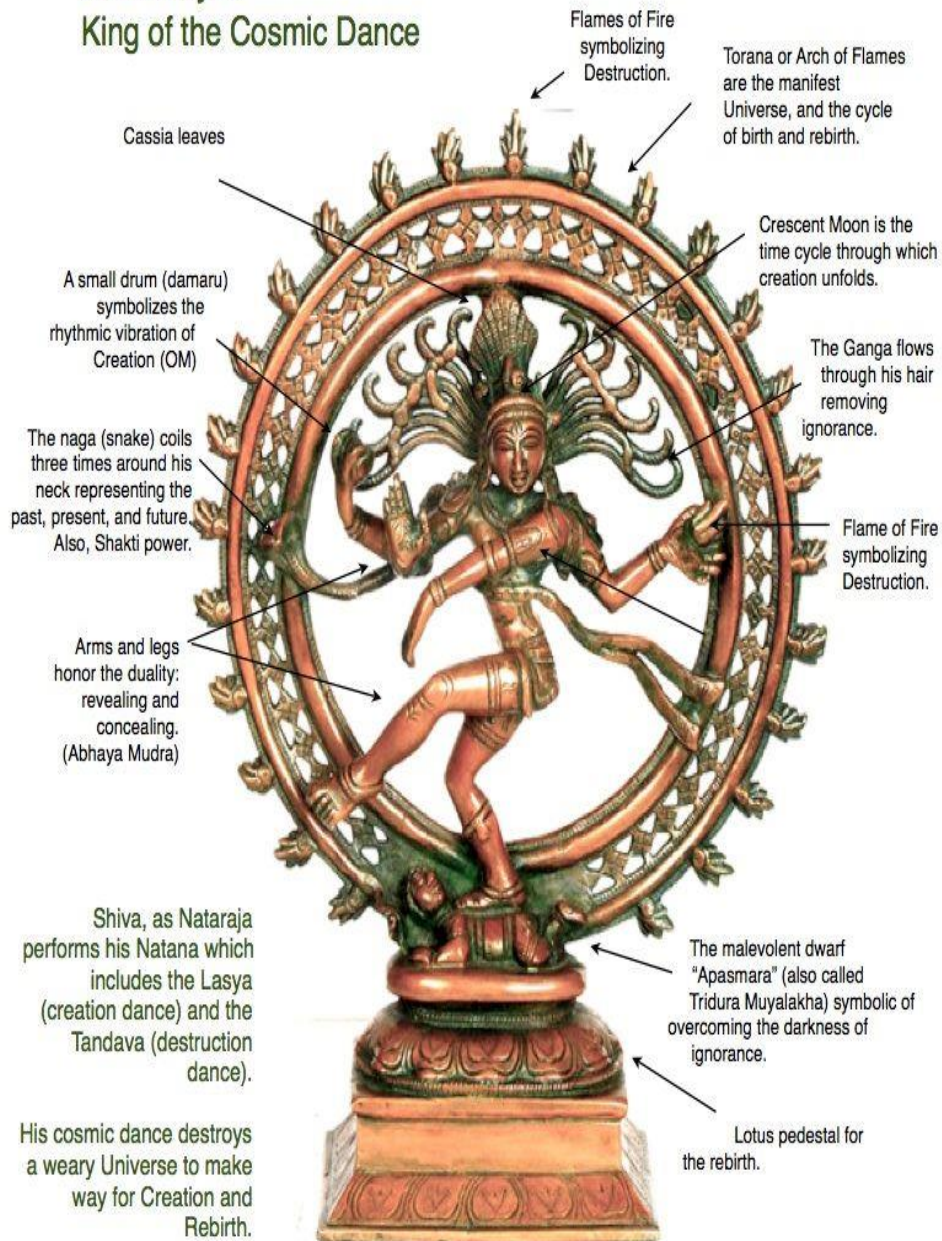


Nataraja: King of the Cosmic Dance



Nataraja

Nataraja or Nataraj, the dancing form of Lord Shiva, is a symbolic synthesis of the most important aspects of Hinduism, and the summary of the central tenets of this Vedic religion. The term 'Nataraj' means 'King of Dancers' (Sanskrit nata = dance; raja = king).

Nataraj is shown with four hands represent the cardinal directions. He is dancing, with his left foot elegantly raised and the right foot on a prostrate figure—'Apasmara Purusha', the personification of illusion and ignorance over whom Shiva triumphs. The upper left-hand holds a flame, the lower

left-hand points down to the dwarf, who is shown holding a cobra. The upper right-hand holds a 'dumroo' that stands for the male-female vital principle, the lower shows the gesture of assertion: "Be without fear." Snakes that stand for egotism, are seen uncoiling from his arms, legs, and hair, which is braided and bejeweled. His matted locks are whirling as he dances within an arch of flames representing the endless cycle of birth and death. On his head is a skull, which symbolizes his conquest over death. Goddess Ganga, the epitome of the holy river Ganges, also sits on his hairdo. His third eye is symbolic of enlightenment. The whole idol rests on a lotus pedestal, the symbol of the creative forces of the universe.

Nataraja Sloka

*Krupasamudhram, Sumukhan, Trinethram,
Jada dharmam Parvathy vama bhagam,
Sad Shivam, Rudram anatha roopam,
Chidambaresam hrudhi bhavayami.*

I salute with all my heart, The Lord of Chidambara, Who is the ocean of mercy, Who is always pleasant, Who has three eyes, Who wears tuft of hair, Who is always peaceful, Who is full of anger, and who is an endless shape.

Nataraja Gayatri

Natarajaya Vidmahe
Nartana Sundaraya deemahi
Tano Nataraja prachodayat.