

Navraatri – Its Significance



By Bhanu Didi

Symbolizing victory of positivity over negativity, Navraatri literally means 'nine nights' in Sanskrit; Nav - Nine and Raatri - nights. During these nine nights and ten days, the three forms of the goddess -Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi - are invoked.

Amidst great celebration, the mind can be carried away and easily go off-centre. Usually in any celebration, the mind goes everywhere. So to bring back the mind to the centre, we keep a joyful silence with awareness. The mind is always conditioned to patterns.

So this is like conditioning the mind to a set pattern that is conducive to growth. The first three days are tamasic, the next three rajasic, and the last three sattvic. In life, all these three qualities co-exist and we have to skilfully get past them. These nine days are a reminder of this. It is the awakening of the Divinity – that quality of the Mother Divine which does not negate anything yet nurtures the good qualities. Supporting the positivity in us and skilfully removing the negative can be learnt by invoking and awakening the Divine in us. This is what is done in the Chandi Homa.

Irrespective of the qualities of a child, the mother always loves the child. Same is with the Mother Divine.

This all-inclusive power supports us and brings out the divine quality in us. This can happen only when we are doing our sadhana. These nine days are a reminder to be a good sadhak (seeker) and of course, none of this can even stir without the grace of the Master and we are very fortunate to have his grace in abundance.

It is said in the scriptures that one can realize the Self through sadhana, seva, satsang and the Guru's grace.

Navraatri – Its Significance

These nine days are an opportunity to be completely in sadhana, seva, satsang and of course, the grace of the Master is already with us.

Nine nights

Navratri (nine nights) is one of the greatest Hindu festivals. It symbolises the triumph of good over evil. Navratri takes place at the beginning of October or thereabouts around harvest time in Northern India and, as the name implies, this festival is celebrated for nine days. Navratri is also known as Durga Puja.

During this period **Durga, Lakshmi** and **Saraswati** are worshipped as three different manifestations of Shakti, or cosmic energy.

The Durga Festival

Durga, the Mother Goddess

The festival is dedicated to **Durga**, the mother goddess who also represents power. Durga annihilated the demon Mahishasura after a relentless battle lasting nine days and nights.

The motherhood of God

Navratri is a festival in which God is adored as Mother. It is said that **Shiva** gave permission to Shivaa (Satti) to see her mother for nine days in the year and this festival also remembers this visit. Families make an attempt to return home on these days and leave on the tenth.

Hinduism is the only religion in the world which has emphasised to such an extent the motherhood of God.

To celebrate a good harvest and to propitiate the nine planets, women also plant nine different kinds of food grain seeds in small containers during these nine days and then offer the young saplings to the goddess.

During Navratri, some devotees of Durga observe a fast and prayers are offered for the protection of health and property. A period of introspection and purification, Navratri is traditionally an auspicious time for starting new ventures.

Celebrations

Navratri is celebrated by communities getting together for dances and nightly feasts.

Navraatri – Its Significance

In India, the most colourful and elaborate celebrations take part in Bengal, where huge idols of the goddess are worshipped.

Divine power

In Gujarat painted earthen pots with water or a lamp inside symbolise the power of the goddess.

The flame symbolises everlasting divine power whilst the fluid water is transitory.

An auspicious time

Feasts of great variety and delicacy are offered to guests and family during the nine days.

Another part of the puja may involve designing puja-thalis or aartis which are decorated plates in honour of the mother goddess, Amba (Ambika).

Dasera (Dussera)

The tenth day of the festival is called Dasera, and marks the triumph of good over evil, and also the motherhood of God.

Durga Puja is particularly important for Hindus in Bengal. After having worshipped her for nine days, her image is taken to the streets in a procession and there is much celebration and dancing.

To mark Shiva leaving her mother after the nine-day visit, her image is cast into water.

In northern parts of India, Hindus also celebrate Raam's victory over Raavan during this time. This festival is called Dussera. The ten days represent the ten heads of Raavan, and each day is used by Hindus to get rid of bad characteristics, such as lust, jealousy and the 10 attributes of our 10 senses are being put to control. The tenth day is known as the Day of Victory.

