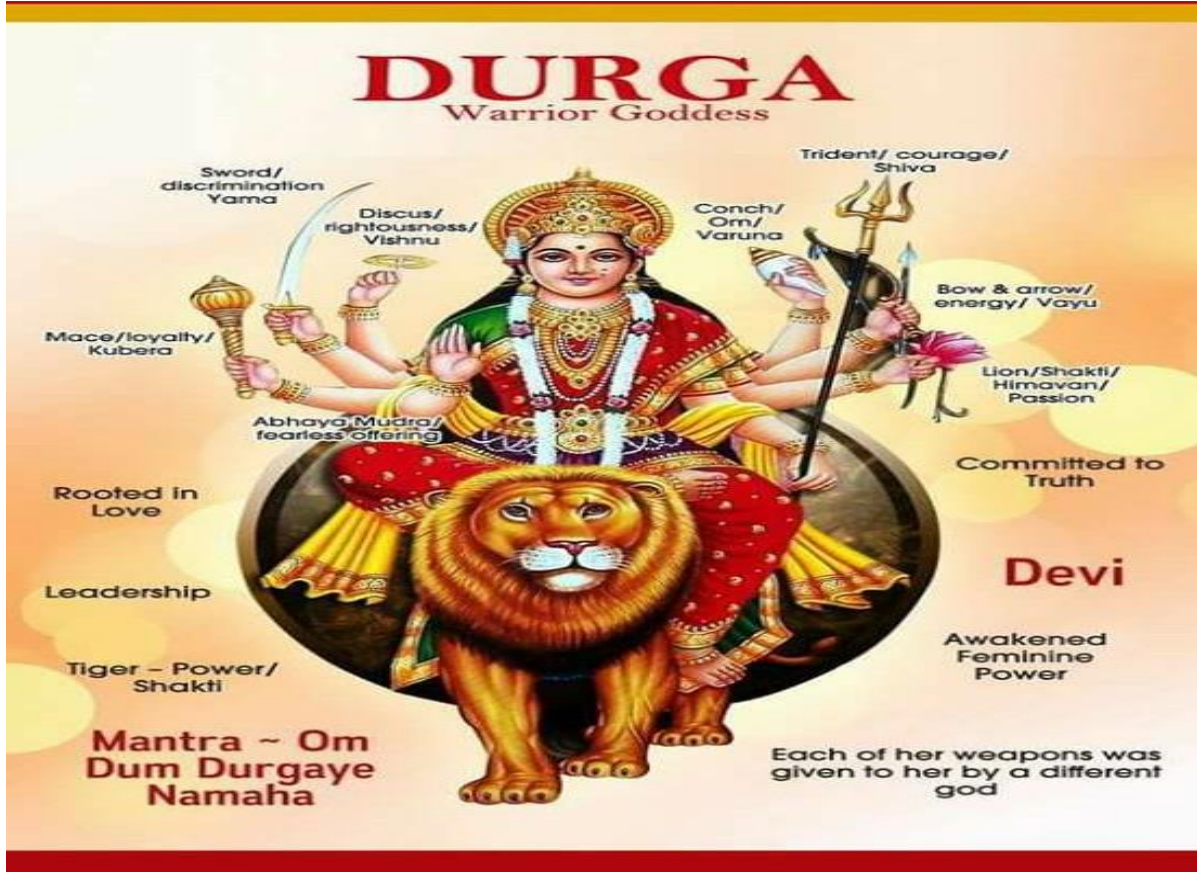


NAVARATRI



सर्वमंगलमांगल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थसाधिके ।
शरण्ये त्र्यम्बके गौरि नारायणि नमोऽस्तुते ।

Sri Durga Saptasloki

Auspiciousness of all things auspicious!
O consort of Shiva, fulfiller of all our goals!
Our only refuge! O three-eyed Gauri!
O Narayani! Our salutations to you!

The word Navaratri originates from Sanskrit, *Ratri* means Night and *Nava* means Nine. Thus the term Navaratri means nine nights or bringing in *nava* or newness to *ratri* (night), the darkness in our lives. In other words, Navaratri seeks to inspire a spiritual awakening, by ending the darkness of night in new light of understanding.

Sharada Navaratri is considered very sacred, auspicious when all the Divine forces are at their highest level of percipience. During the Navaratri time, the Divine Mother Goddess is worshipped in Her various forms as Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. Though the Goddess is one, She is represented and worshipped in three different essential aspects. On the first three nights of the festival, Durga is worshipped. On the following three nights, Divine Mother is worshipped as Lakshmi and then as Saraswati on the last three nights.

The Goddess Durga is Durgati Naashini: “One who destroys evil tendencies and evil forces”. Thus renders, peace, success & prosperity. Goddess Sri Mahalakshmi not only represents material but spiritual wealth as well. Both are like two sides of a coin and one cannot remain without the other. Therefore Goddess Lakshmi is symbolic of both Spiritual wealth and material wealth with success comes or follows the former. For Spiritual wealth, one must gain knowledge. For that we have to first purify our minds. Only a pure and concentrated mind can attain knowledge, which is true wealth and this is obtained through the worship of Goddess Lakshmi. Knowledge is power. Victory over the mind, senses & body (sense organs) can be gained only through knowledge. It is Goddess Saraswati who represents this highest knowledge of the Self. She is the very embodiment of the Knowledge itself. Purify the mind and remove all negativities; cultivate positive virtues; gain spiritual knowledge and transcend limitations. During *Navaratri*, Goddess *Durga* is invoked first to remove impurities from the mind. The Goddess *Lakshmi* is invoked to cultivate the noble values and qualities. Finally, *Saraswati* is invoked for gaining the highest knowledge of the Self. These nine days are an opportunity to be completely in *Sadhana*, *Seva*, and *Satsang*. This is the significance of the three sets of three nights when all these three are gained subjectively, and then there will be *Vijaya Dasami*, the day of true victory!

“In Durga Saptashati, there is a narration of a demon called Dhaomra Lochana which means perception. Our perception can be foggy when we are imprisoned by likes and dislikes. Likes and dislikes serve one’s ego. Ego is nothing but darkness and to dispel such darkness a new light has to be brought in; the new light of understanding. This is Navaratri meaning ending the darkness of night by bringing in new light of understanding....When understanding of the three Goddesses dawns in one’s life it is indeed victory over oneself. Hence, it is celebration in the form of Vijaya Dasami on the tenth day of Navaratri.” Swami Sukhabodhananda

Navaratri is celebrated five times a year. They are **Vasanta** Navaratri, **Ashadha** Navaratri, **Sharada** Navaratri, **Paush** Navaratri and **Magha** Navaratri. Of these, the Sharada Navaratri of the month of Puratashi and the Vasanta Navaratri of the Vasanta kala are important.

Basanta Navaratri: Basanta Navaratri, also known as Vasant Navaratri, is the festival of nine days dedicated to the nine forms of Shakti (Mother Goddess) in the spring season (March–April). It is also known as Chaitra Navaratri. The nine days of festival is also known as Rama Navaratri.

Gupt Navaratri: Gupt Navaratri, also referred as Ashadha or Gayatri or Shakambhari Navaratri, is nine days dedicated to the nine forms of Shakti (Mother Goddess) in the month of Ashadha (June–July). Gupt Navaratri is observed during the Ashadha Shukla Paksha (waxing of moon).

Sharada Navaratri: This is the most important of the Navaratris. It is simply called *Maha Navaratri* (the Great Navratri) and is celebrated in the month of Ashvina. Also known as Sharada Navaratri, as it is celebrated during/after Sharada (beginning of winter, September–October).

Paush Navaratri: Paush Navaratri is nine days dedicated to the nine forms of Shakti (Mother Goddess) in the month of Paush (December–January). Paush Navaratri is observed during the Paush Shukla Paksha (waxing phase of moon).

Magha Navaratri: Magha Navaratri, also referred as Gupt Navaratri, is nine days dedicated to the nine forms of Shakti (Mother Goddess) in the month of Magha (January–February). Magha Navaratri is observed during the Magha Shukla Paksha (waxing phase of moon).

Popularly Navratra is celebrated twice a year. First Navratra is from Pratipada of Chaitra month to Navami and the second is exactly after six months in Pratipada of Ashwin Shukla Paksha to a day before Vijaya Dashami. In the two Navratras Sharada Navratra is given more importance. The celebrations begin on the first day of the month of Ashvin (i.e. Ashwin Shukla Paksha Pratipada) according to the Hindu calendar.

First three days

The Goddess is separated as a spiritual force called Durga also known as Kali in order to destroy all our impurities.

Second three days

The Mother is adored as a giver of spiritual wealth, Lakshmi, who is considered to have the power of bestowing on her devotees inexhaustible wealth, as she is the goddess of wealth.

Final three days

The final set of three days is spent in worshipping the Goddess of wisdom, Saraswati. In order to have all-round success in life, believers seek the blessings of all three aspects of the divine femininity, hence the nine nights of worship.

We need the blessings of all three aspects of the Divine Mother; hence, the worship for nine nights. Each of the nine days of Navratri has special significance. Each day is dedicated to a particular Goddess who is worshipped on that day.

First Day – Shailputri

The first day is dedicated to the Goddess '**Shailputri**', the daughter of the Himalayas. She is a form of Shakti, the companion of Lord Shiva. Shailaputri literally means the daughter (Putri) of the mountains (Shaila). Various known as Sati, Bhavani, Parvati or Hemavati, the daughter of Hemavana - the king of the Himalayas, she is the first among Nava Durgas. Her worship takes place on the first day of Navaratri – the nine divine nights. The embodiment of the power of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, She rides a bull and carries a trident and a lotus in her two hands.

Second Day – Brahmacharini

She is worshipped on the second day of Navaratri and is the second form of Mother Goddess. The name is derivative of the word 'Brahma', which means 'Tapa' or penance. Bharmacharini means one who practices devout austerity. She enlightens us in the magnificent embodiment of Durga with great powers and divine grace. She holds a rosary in her right hand and a water kamandal in her left hand. She is blissful, endows happiness, peace, prosperity and grace upon all devotees who worship her. She is the way to emancipation - Moksha.

Third Day – Chandraghanta

The third day is dedicated to the Goddess '**Chandraghanta**', the symbolic representation of beauty and bravery. The third facet of Goddess Durga is 'Chandraghanta', who is worshipped on the third day of Navaratri, for peace, tranquility and prosperity in life. She has a 'Chandra' or half-moon in her forehead in the shape of

a 'ghanta' or bell. That is why she is called 'Chandraghanta'. She is charming, has a golden bright complexion and rides a lion. She has ten hands, three eyes and holds weapons in her hands. She is the apostle of bravery and possesses great strength to fight in the battle against demons.

Fourth Day – Kushmanda

The fourth day is dedicated to the Goddess '**Kushmanda**', the creator of the entire Universe. The meaning of the name 'Ku-shm-anda' is as: 'Ku' = a little; 'ushma' = 'warmth'; 'anda' = 'the cosmic egg'. So she is considered the creator of the universe. Often she is depicted as having eight or ten hands. She holds weapons, glitter, rosary, etc., in her hands, and She rides a lion.

Fifth Day - Skand Mata

The fifth day is dedicated to the Goddess '**Skand Mata**', the mother of the chief warrior of the Gods army, the Skanda. The fifth aspect of the Mother Durga is known as 'Skanda Mata' - the mother of Skanda or Lord Kartikeya, who was chosen by Gods as their commander in chief in the war against the demons. She is worshipped on the fifth day of Navaratri. She is accompanied by the Lord Skanda in his infant form. Skanda Mata has four arms and three eyes, holds the infant Skanda in her right upper arm and a lotus in her right hand which is slightly raised upwards. The left arm is in pose to grant boons with grace and in left lower hand which is raised also holds a lotus. She has a bright complexion and often depicted as seated on a lotus.

Sixth Day - Katyayani

The sixth day is dedicated to the goddess '**Katyayani**' with three eyes and four hands. According to a legend; Once upon a time, there was a great sage called Kata, who had a son named Katya. Kata was very famous and renowned in the lineage of Saints. He underwent long austerities and penance in order to receive the grace of the Mother Goddess. He wished to have a daughter in the form of a Goddess. According to his wish and desire the Mother Goddess granted his request. Katyayani was born to Kata as an Avatar of Durga.

Seventh Day – Kaalratri

The seventh day is dedicated to the Goddess '**Kaalratri**', meant to make the devotees fearless. This is the seventh form of Mother Durga and is worshipped on the seventh day of Navaratri. She has a dark complexion, disheveled hair and a fearlessness posture. A necklace flashing lightning adorns her neck. She has three eyes that shine bright and terrible flames emanate from her breath. Her vehicle is the donkey. Her raised right hand always seems to grant boons to all worshippers and all her right lower hand is in the pose of allaying fears. Her left upper hand holds a thorn-like weapon, made of iron and there is a dagger in the lower left hand. She is black like Goddess Kali and holds a sparkling sword in her right hand battle all evil. Her gesture of protection assures us of freedom from fear and troubles. She is also known as 'Shubhamkari' – one who does good things.

Eighth Day - Maha Gauri

The eight day is dedicated to the Mata Rani or '**Maha Gauri**' representing calmness and exhibits wisdom. She is worshipped on the eighth day of Navaratri. Her power is unfailing and instantly fruitful. As a result of her worship, all sins of past, present and future get washed away and devotees get purified in all aspects of life. Maha Gauri is intelligent, peaceful and calm. Due to her long austerities in the deep forests of the

Himalayas, She developed a dark complexion. When Lord Shiva cleaned her with the water of the Ganga, her body regained its beauty and She came to be known as Maha Gauri, which mean extremely white. She wears white clothes, has four arms, and rides on a bull. Her right hand is in the pose of allaying fear and her right lower hand holds a trident. The left upper hand holds a 'damaru' (a small rattle drum) and the lower one is in the pose of granting boons to her devotees.

Ninth Day – Sidhidatri

Sidhidatri is the ninth form of Goddess. She is worshipped on the ninth day of Navaratri. Sidhidatri has supernatural healing powers. She has four arms and she is always in a blissful happy enchanting pose. She rides on the lion as her vehicle. She blesses all Gods, Saints, *Yogis*, *Tantrics* and all devotees as a manifestation of the Mother Goddess. In 'Devi Bhagvata Purana' it is mentioned that Lord Shiva worshipped her and was blessed with all Sidhis (supernatural powers). By her blessings his half body became female and other half body male in the avatar of Ardhnarishvara.

(Source revered Devi Mahatmyam) (Compiled by Chaman Lal Gadoo)



शुभ नवरात्री

