

The Legend of Maha Shivaratri states a hunter could not find any animals in the forest to kill for his dinner. He searched all day but had no luck. Eventually he came to a stream where he knew deer often drank in the evening and so he decided to climb a Bael tree to wait. This tree is a particular favorite with Lord Shiva and used in traditional medicine.

The hunter pulled leaves from the tree and threw them to the ground, hoping to attract some deer. One deer came. It spoke to the hunter, telling him of his family who would worry when the deer did not return home. The hunter took pity of the deer and kindly let it live.

The hunter resumed throwing leaves from the tree and continued to do so all night. Unknown to the hunter there was a Shiva linga under the branch he was sitting on. The leaves fell on the linga and as they were his favorite, they pleased Lord Shiva.

The next morning Lord Shiva appeared to the hunter and gave him the blessing of wisdom. From that day the hunter gave up meat and spent his life doing good works. This is why Hindus do not eat meat on Maha Shivaratri. It is thought that those who fast on the evening on Maha Shivaratri will please Lord Shiva and also be granted a blessing

Hindus in general and Shaivites in particular observe this Festival which is based on the Hindu Calendar, and comes in the Month of Phalgun, which coincides with February/March..