

## Navaratri and Dashara

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A Hindu festival is a celebration that integrates spiritual, philosophical, religious and cultural aspects of human life. The **spiritual** aspect is based on the basic human instincts of joy and happiness. The **philosophical** aspect is based on the basic principle of the victory of good over evil in the constant struggle between them. The victory of good is to be celebrated. This is to remind ourselves and future generations that in the constant fight between good and evil, the good shall win. The **religious** aspect deals with the particular rituals of that festival. The mythological stories that are related to the particular manifestation of the God (Supreme Being) provide the religious strength for the festival. The **cultural** aspect deals with the customs, activities, food, dress, social interaction with family and friends etc. In the words of Sriranga Sadguru, a yogi-seer, "The planetary positions are favorable to spiritual development on these festivals and one should make use of these special timings"

The Navaratri refers to nine days and nights and when the tenth day is included it is referred to Dashara or ten days. The tenth day is also known as Vijaya dashami. The spiritual aspect of this festival is to seek the blessings and energy from the three Goddesses (Devis) namely Lakshmi (Sridevi), Saraswati (Vagdevi) and Parvati (Durgadevi). The three phases of cyclical action are creation, maintenance and dissolution. Goddess Lakshmi who blesses both spiritual and material wealth is integral with Lord Vishnu, Goddess Saraswati who blesses spiritual and knowledge of the world is integral with Lord Brahma and Goddess Durga who blesses spiritual and physical energy is integral with Lord Shiva.

In the philosophical aspect of this festival the spiritual wealth wins over evil wealth, the spiritual knowledge wins over evil knowledge and spiritual energy wins over evil energy. It is well known that evil forces gain extraordinary strength during the nights. A spiritual seeker needs the blessings of both feminine and masculine divinities. The spiritual wealth, spiritual knowledge and spiritual energies are needed to annihilate the strong evil forces. This is depicted in the story of victory of Goddess Chamundeshwari (Durga) over the demon

Mahishaasura. The Durga means one who enables us to overcome difficulties. Also the tenth day refers to Dasha and Hara, which signifies the victory of Lord Rama over the ten-headed Ravana. The ten heads of Ravana indicates the combined power of five senses of cognition and five senses of perception. When an evil turned mind along with these ten senses becomes unruly then the Lord Rama who signifies Spiritual energy wins over that evil mind. That victory on tenth day calls for celebration on the Vijaya Dashami. Also in Mahabharata, the Arjuna and other Pandavas come out of incognito and take on their weapons and later wins over Kauravas.

In the religious aspects all the nine days and nine nights, the Goddesses Lakshmi, Saraswati and Durga are worshipped for three days and nights respectively. Various prayers of the three Goddesses are recited and the Sundara Kanda of Ramayana is also read during this time. Also an arrangement of deities and dolls is kept at homes and they are worshipped. This is to celebrate the feminine energy.

In the cultural aspect, special dishes are made and offered to Goddesses and the special decorations are made. Relatives and friends visit each other's house to see the arrangements of deities and dolls. In the festivals, the relatives and friends visit each other's homes, which strengthen the cultural and social interactions.

Thus the Navaratri and Dashara is an important festival in which devotees seek the blessings Mothers Lakshmi, Saraswati and Durga who represent the powers of good desire, sublime knowledge and divine energy respectively. A devotee has to have blessings from these mothers to advance in the spiritual path that leads to bliss and joy. May all seek spiritual wealth, spiritual knowledge and spiritual energy in addition to the materialistic prosperity. May the blessings of the mothers Lakshmi (Sridevi), Saraswati (Vagdevi) and Parvati (Durgadevi) protect and guide all devotees during this Devi Navaratri Celebrations.

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