

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

### Maya-Shakti-Prakriti

From Bhagavad Gita Ch.18, verse 61

The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing all beings, by His illusive power (Maya), to revolve as if mounted on a machine.

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### Maya:

From Svetasvataropanisad, Ch.4, verse 10

Know that Nature (Prakriti) is Maya, and that the great God is the Lord of Maya. The whole world is filled with beings who form His parts

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From Bhagavad Gita Ch.18, verse 61

The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing all beings, by His illusive power (Maya), to revolve as if mounted on a machine.

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### Establishing the existence of Maya

By Sri Shankaracharya

1. The Supreme Self (or Ultimate Reality) who is Pure Consciousness perceived Himself by Selfhood (i.e. Existence with "I"-Consciousness). He became endowed with the name "I". From that arose the basis of difference.

2. He exists verily in two parts, on account of which, the two could become husband and wife. Therefore, this space is ever filled up completely by the woman (or the feminine principle) surely.

Note: The above two verses explain how the One Ultimate Reality which is of the nature of non-dual Existence - Consciousness became the cause of the universe of multiplicity. The first creative impulse in the Supreme Self is the pure I-consciousness. This brings in duality in the One Transcendent Reality, which is symbolically expressed as husband-wife representing Pure Consciousness and its Creative Energy. This Creative Energy is the effective cause as well as the material cause of the entire universe which is stated to be filled with it.

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

3. And He, this Supreme Self thought (or reflected). Thence, human beings were born. Thus, say the Upanishads through the statement of sage Yajnavalkya to his wife.

Note: The primal manifestation of the creative energy of Pure Consciousness is the I- consciousness which results in duality. From that arises thought or ideation of multiplicity, which gives rise to the entire universe of beings.

4. From the experience of bliss for a long time, there arose in the Supreme Self a certain state like deep sleep. From that (state) Maya (or the illusive power of the Supreme Self) was born just as a dream arises in sleep.

Note: The non-dual Supreme Self is of the nature of Pure Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. Just as a dream arises in sleep and produces various objects, an inscrutable power called MAYA manifests in the quiescent, blissful state of the Supreme Self and this produces the bewildering variety of objects and phenomena constituting the universe.

The concept of Maya is central to Advaita Vedanta (or non-dual conception of the Ultimate Reality as propounded in Vedic literature).

5. This Maya is without the characteristics of (or different from) Reality or unreality, without beginning and dependent on the Reality that is the Supreme Self. She, who is of the form of the THREE GUNAS (qualities or energies of Nature) brings forth the Universe with movable and immovable (objects).

Note: Maya is not real, since it disappears on the dawn of knowledge of the Supreme Self. Maya is not unreal, since such a thing would never appear at any time. Maya is equated with Nature or the visible universe consisting of the three modes of energy- Sattwa or harmony, Rajas or activity and Tamas or inertia. Maya is the inscrutable cause which depends on the Supreme Self which is the Ultimate Reality. Nature is its apparent effect.

6.Objection): As for Maya, it is invisible (or not experienced by the senses). How can it produce a thing that is visible (or experienced by the senses)? How is a visible piece of cloth produced here by threads of invisible nature?

Note: The purport is that it is as impossible for the visible universe to be produced from invisible Maya as it is for a visible piece of cloth to be produced from invisible threads.

7 (Reply): As there is the emission of the generative fluid on to a good garment on account of the experience of copulation in a dream, the pollution of the garment is seen as real on waking while the copulation was not true, the man in the dream was real (while) the woman was unreal and the union of the two was

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

false (but), the emission of the generative fluid was real, so does it occur even in the matter in hand.

Note: In this example, an unreal cause (viz., copulation in a dream) produces a real or visible effect (viz., seminal emission). Similarly, the apparent world could arise from the undefinable Maya.

8. Thus Maya is invisible (or beyond sense-perception). (But) this universe which is its effect, is visible (or perceived by the senses). This would be Maya which, on its part, becomes the producer of joy by its own destruction.

Note: When the illusive power, Maya, disappears, what remains is Pure Existence-Consciousness-Bliss.

9. Like night (or darkness) Maya is extremely insurmountable (or extremely difficult to be understood). Its nature is not perceived here. Even as it is being observed carefully (or being investigated) by sages, it vanishes like lightning.

Note: By enquiry into and contemplation on the nature of the Ultimate Reality, Maya and its effects vanish and there is the spontaneous absorption of the mind in undifferentiated Being- Consciousness. There is no entity (called Maya or by any other appellation) other than the Supreme Self.

10. Maya (the illusive power) is what is obtained in Brahman (or the Ultimate Reality). Avidya (or spiritual ignorance) is said to be dependent on Jiva (the individual soul or individualised consciousness). Mind is the knot which joins Consciousness and matter. That mind is to be as imperishable until liberation.

Note: Avidya is spiritual ignorance which makes the soul forget its real nature which is Eternal, Pure Being-Consciousness- Bliss, identical with the Ultimate Reality and impose upon itself separateness, embodiment and the state of a doer or enjoyer. Mind is the entity which is the link between matter and Consciousness and is the field of operation of Avidya. It is synonymous with worldly existence and it disappears on the dawn of liberation or intuitive perception of Reality. Just as Maya, the inscrutable illusive power of the Ultimate Reality, gives rise to the universe of multiplicity, Avidya is the cause of the world perceived by the individual soul.

11. Space enclosed by a pot, or a jar or a hut or a wall has their several appellations (eg, pot space, jar space etc.). Like that, Consciousness (or the Self) covered here by Avidya (or Spiritual Ignorance) is spoken of as jiva (the individual soul).

12. Objection: How indeed could ignorance become a covering (or an obscure factor) for Brahman (or the Supreme Spirit) who is Pure Consciousness, as if

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

the darkness arising from the night (could become a concealing factor) for the sun which is self-luminous?

Note: The darkness of the night on the dawn of the sun. The very nature of Brahman is Pure Intelligence or Consciousness. How could it be covered by ignorance which is antithetical to it?

12. Reply: As the sun is hidden by clouds produced by the solar rays but surely, the character of the day is not hidden by those modified dense collection of clouds, so the Self, though pure, (or undefiled) is veiled for a long time by ignorance. But its power of Consciousness in living beings, which is established in this world, is not veiled.

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"What if you sleep, and what if in your sleep you dreamed, and what if in your dream you went to heaven and there plucked a strange and beautiful flower, and what if when you awoke you had the flower in your hand? Ah, what then?" - Coleridge

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The Lord on account of Maya is perceived as manifold  
- Brhadaranyaka Upanishad II.v.19

### Maya

From Vivekachudamani  
By Sri Sankaracharya

Veiling power and projecting power of Maya

Maya can be destroyed by the realisation of the pure Brahman, the one without a second, just as the mistaken idea of a snake is removed by the discrimination of the rope. She has her gunas as rajas, tamas and sattva, named after their respective functions. Verse 110.

Rajas has its Viksepa-Sakti or projecting power, which is of the nature of an activity, and from which this primeval flow of activity has emanated. From this also, mental modifications such as attachment and grief are continually produced.  
--Verse 111.

Lust, anger, avarice, arrogance, spite, egoism, envy, jealousy, etc.,- these are the dire attributes of Rajas, from which the worldly tendency of man is produced. Therefore, Rajas is a cause of bondage. - Verse 112.

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

Avrti or the veiling power is the power of Tamas, which makes things appear other than what they are. It is this that causes man's repeated transmigrations and starts the action of the projecting power (Viksepa). -Verse 112.

Absence of right judgment, or contrary judgment, want of definite belief, and doubt- these certainly never desert one who has any connection with this veiling power, and then the projecting power gives ceaseless trouble. - Verse 115.

### Maya

A few extracts from the writings of Swami Nikhilananda

Why does the non-dual soul appear in a manifold form? What is the cause of this multiplicity in the universe? How does the One become the many, and the Absolute become the relative? In answer, Vedanta says that this is due to the identification of the soul, or the Absolute, with material upaadhis, or limiting adjuncts. What is the cause of this identification?

Vedanta explains this as MAYA or ignorance.

The finite human mind cannot comprehend the exact relationship between the One and the many, Reality and appearance, the Absolute and the relative.

From the standpoint of the relative, there is no Absolute. The Absolute is a mystical experience characterised by the absence of duality.

That is why Vedanta calls this apparent identification of the Absolute with the relative by the name of MAYA. It is an inscrutable power that inheres in Brahman, or the Godhead. Under the influence of this cosmic ignorance, the all-pervading, eternal, and infinite spirit forgets its real nature. It is something like a man going to sleep, which first makes him oblivious of himself and then creates the fantastic dream world. It is also a well-known fact that on account of ignorance one sees water in the desert, as in the case of a mirage. As long as the sleep and the illusion last, the experience of the dream and the mirage appear to be real. On account of maya, the infinite soul, or the Godhead, identifies itself with the finite, material forms and becomes individualised.

Furthermore, it superimposes upon itself the attributes of the material form with which it is identified. Thus, the birthless, deathless, immortal soul, which is of the nature of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, appears to be finite, phenomenal being subject to hunger and thirst, pain and pleasure, birth and death, good and evil, and the other pairs of opposites.

As long as ignorance lasts, these relative characteristics appear to pertain to the soul and to be real. All the individualised, finite beings one sees in the universe are manifestations of the non-dual soul through maya; but as maya has no absolute reality, the individual soul created by it not, ultimately speaking,

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

real. As, in spite of the perception of the illusory mirage, the real nature of the desert is not affected, so, in spite of the perception of illusory birth and death, the soul is always of the nature of light, infinity, bliss, and immortality.

### **Maya and illusion**

By Swami Vivekananda

The foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa

Excerpts

Almost all of you have heard of the Maya. Generally, it is used, though incorrectly, to denote illusion, or delusion, or some such thing. But the theory of Maya forms one of the pillars upon which the Vedanta rests; it is therefore, necessary that it should be properly understood.

We read in the Svetasvatara Upanisad  
"Know nature to be Maya and the Ruler  
of this Maya is the Lord Himself."

When the Hindu says the world is Maya, at once people get the idea that the world is an illusion. This interpretation has some basis, as coming through the Buddhistic philosophers, because there was one section of philosophers who did not believe in the external world at all. But the Maya of the Vedanta, in its last developed form, is neither idealism nor Realism, nor is it a theory. It is a simple statement of facts- what we are and what we see around us.

The minds of the people from whom the Vedas came were intent upon following principles. They had no time to work upon details or to wait for them; they wanted to go deep into the heart of things. Something beyond was calling them, as it were, and they could not wait.

The Vedantist has proved beyond all doubt that the mind is limited, that it cannot go beyond certain limits- beyond time, space and causation. As no man can jump out of his own self, so no man can go beyond the limits that have been put upon him by the laws of time and space. Every attempt to solve the laws of causation, time and space would be futile, because the very attempt would have to be made by taking for granted the existence of these three.

What does the (following) statement of the existence of the world mean, then?

"This world has no existence."

What is meant by that? It means that it has no absolute existence. It exists only in relation to my mind, and to the mind of everyone else. We see this world with the five senses but if we had another sense, we would see in it something more. If we had yet another sense, it would appear as something still different. It has



## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

therefore, no real existence; it has no unchangeable, immovable, infinite existence. Nor can it be called non-existence, seeing that it exists, and we have to work in and through it. It is a mixture of existence and non-existence.

We find that Maya is not a theory for the explanation of the world; it is simply a statement of facts as they exist, that the very basis of our being is contradiction, that everywhere we have to move through this tremendous contradiction, that wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil, there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow, and everyone who smiles will have to weep, and vice versa.

Now can this state of things be remedied. We may verily imagine that there will be a place where there will be only good and no evil, where we shall only smile and never weep. This is impossible in the very nature of things; for the conditions will remain the same. Wherever there is the power of producing a smile in us, there lurks the power of producing tears. Wherever there is the power of producing happiness, there lurks somewhere the power of making us miserable.

### The father and mother of the universe

Who are our universal parents?  
Our divine Father and our divine Mother?

Bhagavad Gita, Ch.14, Verse 3.

"My womb is the great Nature (Prakriti or MAYA). In that I place the germ (embryo of life). Thence is the birth of all beings".

Bhagavad Gita, Ch. 14, Verse 4

"Whatever forms are born, O Arjuna, in any womb whatsoever, the great Brahma (Nature) is their womb and I am the seed-giving father."

Explanation by Swami Shivananda  
Divine Life Society, Rishikesh):

Prakriti (Nature), made up of the three qualities (Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas), is the material cause of all beings.

In the great Prakriti, I place the seed for the birth of Brahma (the creator, also known as Hiranyagarbha, or Ishwar, or the conditioned Brahman); and the seed gives birth to all beings. The birth of Brahma (the creator) gives rise to the birth of beings.

The primordial Nature (prakriti) gives birth to Brahma, who creates all beings.

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

Gita, Ch.14, Verse 4.

"Whatever forms are produced, O Arjuna, in any womb whatsoever, the great nature is their womb and I am the seed giving father".

(I am the father; the primordial Nature is the mother).

Gita, Ch.13, verse 26.

"Wherever a being is born, whether unmoving or moving, know thou Arjuna, that it is from the union between the field and the knower of the field".

(Purusha is the knower of the field; Prakriti is the field; Shiva is another name for the knower of the field and Shakti is the field; Spirit is another name for the knower of the field and Matter (Prakriti) is the field).

Gita, Ch. 7, Verse 4.

"I am endowed with two Shaktis, namely the superior and the inferior natures; the field and its knower (spirit is the knower of the field; matter is the field.) I unite these two".

Gita Ch.7, Verse 6.

"Know these two- my higher and lower natures- as the womb of all beings. Therefore, I am the source and dissolution of the whole universe".

Gita, Ch.13, Verse 29.

"He sees, who sees that all actions are performed by nature alone, and that the Self is action less".

(The Self is the silent witness).

Gita, Ch.9, Verse 17.

"I am the father of this world, the mother, the dispenser of the fruits of actions and the grandfather; the one thing to be known, the purifier, the sacred monosyllable (AUM), and also the Rig, the Sama and the Yajur Vedas".

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### Significance of the Shiva emblem

As explained by Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa

"Do you know the significance of the Shiva emblem? It is the worship of the symbols of fatherhood and motherhood.

The devotee worshipping the image prays, 'O Lord, please grant that I may not be born into this world again; that I may not have to pass again through a mother's womb.'"

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Explanations drawn from the writings of Sri Shankaracharya



## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

"The Supreme Reality is Pure Consciousness. The primal manifestation of the creative energy of Pure Consciousness is the I-consciousness which results in duality. Thus, He exists verily in two parts, on account of which, the two could become husband and wife representing Pure Consciousness and its creative energy"

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In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 4 - 14,

The wife of sage Yajnyavalkya, and she herself a soul far advanced in the spiritual path, says to her husband:

"Constituted as we are, we need something concrete to fix our minds on and stir our imagination before we can think of subtler ideas".

Therefore, for purposes of meditation and other spiritual practices for less advanced aspirants, the scriptures provide more concrete representations of Reality, which are within their reach.

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### **Ardhanarishwar**

How is it possible for another person to know what idea or thought I have in my mind? Is it possible for me to make that idea come out of my mind and make it enter the mind of another person? To do that, I will have to summon the help of Mother Saraswati (Vak Devi) the goddess of speech (also goddess of learning) or use the written word to communicate. This power or shakti when combined with the static thought, makes it possible for the thought or idea to travel.

This is a miraculous power or shakti. If I am speaking to an audience of fifty people, this power becomes manifold or multiplies and with my each thought enters the minds of all fifty people. If my talk is broadcast via satellite and if there are a million listeners, this shakti becomes a million-fold. Its capacity is unlimited.

This combination of the product of human consciousness (thought) with Shakti makes manifestation of things possible. The clothes we wear, the chair on which we seat, the books we read, the computers we use; all these were first conceived as ideas in the human mind. The chairman of a big corporation conceives of an idea that a fifty-story sky-scraper building should be built. He conveys this idea, using his power (shakti) of speech, to the board of directors who approve it.

The idea is then conveyed with the aid of Mother Saraswati (speech or written words) to the financiers, to the architect, to the contractors, to the labourers on site. The result is the manifestation of a fifty-story building. The thought became

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

a thing. Thoughts are things. Examine everything that surrounds one in the house.

Everything before being made existed as thought or idea before becoming a stove, table, clock, calendar, screw-driver, soap powder.

This is at the human level of microcosm.

At the cosmic level of macrocosm, the combination of Shiva and Shakti (Spirit and Matter) makes possible the manifestation of the universe. The dynamic shakti functions on the static Shiva. The substratum is Shiva and the vibrant manifestation is shakti. Like the screen (the substratum) and the projected image upon the screen.

Shiva and shakti are inseparable aspects of the one Reality, like the whiteness in milk; like the brilliance in diamond and like the word and its meaning. Just as heat is inherent in fire, the power inherent in God (Shiva) is maya (shakti). The manifest universe is the display of shakti or maya.

Man is constituted of both Shiva and Shakti. The persisting personality in him is Shiva and the perishing form is shakti. The being in him is Shiva and the becoming in him is shakti. The awareness or consciousness is Shiva and the physique is shakti. The sentient Shiva manifests Himself through the insentient matter viewed as shakti. The insentient physique enshrines and nurtures the sentient in man. In other words, mother Nature nurtures what is sentient in man. Shakti rears the Shiva in man. Therefore, worshipful attitude towards Shakti is incumbent upon man evolving in Shivahood.

Theology abounds in terms such as Uma-Maheshwar, Lakshmi-Narayana, Radha-Krishna, Sita-Rama, Shiva-Shakti, Purusha-Prakriti, Ardhanarishwar, spirit and matter. These are all indicative of the fact that existence is a mixture of the sentient and the insentient.

The divine power is addressed as Amba in Kashmir and Bhavani in Rajasthan. Gujarat calls her Kalyani and Mithila invokes her as Uma.

Her other names used everywhere are Durga, Chamundi, Saraswati, Bhagavati, Meenakshi, Kamakshi, Lakshmi, Kali etc.

The male and the female elements coexist even in the vegetable kingdom which is still in the primitive stage of evolution. In the feathered kingdom as well as in the animal kingdom, the male and the female do jointly contribute to the formation of the progeny. If humanity was viewed as a unit it is found to be constituted with half- man, half-woman. The entire creation is evidently the embodiment of the masculine and the feminine principles. Shiva is therefore adored as Ardhanarishwar (ardha = half; nari = woman; Ishwar = Lord). The

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

sentient and the insentient are the two categories that constitute nature. Nothing exists outside the pale of these two.

Life in its original state is called Shiva. The apparently insentient body or the vehicle through which it manifests itself is called shakti. It is because of the interplay of life and matter that nature is able to reveal itself in all its splendour and glory.

Gita, Ch.13, Verse 29: The Lord says:

"He sees, who sees that actions are performed by nature alone, and that the Self is actionless".

Thus, the powers and activities of all beings are manifestations of nature (shakti) alone. Without Durga (shakti), Shiva has no expression; and without Shiva, Durga has no existence. Shiva is the silent witness. He is motionless and absolutely changeless.

He is not at all affected by the cosmic play. It is Durga who does everything. She is the power by which the whole universe is permeated and energised. She is the personification of all wealth, power, beauty and virtue. It is she who bestows wealth- both material and spiritual- dispels difficulties and annihilates the evil ones.

The 13th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is the Yoga of discrimination of the Kshetra and the Kshetrajna. The body is called Kshetra, the field. There is an intelligent principle that not only resides in the body but also cognises and governs it. The sages designate that discerning principle as Kshetrajna.

Kshetra is called Prakriti or matter.

Kshetrajna is called Purusha or Spirit.

Prakriti or matter is insentient. Purusha or Spirit is sentient.

From The Gita, Ch.13, Verse 2:

"Know me as the kshetrajna in all kshetras. The knowledge of kshetra and kshetrajna is deemed by Me as true knowledge".

Therefore, true knowledge is the understanding of both matter and Spirit. The knowledge pertaining to Prakriti or matter is classified as Apra Vidya or the lower knowledge and that pertaining to the Purusha or Spirit as Para Vidya or the knowledge superior.

The Mother's grace is boundless. Her compassion is illimitable. Her knowledge is infinite. Her power is immeasurable. Her splendour is indescribable. Approach her with an open heart. Lay bare your heart to her with frankness and

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

humility. Make a total unreserved self-surrender to her. Worship her with faith and unflinching devotion.

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From the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa:

The truth established in the Vedas, the Puranas and the Tantras is but one Satchidananda. In the Vedas it is called Brahman, in the Puranas it is called Rama, and in the Tantras, it is called Shiva. One Satchidananda is called Brahman, Rama and Shiva.

The formless God is real, and equally real is God with form. It is like an infinite ocean, water everywhere, to the right, left, above, below. Water enveloped in water. It is the water of the great cause, motionless. Waves spring up when it becomes active. Its activities are creation (Brahma), preservation (Vishnu) and dissolution (Shiva).

Brahman is where reason comes to a stop. There is the instance of camphor. Nothing remains after it is burnt- not even a trace of ash.

Brahman is beyond mind and speech, beyond reason and logic. A salt doll entered the ocean to measure its depth; but it did not return to tell others how deep the ocean was. It melted in the ocean itself.

Like butter and buttermilk, one finds that Satchidananda Itself has become the universe and the living beings. The blood and semen are thin liquids, and out of them comes such a big creature as man. Everything is possible for God. First of all, reach invisible Satchidananda and then coming down, look at the universe. Everything is its manifestation. It is God alone who has become everything. The world by no means exists apart from him.

The non-dualistic philosophy of Vedanta says that the acts of creation, preservation and destruction, the universe itself and all its living beings are the manifestations of Shakti, the divine power or MAYA.

If we reason it out, we realise that all these are as illusory as a dream. Brahman alone is the reality, and all else is unreal. Even this very Shakti is unsubstantial, like a dream.

But though you reason all your life, unless you are established in samadhi (deep meditation), you cannot go beyond the jurisdiction of Shakti. Even when you say, "I am meditating" or "I am contemplating", still you are moving in the realm of Shakti; within its power.

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

Brahman (Shiva) and Shakti are identical. It is like fire and its power to burn. One cannot conceive of the sun's rays without the sun. Thus, one cannot think of Brahman without Shakti, or of Shakti without Brahman. One cannot think of the Absolute without the relative, or of the relative without the Absolute.

The primordial power (Adyashakti) is ever at play. She is creating, preserving and destroying in play, as it were. This power is called Kali. Kali is verily Brahman and Brahman is verily Kali. It is one and the same reality. When we think of it as inactive, that is to say, not engaged in the acts of creation, preservation and destruction, then we call it Brahman. But when it engages in these activities, then we call it Kali or Shakti. The reality is one and the same; the difference is in name and form.

In the Vedas, the creation is likened to the spider and its web. The spider brings the web out of itself and then remains in it. God is the container of the universe and also what is contained in it. After the creation the primal power (shakti) dwells in the universe itself. She brings forth this phenomenal world and then pervades it.

Bondage and liberation are both of her making. By her maya, worldly people become entangled in worldly maya, and again through her grace they attain their liberation. She is called the saviour, and the remover of the bondage that binds one to the world.

The sky appears blue at a distance; but look at it closely and you will find that it has no colour. The water of the ocean looks blue at a distance, but when you go near and take it in your hand, you find that it is colourless. Men are deluded through her maya and have become attached to the world.

Bondage and liberation are of the mind alone. It is all a question of the mind. The mind will take the colour you dye it with. If you are in bad company, then you will talk and think like your companions. On the other hand, when you are in the company of devotees, you will think and talk only of God.

If a person repeats the name of God, his or her body, mind and everything become pure. Have faith in His name.

The bridging of the gulf between the Supreme Reality and our relative world is provided by MAYA, the divine mother

The Upanishads describe the Absolute (the Supreme Reality) as being beyond the grasp of our senses, mind and intellect; being extremely subtle.

Gita, Ch.13, Verse 31.

"Being without beginning and devoid of any qualities (attributes), the Supreme Self, imperishable, though dwelling in the body, neither acts, nor is tainted".

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

The relative world of the senses and mind, the world we see and experience, this world of multiplicity; how does this world originate from the Supreme non-dual principle?

This bridging of the gulf between the Supreme Reality and our relative world is provided by prakriti or maya or nature called Adyashakti, the Divine Mother. (Absolute and relative, nitya and lila).

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### Kali the mother of time

As the Mahanirvana Tantra says: "To facilitate concentration of mind and for the speedy fulfilment of aspirations, the glorious Kali, the mother of TIME, who is really without form, is invested with forms consistent with her attributes and activities".

Gita, Ch.11, Verse 32.

"I am the mighty world destroying Time,  
now engaged in destroying the world".

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### Durga Festival Navaratri

Explanations based on the teachings of  
Swami Shivananda, Rishikesh

The Ken Upanishad, part three, known as Yaksha Prashna says:  
"The supreme power of God is manifested as **Knowledge, Activity** and **Strength**".

The Bhagavad Gita describes the same in different words.  
Ch14, Verse 5. "Purity, passion and inertia- these qualities, born of nature, bind fast in the body".

These three qualities are known as gunas - Sattwa- Rajas and Tamas.

Each of these three gunas is represented by a colour. Sattwa is white (colour of purity). Sattwa is represented by that aspect of mother Durga we worship as goddess Saraswati. Saraswati wears white. Sattwa binds by attachment to happiness and knowledge. Sattwa is luminous and healthy.  
(Gita Ch.14-Verse 6.)

The colour of Rajas is red, represented by that aspect of mother Durga we worship as goddess Lakshmi. She wears red. Rajas is of the nature of activity, passion and ambition, the source of thirst for physical enjoyment. Rajas binds



## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

fast one by attachment to action.

-(Gita Ch.14. Verse 7.)

The Rajasic person runs after power, position, name, fame and comforts, and involves himself in endless activities to acquire material wealth.

When we worship goddess Lakshmi for spiritual wealth, she bestows on her devotees the inexhaustible divine wealth or Daivi Sampat (which is described in the Gita, Ch.16, Verses 1,2 and 3). Divine wealth or the wealth of 26 divine qualities, brings with it material prosperity as well.

Tamas is black, represented by that aspect of mother Durga we worship as goddess Kali. She is sometimes depicted in dark blue.

Tamas is born of ignorance, deluding all embodied beings. Tamas binds fast in heedlessness, sleep, indolence, laziness (Gita Ch.14 Verse 8). Tamas is that binding force with a tendency to lethargy (lack of energy, vitality), sloth and foolish actions. It causes non-discrimination or delusion. It binds one who associates the Self with the body. A tamasic person acts under the compulsion of the body. He has no power of judgment. His actions are not guided by reasons. His senses are dull.

These are all baser animal qualities, the lower diabolical nature in man. We pray to mother Kali, as Durga the terrible, as supreme power and force, to destroy all our impurities, our vices, our defects. She is to fight and annihilate these demons. This is the 'strength' aspect of shakti as mentioned in the Upanishad. Mother Kali is the power that guides and protects the devotee's spiritual practice from its many dangers and pitfalls.

Mother Kali represents the ferocious and destructive aspect of TIME.

In contrast with creative force in nature, this power is ever active disintegrating forms and structures. It drives heavenly bodies back into their nebulous state.

In the Kenopanishad, part three, (Yaksha Prashna), 12th Mantra, the Divine Mother is described as a woman wondrously fair, daughter of the snowy mountain Himavat, her name Hemavati or Uma.

She is the energy aspect of the Lord. Her other name is Durga. This cosmic energy or shakti is the omnipotent power of the Lord. We call her Durga, the Divine Mother.

Lower states of ignorance and egoism are typified by or personified as demons with such names as Dhumralochan, Chanda and Munda, which should be destroyed by the sudden burst of energy and rough handling. Dumralochan (the smoky-eyed, a person whose understanding is clouded by ignorance) stands for

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

the grosser state of ignorance and egoism. Munda means the low. Munda is the low profile of our egoism. Chanda means fierce. Chanda is the more horrible and fierce side of it. Shumbha and Nishumbha signify more enlightened aspects of egoism. Shumbh means to shine.

Mahishasur stands for ignorance and stubborn egoism. Raktabij represents the subtler states of desire which multiply endlessly to create more problems.

Navaratri (nine nights) - Durga

The nine days' worship is divided into three days of worship for each of the three goddesses-

1. Kali, the goddess of strength for protection and valour
2. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth
3. Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge.

Three days are allotted to indicate the discipline and training to be practised at the three levels of personality namely physical, mental and intellectual to achieve the goal set for each type of worship. The nine days of spiritual discipline and training are only symbolical. In actual practice, the time required to achieve such discipline will run into many months if not a few years.

### Vijaydashmi

The tenth day, Vijaydashmi, is the day of victory, representing the day of enlightenment when all vasanas are destroyed and the knowledge of the Self has dawned in the individual. The individual is said to have attained God-realisation. The triumph of having moved from the ignorant state of JIVAHOOD (embodied soul) to the enlightened state of SHIVAHOOD. This day marks the triumph of spirit over matter, of victory of divine qualities over evil qualities, of the removal of ignorance by the light of wisdom and knowledge.

The victory of Durga is the triumph of the aggressive good over evil, the destruction of vasanas / subtle impressions, desires, and the realisation of the divine Self.

In modern language, Saraswati represents pure science and Lakshmi represents applied science. Thus, Lakshmi flows from Saraswati. First comes the worship of Saraswati through scientific research and then acquisition, assimilation and distribution of knowledge. This is followed by the worship of Lakshmi through the application of knowledge in all fields of human development and welfare.

The Legend

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

The goddess Durga was created by the three gods - Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara - for overpowering the demons. A fierce light came out of the mouths of the three gods. All that light united and became one. It was a huge mount of light, throwing flames on all sides. That united light grew into a female form known as Durga - Mahamaya. Siva gave her a trident like his own. Vishnu gave her a counterpart of his own chakra. Varuna gave the conch, Agni gave the missile named shakti. Vayu gave bow and arrow, Indra gave vajra and bell. Yama gave danda and the sea gave the noose. Brahma gave rudraksh beads and the ascetics gave water pot. Vishwakarma gave her weapons of sorts and powerful amulets. The Himalayas gave her a lion to ride upon. Thus, armed and adorned, the goddess sent forth a loud cry that filled all space, and the echo reverberated with terrible noise, striking terror all round.

The demons sent their most powerful representative Mahishasur in the form of a buffalo to fight Durga. The buffalo represents the lower animal instincts in human beings in an aggressive form. The goddess represents the higher, nobler tendencies also in an aggressive form - the form of Durga.

### The Demons

The 16th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is entitled "The yoga of the division between the divine and the demoniacal". Ch.16-Verse 4, The Lord says:

"Hypocrisy, arrogance, self-conceit, anger, and also harshness and ignorance, belong to one who is born in a demoniacal state".

Ch.16-Verse 7.-"The demoniacal know not what to do and what to refrain from; neither purity nor right conduct nor truth is found in them".

Ch.16, Verse 8. - "They say: 'this universe is without truth, without a moral basis, without a God, brought about by a mutual union with lust for its cause, what else?'

Ch.16, Verse 11.-"Giving themselves over to immeasurable cares ending only with death, regarding gratification of lust as their highest aim, and feeling sure that that is all".

Ch.16, Verse 12. - "Bound by a hundred ties of hope, given over to lust and anger, they try to obtain by unlawful means hordes of wealth for sensual enjoyment".

Ch.16, Verse 17.- "Self-conceited, stubborn, filled with the pride and intoxication of wealth, they perform sacrifices (to deceive the world and not out of faith and sincerity) out of ostentation, contrary to scriptural ordinances.

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

Ch.16-Verse18.- "Given over to egoism, power, haughtiness, lust and anger, these malicious people hate Me in their own bodies and those of others".

**"Triple is the gate of this hell"**

Ch.16, Verse 21- "Triple is the gate of this hell, destructive of the self- Lust. Anger and Greed- therefore one should abandon these three".

Ch.16, Verse 22.- "A man who is liberated from these three gates to darkness, practises what is good for him and thus goes to the Supreme goal".

(When these gates to hell are abandoned, the path to salvation is cleared for the aspirant. He gets the company of sages, which leads to liberation. He receives spiritual instructions and practises them. He hears the scriptures, reflects, meditates and attains self-realisation).

Ch. 16, Verse 23.- "He who, having cast aside the ordinances of the scriptures, acts under the impulse of desire, attains neither perfection nor happiness nor the supreme goal".

Gita Ch.16, Verse 24.- "Therefore let the scripture be the authority in determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done".

('He who desires the welfare of the Self should not disregard the commands of the sacred scriptures. A man who is anxious to attain eternal bliss should respect the Vedas, and the Smritis, which lay down the codes of right conduct. He should readily renounce whatever the scriptures ask him to abandon and accept whatever he is directed to accept. Treat the scriptures with great respect'.) - Swami Shivananda, Divine Life Society, Rishikesh.

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### **Durga - The sole refuge of men when attacked by robbers**

From the Mahabharata

Virata Parva, Section VI:

Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

"And while Yudhishtira was on his way to the delightful city of Virata, he began to praise mentally the Divine Durga, the Supreme Goddess of the Universe, the giver of prosperity, the enhancer of the glory of the worshipper's family, and the destroyer of Asuras. Divine Durga always rescues the worshipper sunk in sin, like a cow in the mire, who in the hours of distress calls upon that eternal giver of blessings for relieving him of their burdens.

O Thou that has slain the Mahishasura, that Thou art praised and worshipped by the gods for the protection of the three worlds. Thou art the great Kali,

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

capable of going everywhere at will, and bestowing boons on Thy devotees, thou art ever followed by Brahma and the other gods. By them that call upon Thee for the relief of their burdens, and by them also that bow to Thee at daybreak on earth, there is nothing that cannot be attained in respect either of offspring or wealth. And because you rescue people from difficulties when they are afflicted in the wilderness or sinking in the great ocean, it is for this that Thou art called DURGA by all. Thou art the sole refuge of men when attacked by robbers or while afflicted in crossing streams and seas or in wilderness and forests. Those men that remember thee are never prostrated, O great Goddess.

Thou art Fame, Thou art Prosperity, Thou art Steadiness, Thou art Success; Thou art the Wife, Thou art men's Offspring, Thou art Knowledge, and Thou art the Intellect. Thou art Beauty, Forgiveness, Mercy and every other thing. You dispel, worshipped by your devotees their fetters, ignorance, loss of children and loss of wealth, disease, death and fear. And they in the world who will recite the Mother's attributes and achievements will be freed from their sins. And they who will invoke Her in exile or in the city, in the midst of battle or of dangers from foes, in forests or in inaccessible deserts, in seas or in mountain fastnesses, there is nothing that they will not obtain in this world".

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### Hymn to Durga

Uttered by Arjuna on the eve of the battle of Kurukshetra between Pandavas and Kauravas

The Mahabharata  
Bhishma Parva  
Section XXIII Bhagavad Gita Parva  
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

#### Addressing Dhritarashtra

Sanjaya said: Beholding the Dhartarashtra (Kaurava) army approach for fight, Krishna said these words for Arjuna's benefit.

The holy one (Krishna) said: Cleansing thyself, O mighty armed one, utter on the eve of the battle thy hymn to Durga for (compassing) the defeat of the foe.

Sanjaya continued: Thus, addressed on the eve of the battle by Vasudeva (Krishna) endued with great intelligence, Pritha's son Arjuna, alighting from his car (chariot), said the following hymn with joined hands.

Arjuna said: I bow to thee, O leader of Yogins, O thou that art identical with Brahman, O thou that dwellest in the forest of Mandara, O thou that are freed from decrepitude and decay, O Kali, O wife of Kapala, O thou that art of a black and tawny hue. I bow to thee O bringer of benefits to thy devotees, I bow to



## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

thee, O Mahakali, O wife of the universal destroyer, I bow to thee, O proud one, O thou that rescuest from dangers, O thou that art endued with every auspicious attribute.

O thou that art sprung from the Kata race, O thou that deserves the most regardful worship, O fierce one, O giver of victory, O victory's self, O thou that bears a banner of peacock plumes, O thou that art decked with every ornament, O thou that bears an awful spear, O thou that holdest a sword and shield.

O thou that art the younger sister of the chief of cowherds, O eldest one, O thou that wert born in the race of the cowherd Nanda! O thou that art always fond of buffalo's blood, O thou that wert born in the race of Kusika, O thou that art dressed in yellow robes, O thou that has devoured Asuras assuming the face of a wolf, I bow to thee that art fond of battle!

O Uma, O Sakambhari, O thou that art white in hue, O thou that art black in hue, O thou that hast slain the Asura Kaitabha, O thou that art yellow eyed, O thou that art diverse-eyed, O thou of eyes that have the colour of smoke, I bow to thee.

O thou that art the Vedas, the Srutis, and the highest virtue, O thou that art propitious to Brahmanas engaged in sacrifice, O thou that hast a knowledge of the past, thou that art ever present in the sacred abodes erected to thee in cities of Jamvudwipa, I bow to thee. Thou art the science of Brahma among sciences, and thou that art that sleep of creatures from which there is no waking.

O mother of Skanda, O thou that possesses the six (highest) attributes, O Durga, O thou that dwellest in accessible regions, thou art described as Swaha, and Swadha, as Kala, as Kashtha, and as Saraswati, as Savitra the mother of the Vedas, and as the science of Vedanta.

[Note: Both Swaha and Swadha are Mantras of high efficacy. Kala and Kashtha are divisions of time. Saraswati implies speech.]

With inner soul cleansed, I praise thee, O great goddess, let victory always attend me through thy grace on the field of battle. In inaccessible regions, where there is fear, in places of difficulty, in the abodes of thy worshippers, and in the nether regions (Patala), thou always dwellest. Thou always defeat the danavas. Thou art the unconsciousness, the sleep, the illusion, the modesty, the beauty of all creatures.

Thou art the twilight, thou art the day, thou art Savitri, and thou art the mother. Thou art contentment, thou art growth, thou art light. It is thou that supports the Sun and the Moon and that makes them shine. Thou art the prosperity of those that are prosperous. The Siddhas and Charanas behold thee in contemplation.



## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

Sanjaya continued: Understanding (the measure of) Partha's (Arjuna's) devotion, Durga who is always graciously inclined towards mankind, appeared in the firmament and in the presence of Govinda (Krishna), said these words:

The goddess said: Within a short time, thou shalt conquer thy foes, O Pandava. O invincible one, thou hast Narayana (again) for aiding thee. Thou art incapable of being defeated by foes, even by the wielder of the thunderbolt himself.

Sanjaya continued: Having said this, the boon-giving goddess disappeared soon. The son of Kunti, however, obtaining that boon, regarded himself as successful, and the son of Pritha then mounted his own excellent car. And then Krishna and Arjuna, seated on the same car (chariot), blew their celestial conches.

The man that recites this hymn rising at dawn, has no fear any time from Yakshas, Rakshasas, and Pisachas. He can have no enemies; he has no fear from snakes and all animals that have fangs and teeth, and from kings. He is sure to be victorious in all disputes, and if bound, he is freed from his bonds. He is sure to get over all difficulties, is freed from thieves, is ever victorious in battle and wins the goddess of prosperity forever. With health and strength, he lives for a hundred years.

I have known all this through the grace of Vyasa endued with great wisdom. Thy wicked sons, however, all entangled in the meshes of death, do not, from ignorance, know them to be Nara and Narayana. Nor do they, entangled in the meshes of death, do not, from ignorance, know that the hour of this kingdom has arrived. Dwaipayana and Narada, and Kanwa, and the sinless Rama, had all prevented thy son. But he did not accept their words. There where righteousness is, there are glory and beauty. There where modesty is, there are prosperity and intelligence. There where righteousness is, there is Krishna; and there where Krishna is, there is victory.

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Durga Saptashati

### The Devisukta of the Rig Veda

Explanations based upon the writings of  
Shree Devadatta Kali

Devisukta is a hymn of eight verses found in the most ancient Hindu sacred text, the Rig Veda (in the 10th mandala)

The Devisukta (RV 10.125) declares that the Goddess is the power expressed through all the gods, that they are united in her who shines with consciousness,

## Maya – Shakti - Prakriti

that her presence is all-pervading, that she supports all of creation, that she is the source of righteousness and the revealer of truth, that she is the source of all worlds, yet that she shines transcendent beyond them. Among Shaktas this Vedic hymn is held in high esteem and is considered to be the source from which the entire Chandi sprang. Later, the Chandi itself was elaborated upon in the Puranas and Tantras.

The Chandi goes by two other names. The most common and widely recognized is Devimahatmya [The Glory of the Goddess]. The other is Sri Durga Saptashati [Seven Hundred Verses to Sri Durga]

