



A Path to Hindu Heritage

NAVARATRI PUJA Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati



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We also invite our readers to send their comments regarding the **Marg** articles, or about other issues falling within the scope of **Marg**. We reserve the right to select, abbreviate, and edit for clarity submitted materials to conform to the editorial policy of **Marg** and the available space.



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DEVI – THE COMPASSIONATE DESTROYER

By Swami Jyotirmaynanada

Navaratri Puja (Mother - Shakti Worship) is celebrated in India in the bright half of the lunar month of Ashwina (September-October). The Mother aspect of God is worshipped as Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati, each for three nights respectively. Navaratri Puja culminates on the tenth day, which is called Vijaya Dashami—the final victory of the Devi over the demons. Navaratri Puja depicts the long course of spiritual evolution in your life and reveals the Way in which the Divine Mother leads your soul to the ultimate victory over the asuric and rakshasic qualities (demoniac qualities) that present countless obstacles on the spiritual path.

In one's life, the forces of darkness manifest as anger and hatred, malice and greed, pride and infatuation, craving and conceit, etc. These are the demons within each human being. On the other hand, the forces of light manifest as compassion and magnanimity, humility and charity, purity and sincerity, universal love, nonviolence and peace. These are the gods within each human being. Life is an arena for the battling forces of darkness and light. The essence of the Puja is to enhance the forces of light, to control the senses and the mind, to overcome the desires emanating from the lower self, and to realize the Divine Self that shines in the cave of the heart.

In the first stage of Navaratri Puja, the Durga-aspect of the Divine Mother is worshipped for the destruction and sublimation of gross impurities in your unconscious that result from numerous births or incarnations. These malas (impurities of the heart) express themselves in the form of anger, greed, hatred, lust, pride, jealousy, etc.

Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, is worshipped in the second stage of Devi Puja. She is symbolic of divine glory or aishwarya. Goddess Lakshmi brings steadiness in the chitta (mind stuff) by



Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Durga

enriching the spirit and removing vikshepa-distraction of mind caused by subtle impressions of impurity in the unconscious. This phase of your spiritual movement is marked by the development of Divine qualities such as compassion, dispassion, purity,

renunciation, charity, universal love, unity, magnanimity of the heart, balance of mind, etc. These are rare gifts of spiritual wealth.

In the third phase of the Puja, Goddess Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge, is worshipped as She tears the veil of ignorance (avarana) and reveals the splendor of Consciousness. The realization of the unveiled beauty of the Supreme confers upon your immortality.

Throughout this glorious path of spiritual evolution, the grace of the Goddess enfolds the aspirant, guiding a series of destructions that are absolutely essential for the increasing revelation of the bliss of the Divine Self within. To an unthinking mind, however, destruction breathes a sense of pathos and melancholy. However, to a mind illumined by the values of transcendental truth, destruction is an inevitable process in the course of construction, and is Blessedness masked with a dark veil. All things of the world change in order to present various enjoyments to evolving souls in the course of their evolution. There lies significance in change and meaning in destruction. Even though the mind and senses are subject to change, the very personality of an individual will also change in time.

Changes must occur, and destruction cannot be avoided. Aspirants who are wise should not be wafted by the current of

HINDU CONCEPTS ON MORALITY

Chandra Sekaran

Socio-cultural-religious factors have greatly influenced a person's moral values. Morality (from the Latin word *moralitas* that means "manner, character, proper behavior") is the differentiation of intentions, decisions, and actions between those that are good (or right) and those that are bad (or wrong). It is a complex, intriguing, and evolving construct.

In human evolution, cultures that have been just, equal, and moral have been widely accepted and appreciated and promote healthy morals. A person's moral values are also derived from one's environment including parents, teachers, role models, peers, colleagues, and the wider society.

In this article, we shall review the traditional Hindu concepts of morality, the development of one's personality, and their relevance in the current times.

THE HINDU LITERATURE

Vedas, the most important Hindu scriptures, recorded in the four sub-categories viz., Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, and Atharva Veda contain the earliest concepts of Hinduism. These four Vedas are further divided into two parts, **Karma-Kanda**, and **Jnana-Kanda**. Karma Kanda deals with rituals and prayers while Jnana-Kanda deals only with the ontological realities – the nature of the world, consciousness (or self) and God known as Brahman in the Vedas. It logically analyses their mutual

relationship to determine whether these are interconnected or if there is any fundamental difference between them. **Vedanta** refers to the set of teachings that are contained in the **Jnana-Kanda** section, which are the culmination of the Vedas. Their vision is to present what the Vedas want us to know.

Vedanta is not restricted or confined to one book and there is no sole source for Vedantic philosophy. However, it is widely accepted that the three most important constituents of Vedanta are the **Upanishads**, **Bhagavad Gita** and **Brahmasutras**. Upanishads are passages from the Jnana-kanda section of the Vedas. They are the core of Vedic wisdom and are essentially philosophical in nature. Though the authorship of many Upanishads is not known, many of them are presented as a set of dialogues between teacher and disciple in logical method trying to uncover the nature of reality. Brahmasutras are intended to logically explain the teachings of the Upanishads.[1] They attempt to systematize the various strands of the Upanishads, which form the background of the orthodox systems of thought.

It is also important to mention that the **Panchtantras**,[7], an ancient Indian inter-related collection of animal fables in verse and prose, are a wonderful example of using social stories to communicate the principles of

Dharma (morality) to children. The original Sanskrit work is believed to have been composed in the 3rd century BCE. The Panchtantras continue to be very popular as stories for children.

BHAGAVAT GITA

The Bhagavad Gita, one of the most revered religious texts of the Hindus is considered to contain the essence and spirit of Hindu philosophy. To understand Bhagavad Gita, it is important to understand the context within which it is placed. It forms a part of the great epic, Mahabharata which is traditionally ascribed to the sage Vyasa.[8] It revolves around the fight for the throne of the kingdom of Hastinapur. This battle is fought between the Pandavas (five sons of King Pandu) and the Kauravas (a hundred brothers who are descendants of King Kuru) who are related as cousins. Pandavas have the legal right to the throne, but Kauravas take over the kingdom by cheating the Pandavas, in a game of dice. The Pandavas have Lord Krishna on their side as their guide, but he has vowed not to use any weapons in the battle. Lord Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. There are numerous moral dilemmas contained in Mahabharata that make it a very meaningful and interesting read.

The Bhagavad Gita is centered on the **moral dilemma** faced by despondent Arjuna (one of the

SARVE BHAVANTU SUKHINAH.... MAY EVERYONE BE HAPPY....

Sarve bhavantu sukhinah (May everyone be happy)
Sarve santu niramayah (May everyone be free from all diseases)
Sarve bhadrani pashyantu (May everyone see goodness in everything)
Ma kaschit duhkha bhaag bhavet (May noone be suffering or distressed)

This is a very simple prayer applicable to one and all. Millions and millions of Indian Hindus have been offering this prayer for last five thousand and odd years. The prayer is so simple that one can easily remember the simple meaning as 'May all be happy and healthy'. As we go into the depth of its meaning there is lot more to understand about the psyche of the sages who offered this universal prayer, which is wholesome, all encompassing, purely socialistic and highly spiritual. It brings out the uniqueness of a spiritual master who develops enormous love for the entire creation so that he not only does whatever best he can do for others and also offers prayer to the higher forces that are beyond one's control.

Thus, this prayer is not just a simple prayer but becomes a mantra, a goal for a sadhaka (spiritual seeker) to meditate upon and move on in the path of spirituality to achieve universality. Let us dwell on these thoughts in. Today's satsang (It is a snaskrit term - derived from two words: (1) Sat that means "true" and (2) Sangha that means community or company. Thus, "Satsang can be translated as "being in the company of truth."

SARVE BHAVANTU SUKHINAH

The first sentence of the shlokas mean:

"May Everyone be Happy" Everyone here refers to the entire creation, to all sensuous beings including plants, animals and human beings. Although this prayer is in Sanskrit and though this is given in the so-called Hindu scriptures, when the sages say "sarve..." they do not exclude non- Hindus, as it means everyone in the universe. The prayer does not say, I pray God to give happiness only to Hindus. and you do not deserve my prayers if you are not a Hindu!

Sometimes the religious institutions can be so narrow that the God you believe in may be the same, the heaven and hell are the same, and the prophet also is the same, but you cannot pray for the wellbeing of people of other sects. One of my Christian friends was saying that when she was a young girl, the church school she was going to, taught her that they are supposed to pray only for those who go to that particular church and those who are associated with other churches do not deserve their prayers. She realized the shallowness of this when she grew up, but for many of her friends this remained a belief for lifetime! Religious

Since deep inside our true nature is this blissful awareness, which is the basis of spirituality, we need to nurture the spiritual attitude consciously as much as possible. This requires constant

full of events. Some events lead to happiness, and some are unfortunate and can make us miserable. Here the sage is giving us this spiritual lesson that even these difficult moments of life triggered by unfortunate events need not make us miserable. He is hinting that you have the inner freedom to accept them without any complaint.

Once again let us recollect that a prayer is complimentary to hard work. It is not something someone can give us without putting in our effort. It is also not something which can reject the unseen higher force behind any activity. Prayer is to give additional inner strength that can give us confidence to work with full energy. When we pray, you are tuning yourself to the un-manifest good forces in the web of universal consciousness that can help you to get the desired results. It tunes you to the natural laws. Many a times when your prayer was very deep and heartfelt it worked wonders, is it not? The results were so rewarding, you got more than you expected. You wonder and say 'Oh God, thank you so much. Your grace is so great. Things are too good. 'I' could never have planned it this way, thank you my Supreme-Father!!

Let us remember that all this process of spiritual Satsang is useful and meaningful only if we recognize that 'peace within us is the basis of establishing peace in the entire globe here and now!'

ॐ

And finally, the sage says 'Ma-kaschit uhka bhag-bhavet!' What a universal prayer. He has no enmity towards anyone in the entire creation. This is the true wish of a great master who has seen the unity of existence. By saying this prayer, the sage is leading us through the real spiritual journey which will lead us to the realization that our nature is bliss. Life is

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SWAMI RAMANANDA OF VARANASI

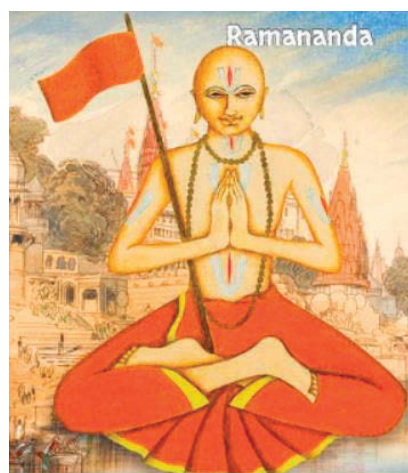
Lakshmi Chandrashekhar Subamanian

Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism) has given rise to a plethora of poet-saints, immortalized by tradition. Their devotional songs have lived long after their physical passing, carrying on the spirit of their soulful love and longing for God. The seven North Indian saints in this Insight are:—Lal Ded, Swami Ramananda, Narasinha Mehta, Ravidas, Surdas, Dadu Dayal and Tulsidas—they sang the universal language of bhakti in five Indian tongues: Kashmiri, Hindi, Gujarati, Braj-bhasha, and Avadhi.

Swami Ramananda is often hailed as the guru of a galaxy of saints. He played a crucial role in the cultivation of poet-saints and the propagation of bhakti in late 14th- or early 15th-century North India.

As with countless Indian saints, little is known with certainty about the life of Swami Ramananda, including year of birth and death. His biography has been derived from mentions of him in secondary literature. The most accepted version holds that Swami Ramananda was born in a Brahmin family at Prayaga (Allahabad) about late-14th-century, and died about mid-15th-century.

In his youth, he became a disciple of Swami Raghavananda. He gave him the "Ram Mantra" and initiated him as Ramananda. According to legend, as a youth Ramananda went on pilgrimage to South India and returned as a follower of Sri Vaishnavism in the line of the renowned philosopher and theologian Ramanujacharya, though he disagreed with that tradition's strict ritualistic guidelines and caste exclusivity. Some Ramanandis (Disciple of Swami Ramananda, such as Rupkala, disassociate their founder from the South Indian Vaishnavas. Another influence in



Ramananda's teachings is that of the Nathpanthi ascetics.

Many people thought after his travels, Ramananda settled in Varanasi, on the banks of River Ganga, to preach in local dialects his liberal ideas of egalitarianism, selfless devotion, and making bhakti truly accessible to all people. However, per George Greirson, Swami Raghavananda, who was well versed in Vedanta and Vatakalai (northern, Rama-avatar) school of Vaishnavism, was from the South, and after much wandering had settled at Varanasi. There, and not in the South, he had Ramananda as his disciple."

TESTIMONY FROM
Dr. RAMDAS LAMB

"Swami Ramananda opened up Ram bhakti to the masses like no one else. During my time as a vairagi in India, it was always so refreshing to be in satsang with those for whom devotion was both the means *and* the goal, the process as well as the product. Swami Ramananda played a pivotal role in the individualization and

RAMANANDA TRADITIONS TODAY

A pioneering force of bhakti in North India, Saint Ramananda is also the inspiration behind the Ramananda Sampradaya, an ascetic Hindu order. Its sadhus (saint-practitioners), often called Ramanandis or Vairagis, adhere to vows,

A story from Mahabharata

DRAUPADI'S SWAYAMVARAM

While the Pandavas were living in disguise as brahmins at Ekachakra Pura, news of the swayamvara of Draupadi, the daughter of King Drupada of Panchala, reached them. Many brahmanas of Ekachakra Pura planned to go to Panchala in the hope of receiving the customary gifts and to see the festivities and pageant of a royal wedding. Kunti, with her motherly instinct, read her sons' desire to go to Panchala and win Draupadi. So she told Yudhishtira: "We have been in this city so long that it is time to think of going somewhere else. Let us therefore go to Drupada's kingdom which is reputed to be fair and prosperous."

The marriage hall was beautifully decorated and built amidst a finely laid out group of new guesthouses designed to accommodate the swayamvara suitors and guests. Attractive sights and sports had been arranged for public entertainment and there were glorious festivities for fourteen days continuously. A mighty steel bow was placed in the marriage hall. The candidate for the princess' hand was required to string the bow and with it shoot a steel arrow through the central aperture of a revolving disk at a target placed on high. This required almost superhuman strength and skill, and Drupada proclaimed that the hero who would perform this feat would win his daughter.

Many valiant princes had gathered there from all parts of India. The sons of Dhritarashtra were there as well as Karna, Krishna, Sisupala, Jarasandha, and Salva. Besides the competitors there was a huge concourse of spectators and visitors. The noise that issued therefrom resembled the uproar of the ocean and over it all arose the auspicious sound of festal music from hundreds of instruments.

Dhrishtadyumna, Draupadi's brother, rode on horseback in front of his sister seated on an elephant. and entered the swayamvara hall. Garland in hand, and coyly glancing at the valiant princes, who for their part looked at her in speechless admiration, she ascended the dais.

The priests recited the sacred mantras and offered oblations in the fire. After the peace invocation had been chanted and the flourish of music had stopped, Dhrishtadyumna took Draupadi by the hand and led her to the center of the hall. Then he proclaimed in loud and clear voice:

Hear ye, O princes seated in this assembly, here is the bow. There is the target and here are the arrows. He who sends five arrows in succession through the hole of the wheel and unerringly hits the target, if he also be of good family and presence, shall win my sister.

Many noted princes rose one after another and tried in vain to string the bow. It was too heavy and stiff for them, and

PERFECT PEACE

There once was a King who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The King looked at all the pictures, but there were only two he really liked, and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for peaceful towering mountains were all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky from which rain fell, in which lightning played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall.

This did not look peaceful at all. But when the King looked, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest -- perfect peace. Which picture do you think won the prize? The King chose the second picture.

Do you know why? "Because" explained the King, "peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace."



BRAHMAN

न चक्षुषा गृह्यते नापि वाचा नान्यैर् देवैस् तपसा कर्मणा वा
ज्ञानप्रसादेन विशुद्धसत्त्वः ततस्तु तं पश्यते निष्कलं ध्यायमानः ॥

Na chahshushā grihyate nāpi vāchā Nānyair devais tapasā karmanā vā.

Jnann-prasāden vishuddh-satvah tatastu tarn pashyate nishkalam dhyāyamānah -- Mundaka Upanishad

Brahman or God cannot be experienced by the limited mind and senses. However, when 'sattva' or purity is enhanced in the mind, the intellect becomes intuitive. It is by the intuitive function of the intellect that one attains realization of the Self.'

By the study of scriptures under the guidance of a Guru, an aspirant gains intellectual insight into the unreality of the world and the Reality of the Divine 'Self'. By practicing profound meditation on Brahman, he gains the intuitional revelation, "I am Brahman", and becomes liberated from the cycles of birth and death.



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- Maintains a Panel of Speakers on Hindu Dharma related topics.
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- In the spirit of “Vasudaiva kutumbkum”, the Foundation runs a sewa (service) program, often in collaboration with other sister organizations.
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