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This Navaratri message was given in on the 13th of October, 1972. A collection of messages by Swamiji during various spiritual festivals including this message can be found in Swamiji's book, "[Spiritual Import of Religious Festivals](#)".

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THE ESOTERIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEVI-MAHATMYA

By

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Our longings are fundamentally very deep and cannot be easily satisfied by temporary make shift or day-to-day adjustment of outer circumstances. Our desires are profound, our yearnings are very unintelligible to outer atmosphere of our daily life. We seem to have a root which is deeper than what can be comprehended by our normal understanding of the world. We grow from all sides, and when we long for or desire or yearn or aspire, we do so in a very comprehensive manner. This aspiration of the human being is really the soul's longing for freedom. All our desires are desires of the soul, ultimately. Though they look like sensory desires, mental desires, intellectual desires, social desires, etc., they are, at the bottom, the longing of the *soul* of the human being, which ramifies itself into various distracted rays through the operations of the mind and the activities of the senses. Our longings are, therefore, capable of being collected into a single essential power, an inward urge, which we may call the longing for freedom. It is *freedom* that we ask for and it is freedom that anyone asks for. Varieties of longings and multitudes of enterprises in the world can be collected into a single focus of the soul's aspiration for liberation. And this aspiration for liberation is not merely the longing of the human being, but of all that is created anywhere on earth or in heaven. Whether it is the plant or the animal, whether it is a man or a celestial, the aspiration is this much. All longings can be boiled down into the quintessence of the longing for liberation, freedom from all sides and an ultimate supremacy over one's own self in the realisation of this freedom.

The Devi-Mahatmya which, in a majestic poetry in Sanskrit, describes to us the Epic of the march of the human soul to its destination, the realisation of this freedom, is the dramatic aspect of the great worship of the Divine Mother during these nine days of Navaratri or Dassehra as you call it. The march of the soul is dramatic. It is not a lagging or a crawling but a beautiful, sonorous, musical advent, you may call it. This is the beauty of the Devi-Mahatmya. All Epics have this particular character of grandeur, uplifting the emotions, and chastening the intellect of the devotee who goes through them.

The Devi-Mahatmya is a part of the Markandeya Purana, containing thirteen chapters which are

grouped into three sections, known as the *Prathama Charitra*, *Madhyama Charitra* and the *Uttama Charitra*. As in the Bhagavadgita, sometimes we are told that the eighteen chapters can be grouped into three sections of teaching, consisting of six chapters in each, in the Devi-Mahatmya also, which is an Epic-counterpart of the methods of the Bhagavadgita in its practical implementations, it is capable of a division into three sections. The march of the soul is graduated into three major steps, though there are many minor steps involved in these three major ones. While we have to rise through various rungs of the ladder of evolution, we come to three points or halting places, we may call them, where there is a complete transformation of outlook, attitude and constitution of our being. These threefold transformations of the spiritual being of the aspiring soul are dominated or presided over by three deities known as Maha-Kali, Maha-Lakshmi and Maha-Sarasvati. These three presiding forces are representative of the powers of the spirit within manifesting themselves in an upward ascent towards freedom ultimate, so that in this march of the soul to its freedom, it carries with it everything that is connected with it. The difference between the spiritual march and your march along the road or a highway is this, that while in your march on a roadway, you alone walk and nobody need accompany you, nothing need be connected with you, and you can have a free walk independently; in the spiritual march, it is not such an isolated march, but you carry with you everything that is connected with you. Now, what are the things connected with you that you carry? There are four stages of this relationship. Consciously we are related in a particular manner and subconsciously we are related in another manner altogether. Consciously, we people seated in this hall for example, have a particular sort of relationship among ourselves, but subconsciously our relationships are of a different kind altogether and they need not tally with our conscious relationship. And deeper still, we have a layer where our relationship is more akin to a unity of life than to a diversity of personality. There is a fourth stage which is incapable of any description at all. We do not know whether we are to call it a unity or a diversity, or oneness or otherness. This is the goal towards which the soul is marching. So, in the description of the Devi-Mahatmya, we are carried forward psychologically and spiritually to our destination of the ultimate realisation.

There are three stages of transformation described in the three sections of the Devi-Mahatmya. The first one is where Adi-Sakti awakes Maha-Vishnu who was asleep, so that He may destroy or overcome the original demoniacal forces, Madhu and Kaitabha. The second stage is where the same Sakti manifests Herself as Maha-Lakshmi and overcomes Mahishasura and Raktabija. The third one is where Sumbha and Nisumbha are destroyed by Maha-Sarasvati. And the nine days of worship comprehend these three stages adored in three days of worship, each. The final victory is called *Vijaya-Dasami*, the tenth day, as you know. That is the day of Victory, where you master the forces of Nature completely and your goal is reached. When you step over nine, you enter into Infinity. Numbers are only nine, you do not have ten numbers. All the arithmetic is within nine numbers only. The whole cosmos is within nine. But when you transcend the nine, you have gone to Infinity, which is beyond cosmic relationship. The lower powers of Nature are like dirt. We call them *Mala*, '*Vishnukarna-Malodbhuto Hantum Brahmanamudyato*', says the Devi-Mahatmya. The Madhu and Kaitabha, two Rakshasas (demons) are supposed to have come out of the dirt of the ear of Vishnu. The lowest category of opposition is of the nature of dirt, *Mala*; and psychologically, from the point of view of the seeking soul, this dirt is in the form of *Kama*, *Krodha* and *Lobha*. '*Kama Esha Krodha Esha Rajo-guna Samudbhavah*,' '*Kamah Krodhastatha Lobhah Tasmad Etat Trayam Tyajet*'--It is desire and anger born of *Rajas*; desire, anger and greed, these three therefore should be abandoned,--says the Bhagavadgita. These three are the gates to hell. These three are regarded as dirt, because they cover the consciousness in such a way that it appears to be not there at all. It is like painting a thin glass with coal-tar. You cannot see the glass. It is all pitch-dark like clouds. This has to be rubbed off with great effort. When this *Mala* or dirt is removed, we get into another trouble. Do not think that when you are tentatively a master of *Kama*, *Krodha* and *Lobha*, you are a real master of yourself. "There are more things in heaven and earth than your philosophy dreams of, O Horatio,"

said Hamlet. So do not think that your philosophy is exhaustive. There are many more things that philosophy cannot comprehend. *Kama*, *Krodha* and *Lobha* are not the only enemies. There are subtler ones, more formidable than these visible foes. As a matter of fact, the subtle invisible enemies are more difficult to overcome than the visible ones. Sometimes you know, an angry man is better than a smiling person. Smiling person is more dangerous than the angry one, because he can have a knife under his arm-pit. This is what we will face. When we manage somehow to overcome this Madhu and Kaitabha, *Kama* and *Krodha*, we get into the clutches of Mahishasura and Raktabija. They represent the *Vikshepa Sakti*, the tossing of the mind. Every minute the mind changes its forms which multiply in millions. You read in the Devi-Mahatmya, how Mahishasura changed his form. Now he is an elephant, now he is a buffalo, now he is something else. If you hit him in one form, he comes in another form. And this is your inexhaustible opponent. His energies are incapable of being exhausted. However much you may try to oppose the *Vikshepa Sakti*, it will manifest in some form or other. This is described in the form of the demon Raktabija, whose drops of blood were seeds of hundreds and thousands of demons like himself coming up. When the Devi severed the head of one Rakshasa, the blood fell on the ground profusely and from that blood, millions cropped up. And when She killed them, again another million cropped up. So there was no end for it. If you cut off one or two desires, the desire is not over. The root is still there. The branches are only severed. Unless the root is dug out, there is no use of merely severing the branches of the tree. So what did the Devi do? She asked Kali to spread her tongue throughout the earth, so that there is no ground at all for the Rakshasas to walk over. They had to walk over the tongue of Kali. So huge it was. And now the Goddess started cutting their heads and when the blood fell, it fell not on the ground but on the tongue of Kali. So she sucked everything. Chariots and horses and demons and everybody entered her mouth. She chewed all chariots into powder. So likewise, we have to adopt a technique of sucking the very root of desires and not merely chop off its branches. Otherwise, desires will take various forms like Mahishasura. When we think that Mahishasura has been killed, he comes as a buffalo and when the buffalo is attacked, he again comes as an elephant, and if Devi attacks the elephant, he comes as a bull and attacks Her. So, there is no way of overcoming these desires by merely dealing with them from outside by a frontal attack. Their very essence has to be sucked. Because, a desire is not an outward form or an action, it is a tendency within. You may do nothing, and yet you will have desires. Because, desire is not necessarily an activity. A desireful person need not be very active. He can be sitting quiet, doing nothing, saying nothing, and yet be full of desires. Because, it is a tendency of the mind, an inclination of consciousness, that we call a desire. That can be inside, even if there is outwardly nothing. This is the *Vikshepa Sakti*,--distraction, tossing and the chameleon-attitude of desire,--which attacks us, when, with Herculean efforts, we try to destroy or gain control over *Kama* and *Krodha*, Madhu and Kaitabha. After Madhu and Kaitabha, we get Mahishasura and Raktabija. Thus *Mala* and *Vikshepa* are the primary oppositions in our spiritual pursuit.

Ancient masters have told us that while *Mala* or dirt of the psychological structure can be removed by *Karma Yoga*, by unselfish and dedicated service, *Vikshepa* or distraction of the mind can be removed only by worship of God, by *Upasana*. While *Karma* removes *Mala*, *Upasana* removes *Vikshepa*. But even now, we are not fully safe. While *Mala* might have gone and *Vikshepa* is not there, we may have a third trouble, namely, a complete oblivion of consciousness. We will have no knowledge of anything as to what is happening. *Ajnana* or Ignorance is a subtler opposing power than its effects in the form of *Mala* and *Vikshepa*. Distraction and direct sensual desires are the outer expressions of a subtle ignorance of Truth, *Avidya* or *Ajnana*. Why do we desire things? Because, we do not know the nature of Truth. Why does a strong wind blow? Because, the sun is covered over with clouds. The sun is covered by the clouds first, then there is darkness and then a gale, cyclone starts blowing from the north, breaking your umbrellas and uprooting trees. All these happen because the sun does not shine. Even so, when the Atman is covered over by ignorance of its nature, the

winds of desire begin to blow, and they come like violent storms. Impetuous is the force of desire. You cannot stand against it, because the whole of Nature gets concentrated in a desire. That is why it is impetuous and uncontrollable. All the powers of Nature get focussed in a desire when it manifests itself, whatever be that desire. So the whole of Nature has to be subdued. You are not to subdue only your individual nature, but the cosmic Nature itself is to be subdued. This is what is depicted in the Epic of the Devi-Mahatmya. It is the subdual, overcoming, transformation of the cosmic Nature in the form of *Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Sattva*. While *Mala* represents *Tamas*, *Vikshepa* represents *Rajas*.

Now, *Sattva* is also a *Guna*, unfortunately. We always praise *Sattva* and regard it as a very desirable thing. But it is like a transparent glass that is placed between us and the Truth. You can see through it, but you cannot go beyond it. Because, though the glass is transparent, it can obstruct your movement. It is not like a brick-wall, completely preventing your vision, as *Tamas* does; it is not like a blowing wind which simply tosses you here and there, as *Rajas* does; it is a plain glass, through which you can have vision of Reality, but you cannot contact Reality nevertheless. How can you contact a thing when there is a glass between you and the thing? Yet you can see it. So they say even *Sattva* is an obstacle, though it is better than the other two forces, in the sense that through it you can have a vision or an insight into the nature of Reality which transcends even *Sattva*. There is a glass pane and you can see a mango fruit on the other side of it. You can see it very well, but cannot get it, you cannot grab it. You know the reason. Even *Sattva* is a subtle medium of obstruction, which acts in a double form; as complacency or satisfaction with what has been achieved, and an ignorance of what is beyond. These two aspects of *Sattva* are indicated by the two personalities of Sumbha and Nisumbha. They have to be dispelled by the power of higher wisdom, which is Maha-Sarasvati.

Action, contemplation and knowledge are the three stages through which we have to pierce through the veil of *Prakriti* or three *Gunas*. And as I mentioned earlier, we are not individual pedestrians on the path. There is no individual movement here. It is all a total movement of everything connected with us and no item in the world is really disconnected from us. Every thread in a cloth is connected with every other thread. When you lift one thread of a cloth, the whole cloth comes up, because of the interconnection of the warp and the woof of the cloth. Likewise, there is an internal interconnection of beings, which prevents any kind of individual effort for the sake of salvation. That is why salvation is universal, it is not individual. When you attain to the Supreme Being, you become the Universal Being. You do not go as a Mr. So and So or as a Mrs. So and So, there. So the path of Sadhana also is a cosmic effort of the soul, a subtle secret which most Sadhakas are likely to forget. It is not a small, simple, private effort of yours in the closet of your room, but a dynamic activity of your essential personality, internally connected by unforeseen relationships with everything in the cosmos. When you enter the path of the spirit, you have also at the same time entered the path of cosmic relationship. A Sadhaka is, therefore, a cosmic person. A spiritual seeker, an aspirant is a representative of cosmic situation. He is not an individual, though he looks like a person, and his Sadhana is not an individual effort. It is much more than what it appears to be on the surface. It is, as it were, the conversation between *Nara* and *Narayana*, Krishna-Arjuna-Samvada, as they call it. You and your God are face to face with each other. In Sadhana, in spiritual effort, you are face to face with your Maker. And the face of the Maker is universal. He is not in one spot, hiding himself in one corner.

So, the dance of the cosmic spirit, in its supernal effort at self-transcendence, is majestically described in the beautifully worded sonorous songs of the Devi-Mahatmya, where we are given a stirring account, a stimulating description of what Maha-Kali did, what Maha-Lakshmi did and Maha-Sarasvati did in bringing about this evolution, transformation of the whole range of *Prakriti* from *Tamas* to *Rajas*, from *Rajas* to *Sattva* and from *Sattva* to Supreme *Vijaya*, mastery in the Absolute, God-realisation. All our scriptures, Puranas and Epics, all our ceremonies and

celebrations, all our festivals and Jayantis, whatever be the occasion for a religious performance, all this is charged with a spiritual connotation, a significance which is far transcendent to the outer rituals which is involved in their performance. Every thought, every aspiration, every ritual and every duty of ours, every action that we perform automatically becomes a spiritual dedication of the Soul, for the sake of this one single aspiration which it has been enshrining in itself from eternity to eternity. This significance is brought out in all our Epics and Puranas. Whether in the Mahabharata or the Ramayana, whether in the Bhagavad Gita or the Devi-Mahatmya, they tell us the same account in different terminologies and with different emphases. It is always a song of the soul. The Bhagavad Gita is a song of the soul, the Over-Soul speaking to the lower soul. Here again, we have a similar account of the actual Sadhana involved in the realisation of this ultimate harmony of the soul with the Over-Soul. The spiritual practice of a Sadhaka is, therefore, a confronting of the three forces of *Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Sattva*, gradually, stage by stage, in their cosmic significance, forgetting not for a moment that we are not 'islands'. No man is an island. You must have heard the poet's saying: "A man is not an island." That means he is not surrounded simply by oceans and cut off from things. He is connected with everything. This is the significance we have to read in our practical lives. This is the meaning we have to see and visualise in our personal Sadhana. And when we learn to see the significance of the presence of divinity or the universality of God even in our private actions, we are taken care of by universal forces. We need not bother about even the smallest problem of our life. Even the littlest of our difficulty will be taken care of in a proper manner by the forces that are in the world, *provided*, of course, that we are able to read the significance of universality even in the most private of our actions, even in the smallest and littlest of our actions. There is no such thing as a little action in the world. Everything is important. Even the most insignificant event is a very important event, ultimately. Because, hidden behind it is the ocean. This significance we have to learn to read. This is, in my humble opinion, what Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj meant whenever he said that God-realisation is the goal of life. He was not tired of saying this throughout his life. We can see, in his earlier books especially, that they commence with the sentence: "The Goal of Life is God-realisation." Whatever he had to say in those books, he said afterwards. So, the first thing is to remember that the Goal of Life is God-realisation. Do not forget this. The little petty tensions and turmoils and annoyances and worries and vexations are not the goal of life. They are the obstacles that come on our way, which we have to carefully obviate and go with caution, like a pilgrim who has lost his way in this wilderness of life, and yet confident at the same time that the warmth of the spiritual sun is always energising our personality and that we are never, at any time, any moment of our practice, completely cut off from that source of energy.

So, through the worship of Maha-Kali, Maha-Lakshmi, and Maha-Sarasvati, we worship *Mula-Prakriti*, *Adi-Sakti* in her cosmic dance-form of transformation, prosperity and Illumination. In the beginning, what happens to a Sadhaka? There is a necessity of self-transformation. It is all hardship, rubbing and cleaning, washing, sweeping, etc. That is the first stage through the worship of Maha-Kali, who brings about a destruction of all barriers. Then what happens? There is tremendous prosperity. You become a master and a progressive soul commanding all powers, getting everything that you want. This is the second stage. In the first stage, it looked as if you were a poor person, having nothing, very weak. But, when you overcome this weakness, by removing the barrier of *Tamas*, you become prosperous. Nobody can be as rich as a Yogi, you know. He can command all the powers. By a thought he can invoke all things, and this is Goddess Maha-Lakshmi working. When Maha-Kali has finished her work of destruction of opposition, Maha-Lakshmi comes as prosperity. A great Yogi is also like a royal personality, because of his internal invocations, though unconsciously done, of cosmic powers. When prosperity dawns, it looks as if the whole universe is a heaven. In the first stage, it looked like a hell. Afterwards, in the second stage, it looks like a heaven, when Maha-Lakshmi begins to work. But this also is not sufficient. Knowledge should dawn. It is not heaven that you are asking for. You want the realisation of Truth. Sarasvati will come for help

and a flood of light on Truth will be thrown and you will see things as they are. There is no enjoyment, prosperity, richness, wealth or any such thing. It is Truth unconnected with yourself in the beginning, but later on inseparable from yourself. Thus, from opposition to prosperity, from prosperity to enlightenment, and from enlightenment to Self-realisation do we proceed. So, these are the truths esoterically conveyed to us in the Mantras of the Devi-Mahatmya.

Now, this Devi-Mahatmya is not merely an esoteric Epic. It is not only a great spiritual text in the form of occult lessons, occult teachings of which I have given you an outline. But, it is also a great *Mantra-Sastra*. Every *sloka*, every verse of the Devi-Mahatmya is a Mantra by itself. I will tell you how it is a Mantra, by giving only one instance, that is the first sloka itself. '*Savarnih suryatanayo yo manuh Kathyate-shtamah*'. This is the first sloka, *Savarnih Surya-Tanayah*. It is all a Tantric interpretation and a very difficult thing to understand. But I am giving you only an idea as to what it is all like. *Surya* represents fire, the fire-principle. '*Surya-Tanaya*' means that which is born of the fire-principle. What is it that is born of the fire-principle? It is the seed '*Ra*'. According to Tantric esoteric psychology, '*Ram*' is the Bija Mantra of Agni. In the word *Savarnih*, '*varni*' means a hook; so add one hook to '*Ram*'. *Yo Manuh Kathyate, ashtamah*. Eighth letter--What is *Manu*? It is a letter in Sanskrit. Eight letters are *Ya, Ra, La, Va, Sya, Sha, Sa, Ha*. The eighth is *Ha*. Add *Ha* to it. *Ha, Ra* and one hook, make '*Hreem*'. *Savarnih Suryo-Tanayo Yo Manuh Kathyateshtamah, Nisamaya Tadutpattim*,--you hear the glory of that, the sage says. So, the first verse means: "Now, I shall describe to you the glory of '*Hreem*'." This *Hreem* is the Bija of Devi. But, outwardly it means, "Listen to the story of the king so and so, who is the eighth Manu" and all that. Thus in addition to the outer meaning, there is an inner significance of the Mantra. I am giving you only the case of one Mantra. Like this, every Mantra is full of inner significance. And every Mantra is repeated by devotees for some purpose or the other. Especially, the Devi-Mahatmya is recited for averting calamities in life. Catastrophies, calamities and tensions, personal or outward, whatever they be, all these are averted by a regular daily recital of the Devi-Mahatmya. When there is war threatening a country, for example, or pestilence or epidemic spreading everywhere, or any internal tension or anxiety of any kind, the Devi-Mahatmya is to be studied and it is a very potent remedy prescribed by seers of yore, not only for temporal terrestrial prosperity, but also for the glory of the hereafter, for illumination, for the destruction of *Avidya* or *Ajnana*, for overcoming *Mala, Vikshepa* and *Avarana*, and to be a fit recipient of the grace of the Almighty. Thus is the outer significance and the inner significance of the Devi-Mahatmya and the special meaning that it has in the life of spiritual seekers or *Sadhakas*. Glory to God! Glory to Sadhana! Glory to the integral character of spiritual practice! May we be blessed with this illumination, with this wisdom, with the strength to tread the path of the Spirit, to our ultimate Freedom!

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