



Devi—The Compassionate Destroyer

By Swami Jyotirmayananda

Navaratri Puja (Mother Worship) is celebrated in India in the bright half of the lunar month of *Ashwina* (September-October). The Mother aspect of God is worshipped as Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati, each for three nights respectively. *Navaratri Puja* culminates on the tenth day, which is called *Vijaya Dashami*—the final victory of the Devi over the demons. *Navaratri Puja* depicts the long course of spiritual evolution in your life and reveals the way in which the Divine Mother leads your soul to the ultimate victory over the *asuric* and *rakshasic* qualities (demoniac qualities) that present countless obstacles on the spiritual path.

In one's life, the forces of darkness manifest as anger and hatred, malice and greed, pride and infatuation, craving and conceit, etc. These are the demons within each human being. On the other hand, the forces of light manifest as compassion and magnanimity, humility and charity, purity and sincerity, universal love, nonviolence and peace. These are the gods within

each human being. Life is an arena for the battling forces of darkness and light. The essence of the *Puja* is to enhance the forces of light, to control the senses and the mind, to overcome the desires emanating from the lower self, and to realize the Divine Self that shines in the cave of the heart.

In the first stage of *Navaratri Puja*, the Durga-aspect of the Divine Mother is worshipped for the destruction and sublimation of gross impurities in your unconscious that result from numerous births or incarnations. These *malas* (impurities of the heart) express themselves in the form of anger, greed, hatred, lust, pride, jealousy, etc.

Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, is worshipped in the second stage of *Devi Puja*. She is symbolic of divine glory or *aishwarya*. Goddess Lakshmi brings steadiness in the *chitta* (mind stuff) by enriching the spirit and removing *vikshepa*—distraction of mind caused by subtle impressions of impurity in the unconscious. This phase of your spiritual movement is marked by the development of Divine qualities such as compassion, dispassion, purity, renunciation, charity, universal love, unity, magnanimity of the heart, balance of mind, etc. These are rare gifts of spiritual wealth.

In the third phase of the *Puja*, Goddess Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge, is worshipped as She tears the veil of ignorance (*avarana*) and reveals the splendor of Consciousness. The realization of the unveiled beauty of the Supreme confers upon you immortality.

Throughout this glorious path of spiritual evolution, the grace of the Goddess enfolds the aspirant, guiding a series of destructions that are absolutely essential for the increasing revelation of the bliss of the Divine Self within. To an unthinking mind, however, destruction breathes a sense of pathos and melancholy. However, to a mind illumined by the values of transcendental truth, destruction is an inevitable process in the course of construction, and is Blessedness masked with a dark veil. All things of the world change in order to present various enjoyments to evolving souls in the course of their evolution. There lies significance in change and meaning in destruction. Even the mind and senses are subject to change, the very personality of an individual will also change in time.

Changes must occur and destruction cannot be avoided. Aspirants who are wise should not be wafted by the current of changes, nor should they feel destroyed by the surging process of destruction abounding in this world. Rather, they must be established in the vision of the Spirit that is the basis of all changes and the substratum of all destructions. Destructions are but passing

clouds that are meant to reveal the blue sky in its expansive glory and untainted beauty. Destructions indeed are the removal of obstructions for the emergence of higher states of vision and of consciousness.

Changes bring forth the same wine in new bottles and the same Spirit in new forms of expression. Every individual must let changes occur freely without allowing their inner center to be disturbed, and without allowing themselves to be lost in the outer forms of destruction.

The same is true with nations and human civilizations. Many ancient civilizations have been lost due to their inability to accept changes and understand new meaning and expression in religion and philosophy. Many nations have perished in the course of time, but those that had rooted themselves in the everlasting and unchanging glory of the Spirit accepted changes and studied their meaning. These types of civilizations have even survived against the terrible ravages wrought by time and upheavals in history.

What is the role of destruction in the lives of aspirants? An aspirant must destroy the lower self—gross impurities such as anger, hatred,

greed, pride, hypocrisy, vanity, jealousy, etc.—in order to attain higher states of consciousness and realize God. Destruction implies sublimation and transcendence. There is no real destruction. Names and forms are destructible as they are relative and illusory in nature. However, the basis underlying them—*Sat-Chit-Ananda*, or Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss as *Brahman*—is indestructible.

Ignorance of your spiritual nature is the root cause of all impurities. It gives rise to innumerable desires that drive the mind to the objective value of an object. By analyzing the mind and practicing enquiry, you must find the causes of these negative qualities and remove them with patience.

Various methods are adopted in the practice of Yoga. An aspirant should practice *pratipaksha bhavana*—asserting a contrary positive quality. For example, anger is conquered by the weapon of love, and hatred by the weapon of forgiveness. The next practice for you to follow is *Kriya Yoga*, which is the combination of *shaucha* (purity), *swadhyaya* (study of scriptures), and *Ishwara pranidhana* (surrender to God). Each of these serves to thin out the negative impressions of your gross impurities.

Avidya (ignorance), *asmita* (egoism), *raga* (attachment), *dwesha* (hatred), and *abinivesha* (clinging to life) are the ruler impurities that cause various negative emotions and feelings in individuals and also manifest miseries of various types in nations and civilizations.

The impressions of these *kleshas* or afflictions exist in the following forms:

1. *Prasupta*—dormant
2. *Tanu*—thinned out or attenuated
3. *Udara*—expanded
4. *Vichhinna*—overpowered
5. *Dagdha*—burned up

By adopting *pratipaksha bhavana*, you thin out impressions of impurities. The opposite of these are *udara* impressions, and this occurs when you are fully controlled by negative emotions. Afflictions are considered to be *vicchinna*, or overpowered, when the impressions of both positive and negative states of mind exist in the

form of various encrustations subconsciously. Even though you are ruled by love, if hatred remains hidden within your heart, your loving nature becomes foreign.

The impressions that are thinned out are further destroyed by the practice of meditation on the Self and by the light of intuition. The knowledge of the Self dispels the darkness of ignorance. With the destruction of ignorance that feeds the growth of impure afflictions and impressions, you attain the state of *dagdha*—burned up state of impressions. These are the type of impressions that exist within Sages.

The ripples of irritability and anger assume the form of righteous indignation in the case of Sages, and are like lines drawn in water that are easier to be effaced and transcended. In the case of aspirants who have attained the state of *tanu* (the attenuated state of impressions of impurity), those waves of irritability are like lines drawn on wet earth. They can be destroyed with just a little effort by such advanced aspirants. But, in the case of those who have impurities that exist in an expanded state, these impressions are like carvings in stone—hard to remove or efface.

By the grace of Goddess Durga, the Destroyer, you gradually gain control of your mind and senses, and thin out impurities. By further emergence of the grace of the Goddess, the demonking of ignorance can be destroyed.

This series of destructions are accompanied by increasing revelations of the glories of higher life, and the course of destruction eventually terminates in the destruction of ignorance that separates the soul from the Absolute. When ignorance is destroyed, the soul merges in the Absolute and the highest goal of life is realized.

Therefore, let us pray to the Mother who destroys:

Oh Durga, do Thou destroy the impurities
Of my heart that separate me from Thee.

Be Thou gracious in releasing my soul
From the fetters of karmas.

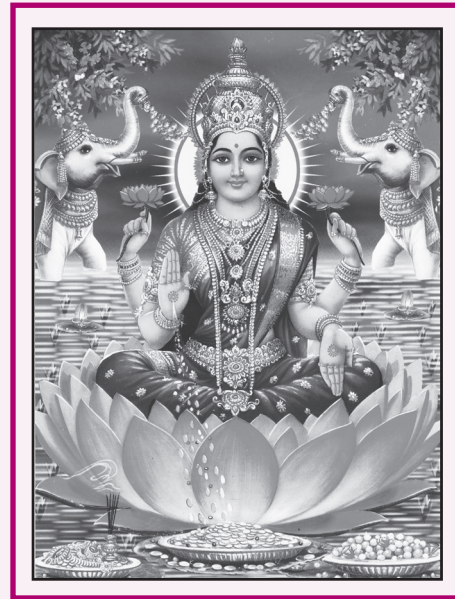
Oh Mother, many an obstacle has held my
soul down in the mire of the world process.

Do Thou remove these obstacles
 So that my heart may rest in peace,
 Devoid of the agitations caused by
 Anger, greed, hatred, lust, and pride.
 May my weaknesses be destroyed,
 May my diseases and maladies be eradicated.
 May the dark mansion of ignorance
 Be destroyed so that the radiant mansion
 Of the Soul may be revealed,
 And the glory of the Absolute will shine forth
 Through the firmament of my heart.
 May Thou destroy the vicious circle
 Of worldly existence,
 So I may be one with Thee forever and ever!



Prayer to Goddess Lakshmi

Oh Goddess Lakshmi, smile upon me.
 Cast Thy side-long glance unto me.
 Let every leaf of my garden turn into gold
 And every flower into a wish-yielding gem.
 I yearn to commune with all,
 To pour out the riches of life
 Into the hearts of every soul,
 And thus shall I construct
 A golden throne
 Out of the substance of faith and feeling,
 Devotion and universal love,
 For Thee to abide in my heart!



Prayer to Goddess Saraswati

Oh Goddess of endless knowledge,
 Shed the luster of Thy beauteous feet
 In the murmuring brooks of my heart,
 And may my heart be an
 Inexhaustible fountain
 Of poetry, philosophy, and arts,
 Of inspiration and intuitional vision
 To flood the hearts of men
 With the sublime feelings of Heaven,
 Oh Compassionate Mother!

