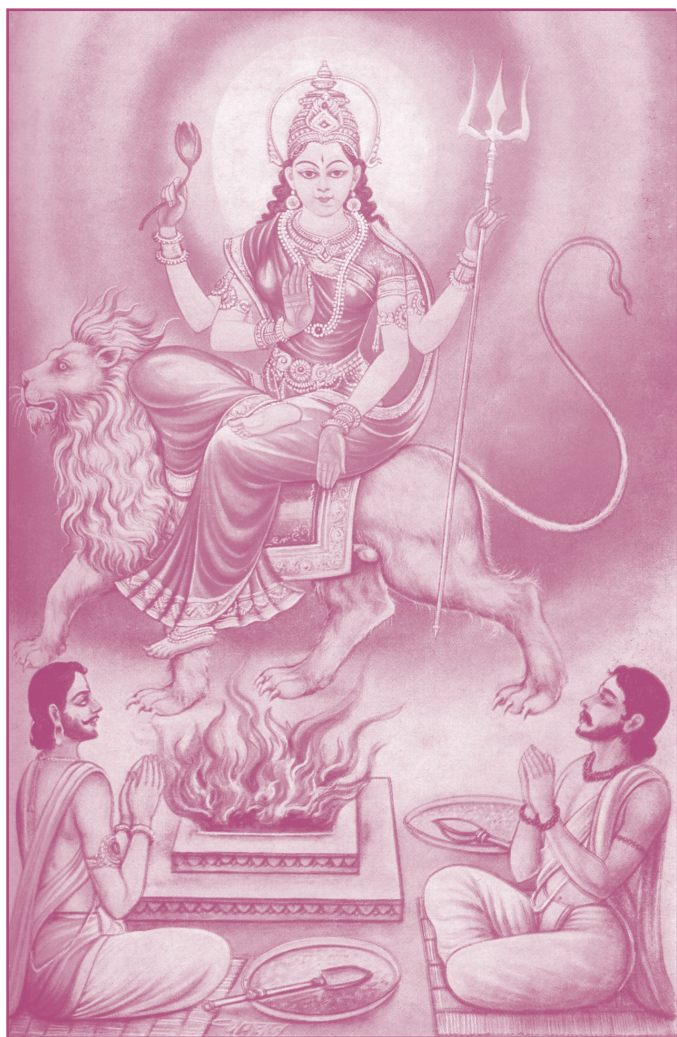




In Durga Saptashati, the scripture that glorifies the Devi, the all-compassionate Divine Mother appears as a mighty force of destruction in the most terrible battles. How can that all-loving Devi be such an awesome destroyer?

The demons that appear in the colorful stories of the scripture represent the forces of darkness hidden in every human being in the form of attachment, hatred, pride, conceit, egoism, jealousy, greed, passion and the many vices that arise out of ignorance. The gods are the forces of light operating through every being in the form of love, compassion, patience, purity, renunciation, fearlessness, detachment, wisdom and the freedom from egoism and selfishness.

The scripture reminds us that life is to be viewed as a constant battle taking place within



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the heart of every individual, a battle in which the forces of light are contending with the forces of darkness. To fight that battle, the spirit must draw Divine energy from the Goddess to overcome the dark forces of illusion that limit the mind and bring about contraction in consciousness.

In its unique way, Navaratri Puja (Mother Worship) depicts the long course of spiritual evolution in the life of the *sadhaka* (spiritual aspirant) and reveals the way in which the Divine Mother leads the soul to the ultimate victory over the demoniac qualities that oppose one's spiritual efforts. 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 Self that shines in the cave of the heart.

To help the *sadhaka* accomplish these noble goals, Devi, in Her three aspects, tirelessly destroys all obstacles on his path. As Durga she destroys the gross obstacles (*mala*, or impurities) that manifest in the physical plane; as Lakshmi she destroys the subtle obstacles (*vikshepa*, or distractions) that exist in the subconscious and unconscious mind, and as Saraswati she destroys the subtlest obstacle (*avidya* or ignorance)—the mystic veil obscuring the identity of the individual soul with the Universal Divinity.