

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 know 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 as 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.

List of 9 colours per day and their significance

The nine days of festivities to welcome Goddess Durga will begin from October 17th and end on October 26th with Vijayadashami.

Worshippers pray to Goddess Durga for nine days at a stretch. The nine forms of Goddess Durga are – Shailaputri, Brahmacharini, Chandharghanta, Kushmanda, Skandamata, Katyayani, Kalratri, Mahagauri, and Siddhidathri.

The nine days carry significance of nine colours dedicated to Goddess Durga each day according to history.

Day 1 – Red

This day is known as Pratipada, associated with Shailaputri, an incarnation of Parvati. Shailaputri is considered to be the direct incarnation of Mahakali. The color of the day is red, which represents strength, peace and calm.

Day 2 – Blue

On Dwitiya, Goddess Brahmacharini, another incarnation of Parvati, is worshiped. Depicted as walking bare feet and holding a japamala and kamandal in her hands, Parvati symbolizes bliss and calm. Blue color depicts tranquility yet strong energy.

Day 3 – Yellow

Tritiya commemorates the worship of Chandraghanta, the name derived from the fact that after marrying Shiva, Parvati adorned her forehead with the ardhachandra. She is the embodiment of beauty and is also symbolic of bravery. Yellow is the color of the third day, which is a vivacious color and can pep up everyone's mood.

Day 4 – Green

Chaturthi commemorates Goddess Kushmanda. Goddess Kushmanda associated with the endowment of vegetation on earth and hence, the color of the day is Green. She is depicted as having eight arms and sits on a Tiger.

Day 5 – Grey

Skandamata, the goddess worshiped on Panchami, is the mother of Skanda (or Kartikeya). The color of Grey is symbolic of the transforming strength of a mother when her child is confronted with danger. She is depicted riding a ferocious lion, having four arms and holding her baby.

Day 6 – Orange

On this day Katyayana is worshipped. Katyayana is an incarnation of Durga and is shown to exhibit courage which is symbolized by the color Orange. Known as the warrior goddess, she is

considered one of the most violent forms of Devi. In this avatar, Kātyāyanī rides a lion and has four hands.

Day 7 – White

The seventh day is or saptami commemorates the most ferocious form of Goddess Durga. It is believed that Parvati removed her fair skin to kill the demons Sumbha and Nisumbha. The color of the day is White. On Saptami, the Goddess appears in a white color attire with a lot of rage in her fiery eyes, her skin turns black.

The white color portrays prayer and peace and ensures the devotees that the Goddess will protect them from harm.

Day 8 – Pink

Mahagauri symbolizes intelligence and peace. The color associated with this day is Pink which depicts optimism.

Day 9 – Light Blue

On the last day of the festival, Navami, people pray to Siddhidhatri. Sitting on a lotus, Siddhidhatri is believed to possess and bestows all types of Siddhis. Here she has four hands. Also known as SriLakshmi Devi. The light blue color of the day portrays an admiration towards nature's beauty.

The Spiritual Significance of Navaratri by Swami Tejomayananda

Ratri means “night” and *Nava* means “nine”. At Navaratri (“nine nights”), the Lord in the form of the Mother Goddess is worshipped in Her various forms as *Durga*, *Lakshmi* and *Saraswati*. Though the Goddess is one, She is represented and worshipped in three different aspects. On the first three nights of the festival, *Durga* is worshipped. On the following three, *Lakshmi* and then *Saraswati Devi* on the last three nights. The following tenth day is called *Vijayadasami*. *Vijaya* means “victory”, the victory over our own minds that can come only when we have worshipped these three: *Durga*, *Lakshmi*, and *Saraswati*.

Durga

To gain noble virtues, all evil tendencies in the mind must be destroyed. This destruction is represented by the Goddess *Durga*. *Durga* is *durgati harini*: "She who removes our evil tendencies." This is why she is called *Mahishasura Mardini*, the destroyer of *Mahishaasura* (demon), *mahisha* meaning "buffalo." Isn't there a buffalo in our minds as well?

The buffalo stands for *tamoguna*, the quality of laziness, darkness, ignorance and inertia. We have these qualities too. We love to sleep. Although we may have a lot of energy and potential inside us, we prefer to do nothing - just like the buffalo that likes to lie in pools of water. In the *Puraanic* story, *Durga Devi's* killing of the *Mahisha* demon is, symbolically, the destruction of the *tamoguna* within us that is very difficult to destroy. In the *Durga Devi Havana* (sacrifice), we invoke that Divine Power within us to destroy our animalistic tendencies.

Lakshmi

For knowledge to dawn within us, we have to prepare our minds. The mind must be pure, concentrated, and single-pointed; this purification of the mind is obtained through the worship of Lakshmi Devi.

In our society today, however, when we think of *Lakshmi*, we think only of money - counting gold and dollar bills! This is why if one goes to a Lakshmi temple, one will find a crowd. Everybody likes *Lakshmi Puja* (Lakshmi worship) because they think she represents material wealth. But what is real wealth? Even if we have material wealth but no self-discipline or self-control, nor the values of love, kindness, respect and sincerity, all our material wealth will be lost or destroyed. The real wealth is the inner wealth of spiritual values that we practice in our lives, by which our minds become purified. Only when we have these noble values will we be able to preserve our material wealth and make good use of it. Otherwise money itself becomes a problem.

In the *Upanishads*, the *Rishis* never asked for material wealth only. In the mantras of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, they first asked to have all the noble virtues fully developed in them. "Having gained the noble virtues, thereafter Lord please bring wealth to us". The *Rishis* express here that in the absence of right values and good qualities, all our money will be wasted, and there are countless examples of this in the world around us.

Our wealth of virtues is our true Lakshmi. Its importance is shown by the fact that *Adi Shankaracharya* himself, in *Vivekachudamani*, describes that *sat sampati*, or six forms of

wealth (calmness of mind, self-control, self- withdrawal, forbearance, faith and single-pointedness) that are to be cultivated to attain wisdom. These virtues are important because our goal is victory over the mind - a victory such that we do not get disturbed by every change that takes place in our lives. This victory comes only when the mind is prepared, and this mental preparation is the symbolism of the *Lakshmi Puja*.

Saraswati

Victory over the mind can be gained only through knowledge, through understanding; and it is Goddess *Saraswati*

who represents this highest knowledge of the Self.

Although there are many kinds of knowledge in the *Vedas* - phonetics astronomy, archery, architecture, economics and so on - the real knowledge is in the spiritual knowledge. Lord *Krishna* himself says in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "The knowledge of the Self is the knowledge"; and He adds, "It is my *vibhuti*, my glory." In other words, we may have knowledge of many other subjects and sciences but if we do not know our own Self, then that is the greatest loss. Therefore the supreme knowledge is the knowledge of the Self that is represented by Goddess *Saraswati*.

Navaratri

Thus, at *Navaratri*, Goddess *Durga* is invoked first to remove impurities from the mind. The Goddess *Lakshmi* is invoked to cultivate the noble values and qualities. Finally, *Saraswati* is invoked for gaining the highest knowledge of the Self. This is the significance of the three sets of three nights when all these three are gained subjectively, and then there will be *Vijayadasami*, the day of true victory!

At *Navaratri* time, the *Rasa* dance (dance of joy) of *Sri Krishna* and the *gopis* is also performed. As the mind becomes purer, calmer quieter, and more cheerful and greater understanding is gained, do we not feel happier? Similarly, the *Rasa* dance is the dance of joy and realization. But, nowadays, the theme of *Sri Krishna* and the *gopis* dancing around the *Rasa* seems to have been lost in our society. The true meaning and purpose of the ritual is often forgotten, as more importance is given to other types of dancing.

Why is the *Navaratri* festival celebrated at night rather than in the daytime? This is another interesting question. Night-time is generally the time when we go to sleep, so the spiritual message is, "You have lived long enough in the sleepy ignorance of tamoguna. It is time to wake up now. Please wake up!"

For a puja, unfortunately, we are never willing to stay up late and so we ask, "What time will it end?" For a party, we never ask this question. If the party ends at 10.00pm, we say "What! The party is finished?! What kind of a party is that?!" Yet we find it difficult to stay awake for a puja!

The Importance of Ritual

Not everyone, it is true, will be of the intellectual type to appreciate everything philosophically. Therefore, philosophy or spiritual truth must be demonstrated visually in some ritualistic form. In this way, when children are first introduced to it, they enjoy a dance or a festival, and then later begin to question, "What is this dance? Why are we doing this *Puja*? What is the meaning of *Navaratri*?" So the purpose of the concretized ritual is fulfilled when these questions begin to arise in the children's minds.

Unfortunately, when we take our children to functions at the temples and they begin to ask questions about what they see, we cannot answer them. Yet when the children revolt later as teenagers, we say, "What happened to the children? These kids are terrible. We never used to question our religion!"

We take pride in the fact that we never used to question anything, but it would have been better if we had asked questions and found out. Why did we not ask? Because of intellectual inertia. Inertia is of different kinds. Physical inertia is not as bad because it is usually temporary. There are also mental or emotional stupors that some people remain in, but the intellectual inertia is the worst kind because under its influence, we do not want to think at all. It is said that people can live without air for two minutes, without water for a few days, without food for a month or so, and without thinking for generations! Some people just do not want to think. This is our inner *Mahisha* (the lazy buffalo), and our spiritual *Mahisha* is that we do not want to wake up from this sleep of ignorance.

As we can see, the theme of the entire *Vedas* is reflected in the *Navaratri* festival: Purify the mind and remove all negativities; cultivate positive virtues; gain spiritual knowledge and transcend limitations. This is the real victory - the dance of joy - ritualistically performed at night, as it is also on *Shivaratri* (auspicious night), to signify our spiritual awakening.