an unperturbed stillness, a presence and Awareness which is the foundation upon which the dance of everything can occur.

So, as we experience seasons of transformation, we must remember that all of the motion of our lives can point us to a simple lesson: to be present and to join the dance of personal growth. All this change points to the often disguised but undeniable truth that there is only here, that there is only now.

I invite you to take a moment of contemplation and consider the different cycles you may be experiencing at this moment –

your stage of life, relationships, or career, to name a few – and acknowledge which part of that cycle you're on at this moment. Then, consider all the ways that the moment you're experiencing at this moment might invite you into stillness as you are growing into your next and higher version of yourself and becoming the person who you are destined to become.

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