

Message for Navaratri

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First of all we should know the significance of Navaratri. Here we talk of the victory of the divine mother against evil forces like asuras.

In the south, we consider the reading of those authentic hymns (stotras) of divine mother like Devi Mahatmyam otherwise called Durga Saptasathi (this contains about 700 slokas). This can be recited in this period. In case people who cannot do that much, the eleventh chapter (adhyaya) is special – especially for removal of ailments, diseases and similar problems.

In Bengal, they give importance to allied stotras like Kunjika Stotra and Devi Sooktam that comes in the preface of Devi Mahatmyam. The latter contain the famous stanzas like ‘Ya Devi Sarva Bhootheshu ----’ (which also are included in the 5th Chapter of the main text)

During this period many people call some pundits and request a daily talk on Devi Bhagavatham. Just like Srimad Bhagavatham, there is also a Devi Bhagavatham. However, Devi Bhagavatham in content and teachings, it vastly different. Srimad Bhagavatham is the quintessence of all Vedas.

The glory of Beejaksharas (sacred syllables) of Devi is contained in Devi Mahatmyam [or also known as Durga Saptasati]. It speaks of various anecdotes. It is a really beautiful allegory with many rich incidents and events around the Devi. In one incident, in the final battle, one of the demon brothers comes to the Devi as a messenger and says, "Look here Devi, we have collected from this world all the gems of high value and kept them in our treasure. The one which has been left out is you, the gem amongst the ladies. You can marry me or my brother, you can choose between us." The Devi responds "Either you should kill me or be equal to me in strength. I am very sorry that you have to fight with me if you want to possess me." In another beautiful section, the mother, who was fighting all alone with the evil forces, out of herself creates so many yoginis around her and also Bala Tripurasundari, Kali and Durga. Then, one of the asura (demon) comments, "It is easy for you, you have thousands to support". The Devi replies, "What are you saying, except me there is no one else." If you worship the mother as the ultimate authority, ultimately there is only one. We call the divine as per our choice but the ultimate entity is one and the same.

It is better to do Lalita sahasranama parayana (recitation) on these days of Navaratri. Lalita sahasranama [thousand names of Lalita] as given by the Devi herself are very good. The vagvadini devatas were unable to state the glory of Divine Mother and it is believed that the Divine mother herself chanted her glories through these devatas.

According to customs in some families, Soundarya Lahari (written by Adi Shankaracharya) that contains about hundred slokas can be read as well.

When we are unable to do divine acts, then the alternative that has been pointed out to us by the Adi Shankara is to divinise all acts of yours. For instance, if you prepare a cup of coffee for yourself, you offer it first to the Lord's photo which is nearby and then mentally you offer it to him "Lord I offer it to you first". "Let it be your Prasad that I am taking". Then it becomes a Prasad. An ordinary coffee thus becomes divinised.

Similarly if when we live with our parents, whenever we are going out, we tell our parents that I will be out for an hour, etc. Why cannot we tell the Lord in the same way, "Lord, please excuse me, I am going out for an hour or so." Treat him as our own and then every ordinary action becomes divine or divinised. A beautiful sloka to this effect has been written by Shankara in Sivananda Lahari and also in Soundarya Lahari. In the Soundarya Lahari it reads,

*Japo jalpah shilpam sakalam api mudra-virachana
Gatih pradaksinya-kramanam asanady'ahuti-vidhih;
Pranamah samvesah sukham akilam atmarpana-drsa
Saparya-paryayas tava bhavatu yan me vilasitam.*

Let everything be your saparya [the worship done to the holy mother].

A question often comes that I am not able to do any divine acts like doing a japa, then, what shall I do. In this case, one can pray, "O Lord, whatever I talk to people from morning to evening, please treat them as your japa. The various gestures that I will be making while talking to people, let them be the mudras [the divine gestures with the two palms in various manners]. The walk I make while going to the office or the market or to the bathroom inside the house, may this please be considered circumambulation of the divine mother. I do not have separate time to perform any fire sacrifices and pour oblations dedicated to you. Whatever food I take during lunch or dinner etc. may please be considered as the oblations offered to you. My falling in the bed at night for going to sleep may please be considered as the prostrations made to you."

Thus, routine actions can be divinised and be taken as the substitutes for the divine acts.

Thus if you are not able to do any special worship of the divine mother during the navaratri period, may we divinise all our acts by dedicating them all to the divine mother's lotus feet.

Happy Dusshera

****Hari Om ****

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