

## Significance of Navratri

The 9 divine nights are significant with three days each devoted to worship of Ma Durga- the Goddess of Valour, Ma Lakshmi – the Goddess of Wealth and Ma Saraswati- the Goddess of Knowledge. The tenth day celebrated on 08 October is known as Vijay Dashmi (Vijay meaning victory and Dash means ten) is to worship, chant and pray to the mother giving thanks to her for showering her mercy upon us and to celebrate the victory that we have achieved over our enemies which are the vices contained within ourselves. One should make full use of these 10 days to take stock of one's life and make changes to be a good, loving and caring person.

Observing the period ritualistically and not wanting Mother Durga to assist and free us from her clutches of repeated birth, old age, disease and death will mean that this is a religious observance and will not benefit us in anyway whatsoever. The word Durga is derived from the word Durg which means prison house. Therefore the name Durga refers to that great personality who is in charge of and controller of the Karma of every human being on this planet. Our prayer to the mother should therefore be that she frees us from this prison so as to allow us to go back home, back to Godhead.

She is compared to the warden of a prison who will recommend parole to that person who has asked to be forgiven for his offences and have made amends to lead a better life. It is only through the grace and mercy of the mother that one can learn how to love the father. It is only through the mercy of Srimati Radharani that one can love Krishna. My humble appeal to every Hindu is for us to grow above religion and remedy some unnecessary practices that undermine and degrade widows. Let us know that it is no fault of theirs that they have become widows and that they should be allowed to continue to live normal lives as they used to. They should be allowed to continue to carry out all religious practices as they used to instead of making them feel like outcasts in society.

It is time when men stood up and stamp out this injustice to widows. Your ever well wisher Panditji \*SRI BRAHMA SAMHITA TEXT 44\* srsti-sthiti-pralaya-sadhana-saktir eka chayeva yasya bhuvanani bibharti durga icchanurupam api yasya ca cestate sa govindam adi-purusam tam aham bhajami TRANSLATION \*"The external potency Maya who is of the nature of the shadow of the cit potency, is worshiped by all people as Durga, the creating, preserving and destroying agency of this mundane world. I adore the primeval Lord Govinda in accordance with whose will Durga conducts herself." (Sri Brahma Samhita/Bhaktivedanta Vedabase)\* In the purport to this verse from the ancient scripture the Brahma Samhita, the vaishnava scholar Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati

Swamiji explains that the material universe is like a prison for the soul. The keeper of this prison is Durga. Durga is the eternal female principle in creation and she manifests as the energy that entraps spiritual souls into identifying with the material body, which thus perpetuates their karmic activity and forces them to take birth after birth in material bodies instead of regaining their spiritual identity. Some might think this makes Durga an evil goddess, similar to Satan (Shanidev) who also tempts souls into forsaking their spiritual path and turn to the dark side. Durga, however, is a venerated deity in the Vedic tradition. She manifests in another form as Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva. Both Durga and Lord Shiva have their roles in the temporary existence of the material creation, and in the eternal spiritual universe. She is the source of all goddesses and a mother to the universe. She is also a pure devotee of God.

Her reasons to entrap souls in illusion is not out of envy or rebellion toward God, as it is with Satan, but it is God's divine will that there be a principle within the material universe to maintain duality that allows a soul to either accept their divine spiritual energy, or to take the dark path of Satan so to speak, and experience different bodies. Durga takes orders from Govinda, another name for God, and when Govinda desires to remove the obstacles on a serious seeker of absolute truth it is Durga who will lift the very veil of illusion she cast. Durga expands her form in the ten goddesses known as the Dasa Mahavidyas. Most famous in Eastern and Western cultures is the ferocious goddess Kali. Contradictorily to her appearance, Kali is also referred to as Kali Maa- Maa meaning mother, as Kali is shakti or the feminine energy of creation.

The other goddesses are Tara, Lalital-Tripurasundari, Bhuvaneshvari, Bhairavi, Dhumavati, Bagalamukhi, Matangi, Kamala, and Chinnamasta, she whose head is severed. Many of these deities have forms grotesque to the Western perspective of divinity, but each of their characteristics and activities represent their divine connection with the Absolute Truth. For example, the scripture the Srimad-Bhagavatam tells a story of how a devotee of Govinda by the name Jada Bharata was kidnapped by worshipers of the Kali deity named Bhadra Kali. They intended to kill the devotee for the pleasure of Kali, not understanding that Kali was also a devotee of Govinda.

Kali manifested in her form out of the deity and killed the rogue followers. Kali is a slayer of demons and protector of devotees of God. Though she entraps all souls by illusion, for those who do want to reclaim their spiritual identity Durga will also protect and assist on the path of self-realization. And because she is the energy that gives birth to the entire universe she is considered the mother of all. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Maharaj states in the purport to the above verse: \*"Durga, worshiped by the people of this mundane world, is the Durga described above. But the spiritual Durga,

mentioned in the mantra which is the outer covering of the spiritual realm of the Supreme Lord, is the eternal maidservant of Krsna and is, therefore, the transcendental reality whose shadow, the Durga of this world, functions in this mundane world as HIS maidservant."\* \*RAAS GARBA\* During the 9 days devotees take great delight to visit the mandir to participate in pooja, sing bhajan and kirtan in praise of the mother and participate in Raas Garba.

A beautiful deity of the mother is enshrined in the centre of the mandir and traditional garba dance takes place while encircling her beautiful form. Durga Devi is the external pleasure giving potency of Krsna. It is her duty to entrap the living entities in the illusion of this material world by providing them with their needs as they PREY on her. Dancing around the form of the mother is a reminder of the repeated birth and death that we will have to endure as long as we are caught in this unending cycle of birth, old age, disease and death. On the other hand if we PRAY to her to liberate us from this bondage she will graciously bestow such a boon upon her aspirants as she is the custodian and controller of our Karma.

She can offer us a free passage or parole out of this world at the time of our death provided that we live a life that is worthy, good, loving and kind towards every living entity. One prays to the mother to remove and destroy our vices and assist us to become "good human beings" so that we can naturally become divine entities. We learn that the mother will assist us in acquiring good and noble qualities and uplift such souls to reconnect with the Supreme Personality of Godhead Sri Krsna through the process of chanting His Holy Names. 1st – 3rd day of Navratri On the first day of the Navaratri, a small bed of fresh soil is prepared in the puja room of the house and barley seeds are sown in it.

On the tenth day, the shoots are about 3 – 5 inches in length. After the puja, these seedlings are pulled out and given to devotees as a blessing or maha prashad from the mother. These initial days are dedicated to Durga Maa, the Goddess of power and energy. Each day is dedicated to a different appearance of Durga. Kumari, which signifies the girl child, is worshipped on the first day of the festival. Parvati, who is the embodiment of a young woman, is worshipped on the second day. The destructive aspects of Goddess Durga symbolize the commitment to acquire triumph over all the evil tendencies. Hence, on the third day of Navratri, Goddess Kali is worshipped, who represents the woman who has reached the stage of maturity. One who is able to destroy but to save, guide the aspirant on the correct path. The mother is compared to a modern anti-biotic drug that is injected into an ailing person to destroy the bacteria and germs that are causing harm but to render the person whole. She is kind but firm and fixed in administering our Karmas. 4th – 6th day of Navratri During these days, Lakshmi Maa, the Goddess of peace and prosperity is worshipped.

Fifth day is known as Lalita Panchami and all books, pens and literature especially of children studying are placed in the mandir or puja room and a lamp is lit to invoke Saraswati Maa, the Goddess of knowledge and art. These books are not touched by the student. When a person acquires triumph over evil tendencies of ego, anger, lust and other animal instincts, he/she experiences a void. This void is filled with spiritual wealth. For the purpose, the person approaches Goddess Lakshmi, to acquire all the materialistic, spiritual wealth and prosperity.

This is the reason why the fourth, fifth and sixth day of Navratri are dedicated to the worship of Lakshmi – the goddess of prosperity and peace. Although the individual has acquired victory over evil tendencies and wealth, he is still deprived of true knowledge.