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## Maha Shivaratri

Sheri Vandermolen

Like an infinitely curling fractal swirl,  
the Shiv Mandir queue  
coils from frenetic main road  
to priapic vibhutied-lingam entryway,  
snaking underground,  
emerging at the shoe-drop,  
and weaving past  
the Möbius crowd-control railings,  
where worshipers place one coin  
in each of 108 brass bowls  
while rhythmically chanting  
the Om Namah Shivaya mantra,  
before winding upward,  
to the towering Ganesha, then down,  
to tie a red-yellow string on the wishing tree  
and shuffle, reverentially, through  
the dark man-made caves housing other linga —  
stone, wood, and plastic  
animatronic pop-up phalluses  
Walt Disney never imagined.

The visitors' celebration of Maha Shivaratri  
(held the fourteenth night of the waning moon,  
in the lunar month of Phalguna —  
February/March)  
will culminate with pouring milk on a lingam,  
lighting a ghee candle to be circled in the air,  
during an every-two-hour aarti fire ceremony,  
and making puja offerings  
(bilva and betel leaves, food, incense)  
to the sixty-five-foot-high Shiva statue,  
which calmly sits in lotus position  
and spouts holy Ganga water,  
while overseeing the devotees,  
who seek endless blessings, meditative peace,  
in the chaos of this sacred day.