



Make Your Life A Festivity of Eternal Victory

By Swami Jyotirmayananda

VIJAYA DASHAMI, the Day of Victory, is the tenth and final day of Durga Puja, or the worship of God as Mother. In India it is celebrated with a great festivity. There are many ancient associations connected with this day. Sri Arjuna in the Mahabharata offered prayers to the Devi on this day and then attained victory. Lord Rama vanquished Ravana. The Devi is also a reminder of that.

From a spiritual point of view, life is a perpetual battle. You have been fighting day by day, birth after birth. As it is commonly said in Spanish, “*Estoy luchando.*”—“I am struggling.” Now and then there are victories in this battle of life, but every victory is followed by defeat, every success by failure. Therefore, it is important that a spiritual aspirant gain insight into the mystic victory that, once attained, will not be followed by defeat.

No situation in life can be permanent. Perhaps at one time you thought that success meant having a great deal of money. You worked hard year after year to make your fortune, and then you watched that fortune diminish due to circumstances beyond your control. Or, you might have labored to build up your muscles until one day you were able to lift a great weight, and you felt you were very strong

and had accomplished a great thing. But then you got sick, and after coughing and suffering from fever for a few days you found that you couldn’t even lift a small brick!

Again and again in life you find victory to be soon followed by defeat. If an insight into the transience of external achievements is gained, you commit yourself to attaining real victory, victory in which the spirit within you triumphs over matter. This is known as Self-realization—the victory for which every soul aspires.

In human life there is a constant struggle between spirit and matter. Whenever you yield to the senses and ignore the voice of reason, you are yielding to matter; and whenever you overcome the senses and the promptings of your lower nature, you are following the path of spirit. The Upanishads term these two paths as the paths of *preya* and *shreya*. You always have a choice—even in the simplest situations. For example, you can rise at four o’clock in the morning or stay sleeping. If you stay sleeping, matter has won; if you wake up, spirit has won.

The path of victory implies bringing about order in your personality. And what do we mean by order? The Upanishads offer a simile that will make this more understandable.

Your personality is like a chariot. The senses represent the horses, and the mind the reins that control the horses. Intellect drives the chariot, in which the soul is a passenger. There are two paths: that of pleasure (*preya*) and that of goodness (*shreya*). If the chariot is driven on the path of goodness, the soul will be led to Enlightenment, which is the goal.

If you establish an order in your personality that permits the senses to be controlled by the mind, and mind to be controlled by intellect, and the intellect, in turn, to bow down to the Divine Self, then your movement towards true victory is certain. However, if that order has not been established, you are as if riding in a chariot driven by a drunkard.

Sensing the absence of direction from their master, the horses take a notion to do what they want: one goes this way, another that way. You can see then that such a chariot would be very easily sidetracked, even wrecked. And that is the predicament most people live with day by day.

Devi Worship— A Sublime Plan for Promoting Harmony Within Your Personality

In the plan of Devi worship, the first three days are focused on the worship of Devi as Durga, the Destroyer. The second three days are focused on Goddess Mahalakshmi, the giver of prosperity, and the last three days on Goddess Mahasaraswati, the giver of Enlightenment.

Worshipping the Goddess is a most profound form of worship. In this worship, you are approaching God with the same tenderness and openness that a child feels when it approaches its mother. In the mysticism behind Devi Puja, God is like a thousand mothers put together. Whether you call God Father or Mother is immaterial, for Goddess and God mean the same thing. God is beyond all. In Devi Puja, however, you adopt the spiritual feeling of worshiping God as Mother.

Worship of Goddess Durga

WHEN WE worship Goddess Durga during the first three days of Mother Worship, we are trying to gain a philosophical insight into adversity—into the situations that appear negative in our lives. When something bad happens to you, when you have hopes that are frustrated, when you encounter baffling situations in spite of your best efforts, when some form of adversity seems to persist day by day—what type of attitude must you develop?

First, see that both adversity and prosperity are aspects of a Divine Plan that is meant to allow your soul to evolve. There is nothing intrinsically cruel in this Divine creation. On the contrary, there is intrinsic compassion.

You may ask that if the Divine Mother is so compassionate, why should She allow anyone to suffer? The answer to this comes through an illustration. Suppose you developed an obstruction in your intestines that had to be removed if you were to continue living. You wouldn't open your eyes as you lie on the operating table and ask, "O surgeon, how can you be so cruel as to cut me with that sharp scalpel?" Rather, you would consider



the knife a blessed sight, and later on you would thank the surgeon.

Much in the same manner, adversity is a kind of incision that will remove anything unwanted in your personality. It is a purifying form of austerity brought to you by the hands of Goddess Durga, the Divine Destroyer. By learning to view adversity as austerity, you are worshipping Durga.

As you learn to feel the presence of the Divine Mother behind every development, you do not become insecure during situations that seem adverse or turbulent. A story is told about a general who was traveling on a ship with his wife. Suddenly a storm burst forth and the ocean became violent, the waves crashing over the ship with tremendous force; yet even so the general remained calm, for he was a devotee of God and had a deep religious understanding.

On the other hand, the wife was very frightened. “How can you be calm in this situation, when the whole ship could capsize in the next instant?” Instead of giving her a direct answer, he unsheathed his sword and put the point of it at her throat. But instead of being terrified, the wife smiled, “What is this? What are you doing?”

“Aren’t you afraid,” he asked, “to see the point of my sword pressed tightly against your throat?”

“How could I be afraid? I know you wouldn’t hurt me.”

“In the same way, my dear wife, you must know that God is the Beloved of your soul and that whatever situation He presents to you, He never intends to hurt you. If you developed that trust in God you would relax at all times, no matter what difficult conditions the world presents.”

AS THIS story shows, during all situations you must remain relaxed, with the understanding that the Divine Self is the Ocean of Sweetness and that you are enfolded by the Divine Mother. Although you must put forth effort to remedy any adverse situation, if adversity persists beyond your control, you should remain poised and calm.

Suppose a mother puts on a terrifying mask and then shows her face to her child. The child is at first afraid, but the moment he realizes who is behind the mask he smiles. Much in the same manner, the moment you have gained the insight that the world is planned for your spiritual evolution, that your soul is getting a Divine education, you smile. But this is not an ordinary smile—it is your soul smiling! As a result, a deep internal relaxation arises. Through such a balanced and devotional attitude towards your adversity, you are truly worshipping Durga.

Further, such an attitude is a key to the most powerful spiritual attainment. As you allow every adversity to be an opportunity for you to practice austerity, you become endowed with immense willpower. And as you cross over an adversity, you realize you are a changed person, having been highly enriched by it. You are like the moon that emerges out of dark clouds, shining brighter than ever.

Worship of Goddess Durga through ritual and through the repetition of her Divine Name has great merit. But of even greater merit is worshipping her through your sublime attitudes and actions. If you go on repeating, “*Om Dum Durgayai Namah*,” but do not handle adversity correctly—if you begin to act like a Destroyer yourself due to frustration, anger and grief!—then your worship is defective.

The next point in the worship of Durga is a conscious plan to reduce and destroy the gross impurities of the mind, such as, hatred, greed, agitation, jealousy, and pride. The easy way to do it is to continue performing actions in the spirit of worship of God.

Do not keep your mind empty. Do not sit down and try to discover the problems of your mind in hopes of chasing them away, for you shall not succeed. Rather, keep your mind busy in a selfless project that gives you expansion. That is called Karma Yoga. It is actually the most important aspect of the worship of Durga, because if you continue to use your energy rightly, the impurities of the mind will gradually dwindle.

As you destroy gross impurities in your personality through the worship of Durga, Divine qualities—known as *Daivi Sampat*—begin to arise. The flowering of these Divine qualities within your heart is evidence of the grace of Goddess Lakshmi.



Worship of Goddess Lakshmi

DURING THE second three days of Mother Worship, we direct our worship to Goddess Lakshmi, the Goddess of prosperity. In a broad sense, Lakshmi *puja* implies developing a profound spiritual insight into how to handle prosperity.

If a prosperous situation comes about, you must consider it a Divine blessing. Prosperity should not make you imbalanced and conceited. The moment you become prosperous you ought not to start showing yourself off to others, boasting, “Look, I’m a success. But you little people, where are you now?” If you do so, you are insulting Goddess Lakshmi. She brought you prosperity so that you might become more relaxed and discover more of your deeper Self, not so that you would build up vanity.

Kabira once said, “*Dukha me sumiran sab karai sukha me karai na koy; jo sukha me sumiran karai to dukha kahe ko hoy.*” —“Everyone remembers God when afflicted with misery; if one were to remember Him during prosperity, there would be no misery in one’s life.”

Every time a person experiences misery or adversity, his mind turns to God and he prays for Divine assistance. And he develops an inner feeling that he will always worship God if only he could get out of that adversity. But the moment the adversity passes and prosperity comes, he forgets God.

In prosperous conditions, one’s mind is busy creating so many ideas about what to do, planning for the future, making oneself more and more comfortable. Thus you can see that handling prosperity is a tremendous art. Therefore, whenever you are prosperous, whenever you are placed in a comfortable situation, or whenever you feel that there is no load and the problem has been resolved, try to intensify your practice of *japa* (repetition of mantra) and meditation. That is the time when you should meditate even more, for then your meditation will give you spiritual joy.

Most of the time people pray and meditate when they are frustrated, when they experience disharmony in human relations, or when they have quarrelled. They will then close their doors and pray and do lots of *japa*. But under those circumstances their mind is under stress. To most people, prayer, *japa*, and meditation are associated with negativity. So the moment you see someone sit down to pray or do *japa* you ask if something bad has happened to him. It should not be so; rather, these spiritual practices should be an expression of joy.

Further, if you learn the art of handling prosperity properly, your mind will not be distracted, for Goddess Lakshmi is the destroyer of Mahishasura, the demon that represents the spirit of distraction. Thus, your prayer and meditation will become more one-pointed and fulfilling.

Another aspect of handling prosperity is not to let it taint you with selfishness. In other words, you

must allow others to be benefited by your wealth, fame, or power. Many people become obsessed with prosperity, feeling that they should have more and more just for security's sake. With some people this obsession follows them to the grave. There are many people in their eighties who live to make more and more money for themselves and see it multiply in the bank; even people in their nineties do this, knowing full well that they may not be alive for long to enjoy it. Such a selfish preoccupation with material prosperity can never give the sense of satisfaction that the human heart craves.

You are utilizing prosperity in the right way if you use your resources to secure more *satsanga* (good association) for yourself and others. Let your prosperity put you in a position where you will be able to elevate your mind, where you can mingle with people who think of the higher Self, where you can hear talks about God, and where you can understand the subtlety of the Self. To be in the company of people who are elevated is a rare privilege in the world.

Most people are devoid of *satsanga*—and it is a tremendous loss. Every city has its high society crowd who regularly attend one meaningless gathering after another. Days and months pass by, but the essence of all their chit-chats is nothing, for they say the same things again and again. In such situations a person is insulting the Goddess of prosperity. He may remain materially prosperous, but inwardly he becomes shallow, discordant, without peace and security—and that is not prosperity. For prosperity to be true, congenial, external situations must be accompanied by profound internal harmony.

A higher aspect of prosperity has to do with attaining Divine qualities, such as contentment, humility, absence of vanity, control over irritability. In this process you should act like a miser; in other words, you should not let go of even a penny's worth of your spiritual values. You should not justify your weaknesses by thinking, "What's the harm if for one minute I become agitated? Or what's the harm if I remain full of pride for just one day?"

If, as a worshiper of Lakshmi, you are counting pennies, you should be extremely generous in giving them away for the good of others. However, if you are counting spiritual values, you should count them like a miser. Don't let a single opportunity slip by. Do not justify wastage of spiritual values even in the smallest measure.



Worship of Goddess Saraswati

THE FINAL STAGE of Mother Worship is devoted to worship of Goddess Saraswati. In its broad sense, this worship involves learning the spiritual art of handling your speech, your talents, and your knowledge.

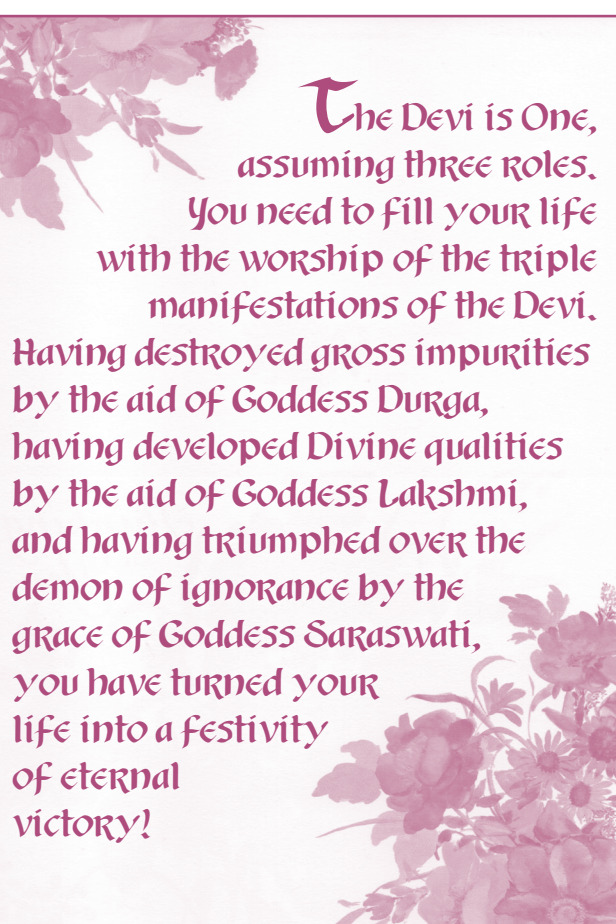
Goddess Saraswati is the presiding deity of speech, talent, and knowledge. Hence, if you do not control your tongue even in the most provocative situations, you are turning away from worshiping the Goddess. If you can control your speech even in the most vexing situations, then you have se-

cured the grace of Goddess Saraswati. The result will be that your words will have immense power. Through your words you can help others in a most dynamic manner. But if you misuse your words, they become meaningless.

Moreover, words are just spoken thoughts. If you tolerate negative thoughts or ill will towards others into your mind, you are disrespectful towards Goddess Saraswati.

Similarly, if you are talented and you become proud and conceited because of it, you are insulting the Goddess. Rather, use your talents with humility in behalf of others, knowing those talents to be the result of Divine Grace.

If you worship Goddess Saraswati rightly, you will prosper. From a spiritual point of view, your knowledge will continue to grow and there will be expansion in your consciousness. As you listen to the teachings of the scriptures and reflect and meditate upon "Who am I?" the grace of the Goddess begins to unfold more and more, leading you eventually to Enlightenment.



**The Devi is One,
assuming three roles.
You need to fill your life
with the worship of the triple
manifestations of the Devi.
Having destroyed gross impurities
by the aid of Goddess Durga,
having developed Divine qualities
by the aid of Goddess Lakshmi,
and having triumphed over the
demon of ignorance by the
grace of Goddess Saraswati,
you have turned your
life into a festivity
of eternal
victory!**

PRAYER TO DEVI – THE COSMIC MOTHER

*Thou art so near and yet so far away.
Thou art the thinker of my thoughts,
the prompter of my feelings.
Thou art the breath of my breath.
How long shall you keep a veil of delusive
desires between Thee and me?
When shall I be maddened to see
Thy exquisite beauty steal into my heart
while meditating in the morning hours
when the gentle breeze blows?
When shall I be intoxicated to drink the
nectar of Thy affection and love,
a drop of which may fall in the hours of
meditation in the tranquility of the evening
when the sun is shrouded in the
ruddy cup of nature's wine?
When shall this body become Thy Body,
my soul Thy Soul and my will, Thy Will?
When shall I be Thyself?*

*Be benevolent,
Oh Mother!
Ages have rolled on.
Many births have I taken,
many experiences have I gone through,
many afflictions have I tided over...
yet, Thou has hidden Thyself
behind my sorrows and smiles.
Though very near to me,
Thou has concealed
Thyself in the passing
names and forms of the world.
Have mercy,
Oh Mother,
I cannot bear this separation
from Thee any longer!
Let me realize that
I am One with Thee!*