

The Ten Divine Articles of Sri Durga

Sri Durga is probably the most widely accepted aspect of *Shakti*, the creative energy of *Brahman*, Absolute Reality. From the standpoint of scriptural history, called Itihasa, She acquired Her powerful name by slaying the evil, ancient and ferocious demon named Durgama. Her name has also been translated as “She who is difficult to know.” This is understandable since She is the Mother of all gods and goddesses, embodying the essential and most refined levels of Consciousness that are most difficult of access. Her precise and timely appearances during times of crisis also indicate Her subtlety, for even the highest gods are seldom privileged enough to be graced by Her visitation. The *Srimad Devi Bhagavatam*, one of the few quintessential Divine Mother scriptures, tries often to explain the apparent dichotomy of Her evasive yet ever-present nature:

“O Mother! Thou art the merciful Mother of the three worlds; Thou art the adorable auspicious Vidya (knowledge) benefiting all the Lokas; Thou destroyest the Universe and Thou skillfully residest (hidden) in the Vija mantras. Therefore we are praising Thee. O Mother! Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshvara, Indra, Surya, Agni, Sarasvati and the other regents of the Universe are all Thy creations; so none of them is superior to Thee. Thou art the Mother of all things, movable and unmovable.

“O Mother! When Thou dost will to create this visible Universe, Thou createst first Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshvara and makest them create, preserve, and destroy this universe, but Thou remainest quite unattached to this world. Ever Thou remainest constant in Thy one form. No one in this Universe is able to know Thy nature, nor is there anybody who can enumerate Thy names. O Bhagavati! No one amongst the Devas even knows particularly Thy endless power and glory. Thou alone are the Lady of the Universe and the Mother of the Worlds.

“The Vedas all bear testimony how Thou alone hast created all this unreal and fleeting Universe. O Devi! Thou, without any effort and having no desires hast become the cause of this visible world, Thyself remaining unchanged. This is a great wonder. We cannot conceive of this combination of contrasting varieties in one. O Mother! How can we understand Thy power, unknown to all the Vedas even, when Thou Thyself hast not known the extent of Thy own nature! We are bewildered at this....”³

Mother Durga’s essential nature, then, is unfathomable. However, when She intends to manifest Her beneficial powers for the good of Her creation, She fashions celestial and human mechanisms and enters into them as consciousness. Numerous are Her appearances throughout history, many lost in the distant recesses of time. One famous and ancient story tells of Her descent into form to rescue the gods and goddesses from evil and destruction. In this rendering, She chose to manifest a portion of Her infinite power through Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and the entire divine pantheon. Each of these powerful beings combined their highest force of thought

through a concentrated beam of conscious Light to aid in Her appearance. Each also offered Her an exact replica of his own personal preferred weapon of battle. In this fashion was the perfect Warrior Goddess born again, ready to dispel evil and all its legions.

Goddess Durga utilizes Her perfect prowess as a warrioress for the good of Her precious spiritual children. Every speck of consciousness in the Universe is under Her constant supervision, for Her essence is pure Consciousness and Consciousness is everywhere, being all-pervasive. As the ten-armed Goddess, She presents a radiantly beautiful form that is bewitching to behold. That special form is somehow simultaneously wrathful and benign and transmits profound spiritual teachings in an exacting manner with meticulous skill. The growth which proceeds from these teachings, beneficial or excruciating as the case may be, always results in the highest good. Her entire spectrum of activities gets accomplished with a boundless compassion and unconditional love that is too far-reaching for mortals to comprehend. Her august presence, full of incredible sweetness and intense power, is so auspicious as to warrant description of an entire *Purana*. A well-known and voluminous epic of over seven hundred mantras entitled the *Devi Mahatmyam* or *Durgasaptasati*, better known as the *Chandi*, has also been dedicated at Her feet of perfection. In these great works, Sri Durga is praised for Her extensive attributes and qualities through holy names which are attracting indeed to Her loving devotees but which are fear-inspiring to all the negative forces dwelling in the Universe.

As pure Consciousness Sri Durga exists eternally,

always abiding in Her own sweet nature. She also inhabits the hearts and minds of Her ecstatic devotees. As *shakti* power, She shapes, nurtures, and dissolves names and forms, while as subtle spiritual energy called *Kundalini*, She lights the lotuses of the seven centers of awareness in the sacred human body. It is only by supplicating Her that human beings can escape the snares of *Maya* (illusion, ignorance) and attain the rare boon of *Brahmajnana* (knowledge of God). The scriptures outline Her as being the essence and embodiment of divine qualities which are reflected in Her children, such as *smriti* (memory), *buddhi* (intelligence), *daya* (compassion), *samadhi* (ecstasy), and *prema* (pure love), to name a few. The boundless power that shapes and destroys entire solar systems is duly contained within Her and by Her indomitable will all things come into existence, are sustained, and disappear, dissolving back into Her infinite being.

Before describing the power, purpose, and symbology of Her Sword of Wisdom, a brief description of Her auspicious appearance should be given. She is usually pictured as having ten arms holding Sword, Conch, Discus, Rosary, Bell, Winecup, Shield, Bow, Arrow, and Spear. She is most often shown riding a lion from which comes Her august name, *Simhavahini*, “She who stands astride the king of beasts.” She is gorgeously dressed in royal red cloth and has several ornaments decorating Her personage. Her hair is dressed up in a crown (*karan-damukuta*) which then flows out in long luxuriant tresses that are darkly luminous and soothing to the eye. The ornaments adorning Her consist of armbands on each arm, a crown of gold and jewels encircling Her hair, ear-

rings, a belt of bells about Her waist, and rings of bells around Her ankles. Many gold wristbands encircle every arm except for the arms holding Spear and Shield which are protected by two forearm shields. Her arms, neck, midsection, and feet are bare and Her dark amber skin is radiant and alluringly fragrant. Her hair has no restricting ornaments but flows out long and free behind Her while retaining perfect order. A golden aura, like the combined glow of many suns, engulfs Her visage and Her countenance is both peaceful and awe-inspiring.