



Delight in the Shower of Devi's Grace

Life is a perpetual battle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness that operate within one's personality. That battle is of great spiritual importance, for without it there can be no growth.

The tenth day of Mother Worship (*Navaratri Puja*), known as *Vijayadashami*, celebrates the victory of Devi, the Goddess, over terrible demons. This victory, or *vijaya*, represents the triumph of spirit over matter, of good over evil, of positive over negative in the life of every individual. By the grace of Devi, every individual will ultimately triumph in this battle of life and attain the state of supreme victory: Self-realization.

Worshipping God as Mother

God, Who is neither male nor female, can be worshipped either as father or as mother, according to the inclination of one's mind and the traditions in which one has been raised. However, worshipping God as mother offers a greater range of spiritual

feeling because of the special bond between a mother and child. That type of closeness, of intimacy, must be developed if one wants to attain the greatest victory in life—God-realization.

Worship of Goddess Durga

The first three days of Mother Worship focus on Goddess Durga, the aspect of Devi that destroys *mala*, the gross impurities within one's personality. By worshipping Goddess Durga, one gains insight into these impurities (anger, greed, hatred, jealousy, etc.) and into the art of removing them.

If these sentiments are not removed, they can become uncontrolled and cause one to be in a constant state of agitation as time passes by. Thus, it is very important for every thoughtful person to learn the art of handling the mind as early as possible in life. By doing so, one secures greater peace and harmony and avoids many of the painful repercussions of old age.

It is said, “The wind howls and howls, but eventually stops. The uncontrolled tongues of elders, however, howl and howl for nothing and never stop.” Unless *mala*, or gross impurities of the mind, are worked upon when you have the youthful energy to do so, you may face increasing frustration as life’s burdens take a toll on your undisciplined mind.

Behind the Mask of Adversity

As life flows on, prosperity and adversity alternate constantly. Just as there cannot be day without night, there cannot be prosperity without adversity. Although both are needed for your spiritual growth, it is adversity that is actually the greater teacher. Therefore, it is important to look upon adversity from a philosophical point of view and learn to handle it well.

When you are confronted by adverse conditions, develop the feeling that God in the form of the all-compassionate Mother is within your heart, that the Divine hand is guiding you. With patience and faith, know that even this will pass away.

If a mother puts on a horrible mask when playing with her child, the child becomes frightened. But when the child sees the mother’s gentle, smiling face behind the mask, the fear gives way to joy.

Much in the same way, adversity is like a frightening mask. When you understand the Divine purpose behind it, the sting is not as painful, not as bitter. With philosophical insight you may actually convert adversity into something gentle and sweet.

Reflect on the manner in which Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, prayed to Krishna: “Oh Krishna, please continue sending adversity to me, for then my mind turns to You.” Of course, from a practical point of view, one need not pray for adversity; this world inevitably gives lots of adversity. Rather, pray for the understanding that will enable you to handle your adversity properly and for the wisdom to feel the sweet touch of the Divine hand in all circumstances.

Learn the art of applying a philosophical attitude to day-to-day frustrations. For example, when you see things that you have painstakingly built up suddenly break down, try to understand the illusion behind the expectations you had. Although you may

not perceive their illusoriness, should those expectations not be in harmony with your evolution from the Divine point of view, they will not be satisfied.

Therefore, when you are confronted with a frustrating situation, don’t become broken-hearted. Rather understand that all situations you encounter have a necessary place in the Divine plan and are intended to help you in your spiritual evolution, not to harm you.

Learn to pray to the Divine Mother not to make life easy, not to lessen your load, but to give you strength so that you can ride over obstacles in an effortless manner. Pray that your strength be increased to that of ten thousand elephants, so that whatever load you are carrying will feel light as a feather. When one is weak, just a feather feels like a burden. So, aspire for the internal strength to face your problems with courage and a sense of challenge.

Similarly, when you look beyond your own life and view developments in the world at large, you may despair to see lots of destruction and strife everywhere. However, with a deeper understanding, you recognize the Divine plan behind it all. Thus, do your very best to promote peace and harmony, but, at the same time, do not allow yourself to be overwhelmed by the problems of the world. Those problems ultimately belong to God, not you; they are ultimately God’s headache, not yours. Your own headaches are quite sufficient for you to bear.

In maintaining this spiritually mature attitude to your own problems and those of society, you are worshipping Goddess Durga in the most profound manner. In so doing, you have taken a major step forward in fighting the battle of life.

Insight into Action

Another most important aspect of worshipping the Devi lies in developing insight into *Karma Yoga*, the philosophy of action. Every situation in life requires some type of action or work that one has to do. Acting in the spirit of *Karma Yoga* implies that you do your work as an offering to God, in the form of worship.

If you are of a devotional nature and have been given a job in a temple or a church, then regardless of the type of work — be it sweeping

the floor or taking care of the flowers in the shrine — you will do it with an abundance of Divine feeling. Similarly, learn to see the whole world as a temple and do whatever work comes to you as a form of worship.

When actions are performed with the spirit of love, you hardly feel as if you are working. For example, on the happy occasion of a child's wedding, parents work so hard preparing for this family festivity, but it is such a joy that they think about nothing else.

Similarly, it is of great importance that you learn to delight in whatever action you are doing. Do not develop a sense of contradiction when you work, allowing thoughts such as: "Why should I bother to sweep the walks? The leaves will only fall again!" Or, "Why should I clean the office? It will only get all cluttered up again!"

Don't question why you have to do things in this world; to do so reflects a lack of philosophy. You don't question why you eat, knowing very well that you will become hungry again. You eat because you enjoy eating, because you need nourishment. By the same token, you should do your work for the joy of doing it, and for spiritual nourishment.

Day by day, flowers are joyfully gathered in a temple as an offering, even though they will wither away. Just like an offering of flowers, your work must continue day by day.

Most people view work with the wrong philosophy. They perceive it as a form of labor, and eagerly await the time when they can retire. They develop the illusion of how wonderful it would be to sit back every day with their legs outstretched and watch the sunset, or simply sit on a rocking chair and watch the people go by. They don't realize what a miserable situation that really would be. Actually, what they would be doing is just waiting for death.

Rather, work in itself should be viewed as something joyous, as a form of worship, as an opportunity to serve God within all. Therefore, perform your duties with the insight that the Divine Durga is with you at all times. Delight in serving Her in everything that you do, with the joyous feeling that She is ever-present, helping you to overcome your obstacles and to handle prosperity and adversity, gain and loss, with a balanced mind.

Worship of Goddess Lakshmi

At this stage of spiritual evolution, a greater aspect of the Goddess unfolds, and that is Mahalakshmi. Goddess Lakshmi is the giver of prosperity and the remover of *vikshepa*, the distractions of the mind caused by the subtle desires of the unconscious.

In the story told in the *Devi Mahatmyam*, Lakshmi destroys a demon called Mahishasur, who used to manifest in the form of a great buffalo. Buffaloes are such highly distracted creatures that they are not delighted in the least if you sing the most melodious tunes into their ears. Similarly, if your mind is distracted you will not be receptive to the music of Divine philosophy, the message of Liberation.

The role of Goddess Lakshmi is to cause the unfolding of devotion in your personality, which removes distraction of mind. You learn to practice devotional meditation and *japa* (repetition of mantra). These are powerful techniques and should not be taken lightly; they bring a tremendous change in your personality.

The secret of success lies in practicing these spiritual disciplines every day, but in a balanced way. You are not required to meditate for hours on end, just half an hour or even fifteen minutes will suffice. In the morning when you wake up, let your mind flow to the Divine Self. At night before you go to sleep, let your mind flow to God within you, to the Mother of mothers.

Learn the art of repeating mantras. A mantra is any Divine formula, any Divine name. You may choose to repeat *Om Sri Ramaya Namah*, *Om Sri Krishnaya Namah*, *Om Sri Maha Lakshmyai Namah*, *Om Namah Shivaya*, or simply *Om*, or the Divine name of any Deity that inspires you. Regardless of which *mantra* you choose, you should develop the habit of repeating that mantra whenever you can throughout the day. For by doing so, the distractions of your mind begin to diminish, and true prosperity begins to manifest.

True prosperity is a blend of inner spiritual advancement and prosperity in your environment. From a philosophical point of view, you are not separate

from the world around you. Rather, the world around you is a form of projection of your inner movement. If you are advancing spiritually, your personality is becoming relaxed and integrated. Thus, externally you will project vibrations of harmony and peace.

Although the external world is a relative world and cannot be made absolutely perfect, you can, to a great extent, continue enhancing peace in your environment. If you are enduring, forgiving, patient, and compassionate, then naturally you will be able to get along with people, you will be able to handle bigger projects, and you will become prosperous.

On the other hand, you may ignore the value of internal and external harmony and dream only of attaining material prosperity by winning the lottery and becoming a millionaire. If you assume that all your problems would then be solved, you are under a tremendous illusion. Actually, if that ever happened, it would not only cause you to become completely distracted, it would give you more problems.

If you are enjoying sleep now, you would not enjoy sleep then. If you have a warm and secure feeling with the people around you now, you would not have it then. You would become so suspicious of others that you would be fearful unless you were surrounded by bodyguards.

Therefore, you must realize that prosperity in itself is neither good nor bad. What is important is how you handle the prosperity that comes to you. Under prosperous conditions, can you keep the clarity of your intellect intact? Unfortunately, many people become extremely egocentric when they become prosperous. They become overly elated and develop a superiority complex. Oftentimes one even becomes obsessed with proving their greatness to all those who had mistreated him, and fantasizes about the various ways in which to do so.

Some people get completely distracted by their prosperity and behave like children. They get so carried away that they don't know whether they are coming or going. They run from one party to another, from one hotel to another, from one country to another.

This pertains to human relationships as well. A man who suddenly attains wealth or fame may decide that he and his wife are no longer compatible, and

so he bids her farewell. He thinks that because he has money, he can buy a new family anywhere in the world. He thinks money can buy love, friends, perhaps even new parents! He is in such a state of mental illusion that he thinks he can achieve anything by merely waving a dollar bill.

If prosperity makes you conceited, then not only are you not qualified for it, but you are also being disrespectful to Goddess Lakshmi. There is a saying, "*Namante phalino vrikshah*" — "When a tree is full of fruit, it bows down." The implication of this saying is that when you have true prosperity, you become humble.

Thus, adversity and prosperity should never stiffen your neck nor cause rigidity in your spine. You should be flexible in both conditions. If there is adversity you must develop humility. If there is prosperity, you must develop even more humility.

By handling adversity with wisdom and insight, you are pleasing Durga Devi, Who promotes the movement towards prosperity. By properly handling prosperity, you are pleasing Goddess Lakshmi. Incurring the pleasure of Lakshmi means that you will be in a position to enjoy a higher form of wealth, wealth that cannot be compared with anything in this world: contentment, fearlessness, humility. When you have these great virtuous qualities, you have discovered the greatest treasure, and it is within your very self. This attainment is the result of the grace of Goddess Lakshmi.

Worship of *Goddess Saraswati*

The grace of Goddess Lakshmi leads you to the worship of Goddess Saraswati, the giver of knowledge. The highest form of knowledge — that which liberates you from the bondage of the world-process — will be bestowed upon you when you have removed the third obstacle in the process of spiritual advancement. That obstacle is *avarana*, or veiling of your true identity by ignorance, or *avidya*.

Recall that *mala*, or gross impurities, is the first obstacle, and by the grace of Durga you remove it. The second is *vikshepa*, distraction of mind, and by

the grace of Lakshmi, you obliterate the distractions and thus possess a more poised mind and greater inner fulfillment. Now, by the grace of Saraswati, the veil of ignorance is gradually lifted until you view the splendor of your Self and realize, “I am *Brahman*!”

Insight into Knowledge

Knowledge has two aspects: academic knowledge and spiritual knowledge, and both may give rise to pride. A research scholar in a specialized field of science may have acquired extensive academic knowledge. He may have received a big certificate that is hung high on the wall of his office, causing all heads to rise. All this wonderful recognition makes him feel that he is so great. But, if he looks within himself, he will see that in spite of all his achievements, he still has the same egocentricity, the same vanities, the same irritability. Therefore, academic knowledge, certificates, and impressive titles do not transform one’s personality.

So, one should not become conceited about the knowledge he has gained. If he does, he is insulting Goddess Saraswati.

The advanced knowledge that transforms one’s personality is intuitional knowledge, called *para-vidya*. It is by the grace of the Goddess that *avarana* is overcome, that the veil of ignorance is lifted, that one attains intuitional knowledge and is led to the ultimate goal—Liberation.

In the mystical story we study during Mother Worship or *Navaratri Puja*, *avarana* is represented by two great demons, Shumbha and Nishumbha. These two demons symbolize the illusions of I-ness and mine-ness and the Devi attains ultimate victory by defeating and destroying them.

From incarnation to incarnation the “I” within you has shifted. In your previous embodiment you were an entirely different person, yet you say of your present embodiment, “This is me.” In your previous embodiment you gathered possessions with an intense feeling of “mine-ness.” You were proud of your home, your possessions, your accomplishments. But when the time came for you to leave that embodiment and enter into another, all those possessions and accomplishments were discarded.

Thus, it is important to understand that even today you are not this body, and the things that you call “mine” are not really yours. By rising beyond these illusions of I-ness and mine-ness, you break the veil of ignorance and, thereby, realize, “I am one with the Divine Self.” That is the highest knowledge. Once you have it, you become truly fulfilled.

Share Your Talents

Artistic talent in music, painting, acting, etc. is a blessing of Goddess Saraswati and, thus, should never make you conceited. Rather, it should make you more humble. By excelling in artistic endeavors, you are actually discovering the glory of intellect that shines within you. All creative movements allow you to discover your deeper self and, in so doing, you become the worshipper of Goddess Saraswati.

Whatever knowledge or talent you have should be shared with others. Why acquire knowledge just for yourself? If you worked hard to learn music, would you stay in a closed room and sing just for yourself? Or if you became an artist, would you paint just for yourself and then discard the paintings? If you do not share your talents generously, you will neither succeed nor prosper in your artistic field and your attainments will not be fulfilling.

If you wish to see your personality blossom, you must go beyond the limits of your ego and use your knowledge to serve others. If you are self-centered, egocentric, then all your knowledge and talent will stagnate. You will not receive the grace of Goddess. It is when you share your talents that the grace of Goddess flows. Therefore, teach and share whatever knowledge you have with others. In so doing, your own wealth increases. The more you give, the more you receive, and the more internally enriched you become.

Reverence the Gift of Speech

Another great aspect of worshipping Goddess Saraswati is the control of speech. Goddess Saraswati is the presiding deity of the tongue, and you must view the words you speak as an expression of worship. If you speak in a reckless manner, you are not worshipping the Goddess.

Because the Divine Self is within you, you are as if in a temple at all times. Therefore, everything you do should be sanctified by an awareness of perpetually worshipping the Divine Self within.

Learn About Your Deeper Self

The advanced method of worshipping Goddess Saraswati involves learning about your deeper, essential Self and becoming fascinated by that Self. This is done by coming into *satsanga*, or spiritual association, and listening to the teachings of the scriptures with deep attention and devotion.

The movement towards your deeper Self should be an engrossing project. People who are interested in the value of gold go to the stock market every day, sit around the computers, and become engrossed in watching the numbers go up and down. Certainly, the project of attaining the wealth of Liberation should become far more engrossing than merely securing gold. As a true worshipper of Devi, you should become fascinated by the teachings of the scriptures and eagerly strive to learn as much as you can about your deeper Self.

This movement towards Self-knowledge should be practiced every day with regularity. It is surely an error to say to yourself, "Right now I have no time for meditation. I'm busy establishing a business. Later on, perhaps in three years, I'll go to *satsanga* more sincerely and meditate more intensively."

No matter where you are, no matter what you are doing, create some time for your spiritual practices. The time you create for relaxing your mind, for turning within yourself, will save lots of time in the future. Otherwise, the time that you cannot spare today will grow into lots of time wasted in misery, sickness, frustration, and sorrow. It is, therefore, very wise to give a little time and attention day by day to spiritual disciplines and to the harmonization of your personality.

Profound worship of Goddess Saraswati implies listening, reflection, and meditation. Through this three-fold practice, your mind is rendered calm and clear, and it reveals that the real You is the universal Self. You discover that you are not just a wave in the ocean, you are the ocean! That awareness, "I am the ocean-like Self," is not merely an intel-

lectual experience, but an intuitional experience. In that experience, the melody of eternity resounds constantly within your heart.

One of the most effective and inspiring paths to the attainment of that experience lies in the perpetual worship of the Divine Mother in her three aspects: Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati. Backed up by the Divine grace of the Devi, strive to remove the impurities of your personality and cultivate Divine virtues, learn to handle your adversity and prosperity with strength and insight, overcome mental distraction and promote intuitional knowledge by meditation, repetition of mantra, prayer, reflection and *satsanga*.

If you live your life in this way, you will feel the presence of the Goddess with you at all times as you fight the battle of life. As She leads you from victory to victory, you become a source of joy for all people around you. You exert a subtle positive influence on the world and so many are benefited.

As a result of this profound worship, you will attain ultimate victory: the realization that "I alone exist. The worshipper and the Worshipped, the devotee and the Mother Who is being worshipped are one."

Once you become one with the Divine Self, there is nothing more. You have attained Liberation from all battles of the world-process. That is the highest attainment, a victory that is not followed by defeat, a victory that puts an end to the cycle of birth and death forever.

May the Divine Mother bless you with insight, strength, prosperity, understanding and victory!

