

॥ श्रीः ॥

Devi Māhātmyam

Apr 2020 Discourse Series

Part - 9

By

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWCMDgre2Jk>

Bhaskara Prakasha Ashram

॥śrī sadgurucaraṇāravindābhyāṃ namaḥ ॥

॥ श्रीः ॥



śrī vimarśānandanāthaṃ satyāmbāsahitaṃ gurum |

hr̥tpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||

śrī prakāśānandanāthaṃ vimarśāmbā sahitaṃ gurum |

hr̥tpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||

śrī rāmānanda nāthaṃ rāmāmbā sahitaṃ gurum |

hr̥tpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||

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Introduction

śrī gurubhyo namaḥ ||

śiva-śakti samārambhāṃ bhāsurānanda madhyamāṃ |
asmat śrī nātha paryantāṃ vande guru paramparāṃ ||

Last week we talked in detail about Vyāsa Pūjā. We also [celebrated] Bhaumāśvini (Aśvini star falling on a Tuesday) where you all chanted the Devī Upaniṣad ten times. I had the fortune of participating in it. It is easy to say that along with Gaṇapatī-atharvaśīrśōpaniṣad as [a prelude and] part of the Devī Māhātmyam pārāyaṇam but quite a challenge to chant it ten times at a stretch. You took about the same time [to do this] that a fast chanting of Devī Māhātmyam would take. I want to share with you something about this Devī Upaniṣad.

The Mahattva of the Devī-atharvaśīrśōpaniṣad

I never knew that there was an Upaniṣad for Devī. Usually when we chant, we start with Siddha kuṅjikā [stotram], Kavacam, Argalā and Kīlakam. This tradition of chanting with the upaniṣads came a little later. In 1971-1972, a well-known purohit by the name Śrī Rāmamūrti Swāmigaḷ used to live [near Chitthirakuḷam in Mylapore, Chennai]. He conducted a big Caṇḍī Homam around that time. He had requested our Swāmigaḷ to come for the yajñam and chant the Devī Upaniṣad (if not the entire Devī Māhātmyam) —[he had sent a message] through Śrī Seenu Sāstrigaḷ who was our family priest and a great disciple of Swāmigaḷ.

The Caṇḍī yajñam started in the morning and went on till night. Since my work shift was in the morning, Swāmigaḷ had told me that we could go in the evening for the Caṇḍī yajñam. He asked me to take the Gorakhpur script of the Devī Māhātmyam (because of big fonts). When we went to the Caṇḍī Homam, the pūrnāhuti and the upacāram had just been completed.

Rāmamūrti Sāstrigaḷ announced, “Rangaswāmy Dīkṣitar, who is the embodiment (svarūpaṃ) of Ambāl Herself, will chant the devī upaniṣad.”

Typically for śrīvidyā homam, we chant Tripurōpaniṣad while for Caṇḍī Homam, we chant Devī Upaniṣad. I will tell you later as to why this tradition exists. Swāmigaḷ asked me to open the book. Now I have certain advantages when it comes to chanting! I usually chant at the back and all I need to do is to give the background śruti. Swāmigaḷ had a wonderful voice and even his madhyama [sthāyi] śruti was mellifluous. We finished chanting. The program finished, and we were returning home. I asked him, “This upaniṣad sounds so good and the meaning appears so deep. [Can you tell me about it?]” Swāmigaḷ agreed and said, “This upaniṣad is very important—it is something that we need to chant every day. We need to also chant this upaniṣad as part of our Caṇḍī Homam. Did you notice the last phrase, ‘**devatā sānnidhyam bhavati**’? [This means] Ambāl starts to reside in the place where this upaniṣad is

chanted.”

I requested Swāmigaḷ to teach all the children [the devī upaniṣad]. He kindly obliged and started teaching the children. His nature was not to ask anyone to do anything [unless we expressly request him to teach]. He will do [the sādhanā]. That was it. [He never imposed on others that they should also do it]. My plan was, by having the children learn it, I could make them chant in future occasions as and when needed. Swāmigaḷ taught the children as requested.

Swāmigaḷ explained the phrase “**prāṇapraṭiṣṭhāyām japtvā prānānām praṭiṣṭhā bhavati**” —this comes in the end of Devī Upaniṣad. When we chant Devī Upaniṣad, Ambāl gets verily established in that place.

Especially when we do Pūrṇāhuti at the end of a homam, Ambāl’s sānnidhyam or presence is fully established in the homāgni. That would be the time to chant her stotram: we need to chant Lalitā Sahasranāmam, Devī Upaniṣad, Tripuropaniṣad at this appointed hour. Specifically, we may not know what to ask of Her during such an auspicious time. Chanting upaniṣads like Tripurōpaniṣad and Devī Upaniṣad will result in [the fulfillment of the wishes] of the devotees--in fact, chanting the upaniṣad 100 times during purṇāhuti would yield the result of chanting it 10,000 times--i.e., the *phala* for chanting Ambā’s stuti at this time is exponential.

This chanting of Devī Upaniṣad is even more important when we perform kumbhābhiṣekam: whichever devatā is being installed at the temple [where the consecration ceremony is being performed with the sacred chant of the Devī Upaniṣad], the Divine Mother will ensure the sānnidhyam or presence of that particular devatā in the temple.

Sometime later, Śāntānanda Swāmigaḷ (from the Bhuvaneśvarī Pītham, Pudukottai) started the initiative to install a Mahāmeru weighing five tonnes (with 5 kinds of metals) in the pītham. He had some questions and the Asthāna Śāstrigaḷ of the pītham, Śrī Rājagopāla Sāstrigaḷ recommended our Swāmigaḷ to Śāntānanda Swāmigaḷ--saying, “They have a silver Meru in their house/āśram and I remember him (Swāmigaḷ) telling me that he did the pūjā for the Meru in Kāśī kṣetram.” Rājagopāla Sāstrigaḷ [subsequently] took me to meet with Śāntānanda Swāmigaḷ. I told Śāntānanda Swāmigaḷ that in 1967 my father had performed the kumbhābhiṣekam and the prāṇa praṭiṣṭha to the silver meru in Kāśī. [Our Swāmigaḷ] had followed the kumbhābhiṣekam ritual with 10 days of mantra pārāyaṇam, 48 days of mandala pūjā with āvaraṇa arcanā, Lalitā Sahasranāma pārāyaṇam both in the morning and evening.

We repeated this [sādhanā] 25 years later in 1992. By then, my father had become a Sanyāsi. But he told us exactly what to do that time, and I just followed his instructions.

Śāntānanda Swāmigaḷ told me that he wanted the kumbhābhiṣekam of the Mahāmeru to be performed in exactly the same way that we had performed it—and assured us that he would personally ensure that all the materials and support needed for the event were made available to me. He requested us to stay with him throughout the whole event. I gladly accepted the invitation, and the kumbhābhiṣekam went very well. Then we all chanted all the upaniṣads including the devī upaniṣad after Pūrṇāhuti. Even Raghu (Śrī Raghu Ranganathan-ji) was there at that time.

Śāntānanda Swāmigaḷ also recalled how the verses of the devī upaniṣad stated that the Divine Mother will stay forever in that place. He remarked, “This is why I was particular about having the kumbhābhiṣekam performed by persons belonging to a paramparā that has done this for generations.” He further requested us to give upadeśam to the families that would be doing the maṇḍala pūjā--and instruct them on nitya pūjā as well, so that they may be able to do daily pūjā in the way prescribed by the śāstrās.

There was another incident [pertaining to the Devī Upaniṣad] that comes to my mind. One of Swāmigaḷ’s disciples, Rangā Iyengār, was an astrologer. His disciple Rāghavan Iyengār, was an expert in Astrology and practised Praśna Jyotiśam. He stated that chanting the devī upaniṣad on the confluence of aśvini nakśatram and mangala vāram (Tuesday) is an extraordinarily effective antidote for mrityu (death) and threats to one’s life. Once, he recommended for a critically ill person that he [arrange and participate in] chanting 1000 āvarti-s of devī upaniṣad --and I bore witness to the power of the Devī Upaniṣad chanted repeatedly on Bhaumāśvini: the person who had been terminally ill was able to avert death for another 20 years! [The assurance is:] **bhaumāsvinyām japtvā mahāmṛtyuṁ taratī!**

Therefore, fundamentally, one needs to have total faith in the śāstrās, as they are the bedrock of our dharma. Especially in the current times of the Coronavirus pandemic, chanting the Devī Upaniṣad and hearing the pārayanam are so powerful. [Note that even to be able to] chant or listen to the devī upaniṣad, one should be most fortunate and have accrued good karmā or merit. [Remember] we had 10 people chant for four hours. Even listening to the auspicious Devī Upaniṣad confers enormous merit and blessings. You can imagine the merit accrued by chanting the Devī Upaniṣad.

Our Guru Paramparā

Last week we were talking about vyāsa pūjā. For people like us— if we are hungry, we can cook, or we can request others to cook for us or we can go to a restaurant, etc. We have a lot of such options. But for Sanyāsīs, they have no option. Since they do not wish to accrue karma, and they do not engage in any *agnikāryam* (fire oblations)—they also cannot cook, as cooking involves the use of agni. They cannot ask, “Cook this for me” or “Feed me now” etc. of anyone. They can only eat whatever they have been offered as bhikṣā. There can be little or no salt in the dishes; and yet, they accept everything that is served! I speak from my personal experience of cooking for Swāmigaḷ! I was not proficient in cooking; but I had taken on the task of cooking for and serving Swāmigaḷ. He would tell me after eating: “Add some extra salt for the rasam,” or “There was a lot of sweetness in sāmbar,” and so on. I would ask him: “Why couldn’t you tell me when I was serving you? I could have easily fixed it.” He would say, “No I cannot. Our dharma forbids us to say that while eating. We have to eat all of the food on the plate in silence—**mounena bhoktavyam**”.

When Swāmigaḷ was leaving for Kāśī, I asked him: “How will you manage the bhikṣā? He told me: “Don't worry, if someone offers me bhikṣā, I will receive it. Otherwise, I will utter ‘Mahādeva’ a few times. Someone may respond to that [call] with bhikṣā for me. As long as the waters of the Ganga exist, I will have sustenance. If there is no bhikṣā on any day, I will drink three handfuls of water from Gangā. That should be more than enough [to sustain me].”

If you have seen Jain monks, they would wear a mask around their mouth—just like we do nowadays—and they would always have peacock feathers on hand as well. They would sweep the walkway with the feathers as they walk, so as to not threaten, hurt or induce fear in even the tiniest creatures through their actions:

abhayam sarva bhūtebhyah [is the code they live by].

Even if bed bugs were to crawl over them [and suck their blood], or a snake were to crawl over them, they would just be quiet.

Sanyāsis also don't stay in the same place for a long time. But during the rainy season, as it is not safe to wander, they stay in once place for 2 - 4 months. [During this time, they] observe the cāturmāsya vratam depending on the people requesting them to stay. The vyāsa pūjā that we talked about last week is performed typically at the start of this cāturmāsya vratam.

If you look at our paramparā, all of the Gurus were nityāgnihotrīs (offering fire oblations every day), and experts in the śāstrās and in veda pārayānam. They all engaged in the nitya-karmās as prescribed in the śāstrās—and perform śrīvidyā-upāsti and nitya-ārādhnam of Ambāl. They all eventually adopted sannyāsam (the path of renunciation), and followed the creed “**kāśiyāntu maraṇān muktiḥ**” — they all retired to Kāśī in their final days, so that they could attain videha mukti there.

You can see all the Gurus in our paramparā have followed all of the above milestones. All of us when we get the Mantra-upadeśam, want to engage in more and more pūjā. That desire is very common and there is absolutely nothing wrong with it. It is only those people who perform the pūjās that will know how challenging it is to manage the pūjās on a daily basis. Easily five to six hours will be taken up in just performing the pūjās.

One day, without warning, Prakāśānanda Nāthendra Saraswatī Swāmigaḷ (my grandfather in his pūrvāśrama), handed over his pūjā materials to Vimarśānanda Nāthendra Saraswatī Swāmigaḷ (who was my father in his pūrvāśrama). This happened just three days before navarātri prārambha.

My father would always go to Madurai for the navarātri festival: he would do the pūjā at his very close friend's house (for almost 20-25 years until he went to Kāśī). My father was not in the habit of speaking a lot. Two to three sentences from him would be a lot! When my grandfather inquired if my father was planning to go to Madurai for navarātri, my father simply nodded his head.

On this occasion, my grandfather instructed him: “Take my pūjās and perform them from now onwards.” My father himself had a śrī cakra (śrī yantra). Now he took charge of one more śrī yantra from my grandfather. My grandmother was watching all of this and asked my grandfather: “Don't we need to do pūjā for navarātri?” My grandfather responded: “At some point in our lives, we have to let go of these. Going forward, let us just do japam and nyāsam. If we do pūjā, you need to make neivedhyam. You will need someone to help you with that, and further verify and ensure that everything is good for the pūjās. [I say] all the rituals that we have performed so far are adequate.”

If you remember: Mahāperiyavā gave all his pūjās over to Jayendra periyavā one day and from then

onwards, [Mahāperiyavā] performed only japam: **“yajñānām japa yajñosmi”** .

When my grandmother asked about [what would happen to] her pūjā that she had been performing--she had been given a śivalingaṃ that she used to offer pūjā to. And my grandfather replied: “[Your pūjā would continue. The śivalingaṃ] is still there. I have kept it aside.” He took sanyāsa in 1948 and for 14 years afterwards, he had performed the Vyāsa Pūjā. So for Vyāsa Pūjā that year (when my grandfather handed over his pūjās to my father), we had the Iśānādi pañcakam in the center; and on the right, was the guru pañcakam --the position for five gurus in the guru maṇḍalaṃ comprising of guru, parama guru, parameṣṭi guru, parāpara guru and brahma vidyā sampradāya guru. Śrī Vimarśānanda Nāthendra Sarasvatī Swāmigaḷ placed what he inherited from his father in that Vyāsa pūjā maṇḍalaṃ. He would normally perform the āvaraṇa pūjā and the sahasranāma pūjā as well. This was a routine for him.

Swāmigaḷ went to Kāśī during his last days. He did not want to live in the (upper) first floor of the mutt that we found for him. There was one room downstairs (on the ground level) with no window --the room was just 6ft x 8ft large. It was like a godown or storage unit. He wanted to stay in that small room. We thought it was not conducive for our living; we felt it was not good enough for him. However, he preferred that room as he felt there would be no disturbance to his spiritual routines [there]. The day of Vyāsa pūjā arrived. I gave him a handful of flowers for him to do the pūjā. He wanted two thousand flowers, because he wanted to do Lalitā Sahasra-nāmāvali (arcanā)! I told him I would procure the flowers, as he had decided to do the arcana for the Divine Mother already. [There was a reason why Swāmigaḷ wanted to do elaborate pūjā to Ambā on Vyāsa Pūjā day. We will see the reason below.]

The reason I am relating all of this is to illustrate that Ambā resides in the place where Guru resides. Ambā has a name **“Guru krama puras kariṇī”**. We all perform ārādhana to Ambā based on the Mantropadeśam from Guru; is it not? [Guru is the portal unto Ambā and also verily Ambā in human form]. In addition, an important parva-dina for Ambā is Pūrṇimā (full moon) tithi. Vyāsa pūjā comes on Pūrṇimā tithi as well. So on that day, Swāmigaḷ would conduct both (Pūrṇimā) Pūjā to Śrī Lalitā Mahātripurasundarī and the Vyāsa Pūjā. Hence his earlier request for the 2,000 flowers.

[The confluence of Vyāsa Pūjā day on Pūrṇimā should further reiterate the equivalence of Guru and Ambā.] That is why, if you go to major mathams, you will find that nitya ārādhana of Ambā takes place there (daily). Take Kāñcī Mutt, there is daily ārādhana of Goddess Kāmākṣī; in Śringeri Mutt, there is daily ārādhana of Goddess Śāradāmbā; in the Jyotir Mutt - daily ārādhana of Śrī Śoḍaśāksari. There is no matham without Ambā's pūjā. Similarly śrī Rudram is also important. Even for Sanyāsīs, a daily āvartī of Rudram as pārāyaṇam or abhiśekam is an essential part of their nitya-karmā. On the same lines, they will chant Devī Sūktam or Devī Māhātmyam in the mutts. [Usually] the mutts will have designated person(s) to chant Devī Māhātmyam daily. In fact one of our āśrama devotees is the one chanting Devī Māhātmyam daily at Śringeri Mutt. **“nityamāyatane mama”** --meaning, ‘do daily chanting without fail’.

If you ask why should Sanyāsīs chant Devī Māhātmyam when they don't wish anything for themselves, [the answer lies in the twelfth chapter].

Twelfth Chapter

Devī mähātmyam assures: [those who] chant with no specific wishes will get vijñānam (special knowledge/viśeṣa jñānam); when one chants with specific wishes or sankalpa, those wishes will [also] be fulfilled.

sā yācitā ca vijñānam, tuṣṭā ṛddhiṁ prayacchati (Verse 37, Chapter 12)

You may ask why people who don't have any wishes (and have completely renounced all materiality) need to chant?

In Chapter 13, we encountered the phrase **"möhameṣyanti cāpare"**. This means: some of us were under the influence of moha in the past; some of us are in the clutches of moha in the here and now; and some of us in the future will be under the spell of moha or delusion. The prabhāvam of Mahāmāyā is such that things that cannot even be imagined, do happen. In order to be released from the **veil** of moha or delusion [we need the Grace of Mahāmāyā.] And to get the kripā of Mahāmāyā, we need to do ārādhana of the adhiṣṭhāna devata, the Caṇḍī. The twelve chapters are episodes told by Rṣi to the king to explain the prabhāvam of Mahāmāyā. In Chapter 11, it is the compassion or kārūṇyam of Ambāl that She tells the devās that She will grant any wish that will benefit everyone in the universe. So what did the devās ask Her for?

**sarvā-bādhā-praśamanam, trailōkyasyākhileśvari |
evameva tvayā kāryam-asmad-vairi-vināśanam|| (Verse 39, Chapter 11)**

The above verse means:

"Oh Devī, please decimate all difficulties, challenging times, hurdles, threats and ills that we may experience--and also the sources of these ills as well." [This boon sought by the devās] is like a general clause. [The devās seek protection from all their adversaries/enemies and from all ills that could plague them at any point in time.]

Ambāl further elaborates about her forthcoming seven avatāraṁs, starting from Her avatāraṁ as Nandajā up to Her avatāraṁ as Brāhmarī. Today, I may be able to elaborate on Ambā's avatāraṁ as Durgā, if I have time.

Ambāl gives an assurance to devatās that whenever they encounter threats or face hardships from Asurās, She will come forth **then and there, immediately**, and will decimate their enemies. Contrast this with the statement Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa makes in the Bhagavad Gītā:

**dharmasamsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge ||
(Verse 8, Chapter 4, Bhagavad Gīta)**

Bhagavān says he will appear in each yuga when dharma begins to weaken.

The Divine Mother does not take a stand like that. [She is Mother - therefore She can not take the suffering of her children]. She tells us, "I will come as and when you have problems." Ambāl goes to the extent of saying, **"Just think of me when you have problems; and I will come and take care of them."**

We cannot have a better blessing than this. Ambā does not distinguish between more meritorious and less meritorious children: She bestows Grace without conditionality.

Also in Bhagavad Gītā, Bhagavān says: I will take care of all those who think of me all the time. Here, Ambāl says: “Just think of me when you have problems!”

After this segue in the Devī Māhātmyam, the story of the devās is over. We don't see them any more. However, even after the Ṛṣi narrates the three stories, the problems plaguing the King Suratha and Vaiśya Samādhi still exist. Imagine that you are hungry. Wouldn't you continue to be hungry [in due course]? In fact you may feel even more hungry, until you have had something to eat! The king and the merchant represent people like you and me. For a lot of us [the fact is that] we cannot share a large percentage of our problems with others, or talk about them openly. Everything is in our heart. |

In Chapter 12, the Divine Mother lists just about [every type of] difficult situation we could possibly face. I have already talked in detail about them earlier. Time permitting in the future, we can go over each of them [again] in detail.

At the end of the 12th chapter, Ambā says:

”Chanting [my māhātmyam even] once gets the same fruit as conducting any mahotsavam for a year nonstop”.

Now the question arises: If I am already in a difficult situation, how am I going to chant the Devī Māhātmyam even once? Where would I be able to do so? How can I even procure the materials needed for your worship? So Ambā then offers another amazing concession: “When you need me, just think of me.”

dūrādeva palāyante smarataś-caritaṃ mama (Verse 30, Chapter 12)

At the end of the 12th chapter, you see the Devās getting back to their normal lives. Ambāl also disappears. Now the Ṛṣi tells the king and merchant, “Now that I have told you all about the prabhāvam of Devī, you can begin performing ārādhana to Her.” And he concludes the 12th chapter with 2 verses, Verse 40 and Verse 41. We need to look at the verses together:

**bhava-kālē nṛṇāṃ saiva, lakṣmīr-vṛddhi-pradā gṛhe |
saivā'bhāve tathā'lakṣmīrvināśāyōpa-jāyate|| (Verse 40, Chapter 12)**

**stutā saṃpūjita puṣpaidhūpa- gandhādibhi-stathā |
dadāti vittaṃ putrāṃśca, matiṃ dharme gatiṃ śubhām|| (Verse 41, Chapter 12)**

When times are good for you, I stay in your house as Lakṣmī, or as fortune. Alternately, when times are not optimal, I reside as alakṣmī (or misfortune).

How to drive out misfortune/alakṣmī and invite in fortune/lakṣmī? The answer is simple, and the Mahārṣi tells us what to do even without us asking him. He advises: “Do stuti to Ambā”. What does he mean by

‘Stuti’? We know from earlier in the 12th chapter that the 4 stutis include Brahmā Stuti or Rātri Sūktam, Śakrādi Stuti or Indrādi Stuti, Devī Sūktam or Aparājita Stuti and finally Nārāyaṇī Sūktam / Nārāyaṇī Stuti.

Here, the Rṣi elaborates: “Offer [Devī] pūjā with puṣpaṃ, dhūpaṃ, dīpaṃ. [Worship Her]. Do Her ārādhana. She will be pleased with it and will bless you with all things.” When you worship Her, you will be blessed with all comforts and joy in this lifetime, and will attain an auspicious status or ‘śubha-gati’ and liberation (mokṣam) at the end of your life.

We saw earlier [in the Prathama Caritram] how even Rṣis (seers) and other wise and learned people can come under the influence of Mohā and Māyā.

**mahāmāyā hareścaisā, tayā sammōhyate jagat |
jñānināmapī cetāmsi, devī bhagavatī hi sā|| (Verse 55, Chapter 1)**

balādākṛṣya mohāya mahāmāyā prayacchati || (Verse 56, Chapter 1)

So if any of you are undergoing difficulties, you need not worry. Just perform ārādhanaṃ to Ambāl, and She will take care.

Thirteenth Chapter

We know that the Rṣi runs an āśram in the forest and he has responsibilities: he has disciples that he teaches, takes care of, etc. [The time for the departure of the King and the Merchant is at hand.] Having explained Devī’s prabhāvam to the king and merchant in a very elaborate manner with the three stories, the Rṣi then tells them:

“Now surrender to Devī completely and [take refuge at Her feet] in a very focused way. What you need to do is perform worship of the Divine Mother. The more you do [ārādhana for Ambā], the more you will experience prosperity and happiness--akin to that experienced by the king of the devās, Indra. You will live your life happily. You will live free of diseases and free of the troubles [accompanying] old age. You will get a spot in svarga (astral plane) and get mokṣam.” [What the Rṣi also means is: “You need to beget jñānam for Mokṣa, which too Devī will bestow on you.”] At this point, the Rṣi is ready to take leave from the King and the Merchant. When elderly people take leave, you don’t say “Thanks.” Instead you do śāṣṭāṅga namaskāram. This is something I really like in Vaiṣṇava Sampradāya. [Sādhakās] will just keep performing namaskārams to the Guru.

The two men circumambulate the Guru (they do pradakṣiṇam around him); then they offer namaskāram by fully prostrating on the floor, and receive permission from the Rṣi to leave.

Mārkaṇḍeya MahaRṣi says that they left immediately thereafter, to start working on the upāya advised by

the Rṣi. They went to the river, bathed in it, and commenced Ambāl's āradhanā. They did whatever they could given their material constraints. For three years, they kept chanting the Devī Sūktam and the japam given to them by the Rṣi Medhas. They offered fire oblations (performed homa) to the best of their ability; they offered arghyam with water from the river. They offered pūjā with flowers they found nearby. They offered a few drops of their own blood as *bali*.]

**sa ca vaiśyastapastepe devī sūktam param japan |
tau tasmin puline devyāḥ, kṛtvā mūrtim mahī-mayim|| (Verse 10, Chapter 13)**

**arhaṇām ckratustasyāḥ, puṣpa-dhūpāgni-tarpaṇaiḥ |
nirāhārau yatāhārau, tanmanaskau samāhitau|| (Verse 11, Chapter 13)**

dadatustau balim caiva nijagātrāsrugukṣitam | (Verse 12, Chapter 13)

I need to tell you a story. Swāmi Sadāśiva Giri, a monk who lives in Thapovanam, is a very dear friend of mine. He is an accomplished scholar and is very learned. When we performed a sahasra Caṇḍī Homam in SaiDarśan Trust, Redhills, Chennai, he came and stayed all the ten days. One day, while discussing certain practical aspects of the Sahasra Caṇḍī Yagña, he shared an anecdote. He related that in Sikhism, there are 10 gurus--the Sikh guru paramparā starts with Guru Nānak and goes to Guru Gobind Singh. [The penultimate Guru was Guru Nanak.] **During Guru Gobind Singh's time, the Guru decided that he needed a large army of soldiers for protecting dharma and for duṣṭa-nigraham (the vanquishing of enemies of the faith). He needed people who were strong-willed, unafraid to give their lives for their faith and rooted firmly in principle and in their faith. He wanted a 'warrior race'!** To this end, he conducted a big Sahasra Caṇḍī Yāga in Patna--at the end of which, it is believed that he cut one of his fingers and offered it to the fire as oblation.

When I mentioned the above detail in a talk in the US, I got a call late at night from a disciple who said: "We Googled [the yagña in Patna conducted by Guru Gobind Singh] but we [didn't find anything about the Guru] cutting [and offering up] his finger." So I told them, "Since the first part of the story is true, assume that the second part is true too!" **The reason I am sharing this detail is to illustrate this [nuance]: At the time when the King Suratha conducted the homa, he did not have anything else to offer [as bali and hence offered a few drops of his own blood]. The padam "dadatustau balim caiva nijagātrāsrugukṣitam" refers to this offering.** Devī is very happy [with the offering and] to see that the king's and merchant's āradhanā was conducted with *ekāgra-citta* or single-minded devotion. [The take-away from the anecdote about Guru Gobind Singh is that the bhāvanā with which we offer worship to the Divine Mother is very important. Whenever there is single-pointed devotion and sincerity of intent, Ambā is sure to be greatly pleased and will bestow her abundant Grace on the devotee.]

Now when the king did the sankalpam, he certainly wanted his kingdom back; but, he also wished for Ambāl to appear to him. This was not a necessity for him --rather, it was a fervent wish. But Ambāl was so moved that she decided to grant his desire as well. She simply appeared before them [without condition]! Furthermore, She stated to the King and the Merchant that She was greatly pleased with all the worship offered by them, and that they could ask for whatever boon their hearts desired.

One thing you need to know: remember, that if you have had the darśanam of Ambā, there is no rebirth [for you]. The king goes first and asks Ambā the following: “If I am to have another birth, I would like to have a kingdom that I never lose. If I may ask for another wish, I would like to reclaim my country that I lost sometime back.” Remember: In circumstances like this, you need to be very precise in asking what you want. Ambā blesses the king in this way: [You] will, in a short period of time, be able to gather an army and regain [your] kingdom. [You will] rule it and hold on to it throughout [your] life. To show us that She will always give us more than what we ask for, Ambā further blesses the king with this extraordinary blessing: She tells him that in his next birth, the King will be reborn as the son of the Sun God himself, and will rule the fourteen lokās, unrivaled as the manvantarādhīpati!

Now Ambāl looks at the Vaiśya Samādhi. Remember, just by merely looking at Ambāl, Samādhi is blessed with supreme knowledge or Realization of the Self [or ātma jñānam]. He realizes that the notions of “me” and “mine” are the ones that have caused all his pain and trouble--he pleads with the Divine Mother to rid him of [the ropes of attachment and all duality].

mametyahamiti prāgñāḥ saṅgavicyutikārakam || (Verse 18, Chapter 13)

These “me” and “mine” constructs are like ropes that bind us tightly--they represent a noose (pāśa) around us. We need to be rid of them! But in order to be rid of this pāśa, we need to bind ourselves to the reality of “śivo:'ham, śivo:'ham” or “That Consciousness am I”. [Devoid of attachment, we can finally attain Self Realization-- this realization will allow us to attain sāyujyam with the Divine Mother.] This is the principle of the phrase “haṁsaḥ śiva so:'ham” in our Guru Padukā Mantra. Ambāl responds beautifully to this plea of Samādhi's. Her choice of words too is so beautiful and poignant. We need to learn the art of speaking from the Devī Māhātmyam!

Remember that the means to achieving mokśam is [ātma] jñānam or Self Realization? Ambā responds to Samādhi's plea by blessing him that he will get the Realization that will lead him to the Mokśam that he desires.

tam prayacchāmi saṁsiddhyai tava jñānam bhaviṣyati || (Verse 25, Chapter 13)

The jñānam that is required for the attainment of Mokśam begins with the realization that one must renounce the notions of “I” and “Mine”. In the Kaulopaniṣad, we encounter the phrase: “**jñānam mokśyaika kāraṇam**.” The jñānam exhibited by Samādhi is the jñānam that is referred to in the Kaulopaniṣad.

The next second, the Vaiśya is not to be seen. Where is he? Where has he gone? He has reached sāyujyam or unity with Ambāl. So even before Ambāl leaves [the riverbank], the merchant Samādhi has already left the material plane and has reached Ambāl.

A Closer Look at Jñānam Leading to Mokśam

Again, what is jñānam? Jñānam is recognizing that the mental constructs “I” and “mine” are at the root

of our suffering--and ridding ourselves of these constructs. How do we rid ourselves of attachment? Each of us needs to consider this carefully for ourselves.

This jñānam is not achieved intellectually-- it is not attained through knowledge gleaned from books or by listening to others speak, etc. This jñānam is attained through direct experience and must come on its own. We need to arrive at the decision to not be slave to attachment. We need to become resolute in ridding ourselves of the bonds of attachment that bind us.

This is not achieved by changing one's clothes or stripes. It is not achieved through writing one thing in our will and estate plan today; and changing our minds tomorrow and making changes to our will... But once the jñānam does come to us, then we will not be in that place--figuratively and sometimes literally.

So until you attain that jñānam, you need to propitiate the Divine Mother - you need to engage in daily sādhanā - i.e., do Devī Māhātmyam pāraṇam.. So that you may beget the wisdom as assured by Devī Herself: **sā yācitā ca vijñānam, tuṣṭā rddhiṃ prayacchati (Chapter 12).**

Japam is the biggest upāya for this vijñānam -- which will lead to ātma-jñānam and place us on the path to liberation.

“tasmāt sarva prayatnena devīm japam niranantaram”. Do nāma-japam continuously from the moment you wake up until you fall asleep. We must resolve to do this until the moment we attain sāyujyam with Ambā.

Ambāl disappears immediately after granting the wishes of the King and the Merchant. [Rṣi Mārkaṇḍeya utters the phrase “**itī dattvā tayordevī yathā'bhilaṣitam varam**” to describe the way in which Ambā confers every desire sought by Suratha and Samādhi]. The Rṣi then describes how Suratha becomes the 8th Manu and Manvantarādhipati with the blessings of Ambā. Thus ends the Devī Māhātmyam.

The [adhyāya] devatā invoked at the end of the 13th chapter is Śrī Mahātripurasundarī Śrī Vidyā [the invocation is: Śrī Mahātripurasundaryai, Śrī Vidyāyai namaḥ.] Why is this so?

It is stated in the Lalitā Sahasranāmam that, for a person to attain mokṣam or liberation, they will be blessed with mantropadeśam in their last birth, which will allow them to perform ārādhana for Ambā. [Ambā is Vidyā'vidyā-svarūpiṇī --therefore, the Vidya and the Mantropadeśam given to the sādhanika is the Devī Herself. Ambā is Śrī Vidyā and Mahātripurasundarī who grants liberation or mokṣa. Ambā is the upāya and the ārādhana; and She is the ārādhya-devatā too. She is all three, and it is through Her Grace that one attains mokṣa. Hence the adhyāya devatā invoked in this thirteenth chapter is ‘Śrī Mahātripurasundarī, Śrī Vidyā’.]

Devī Confers Bhoga and Mokṣa

[Normally,] where there is bhoga, there is no mokṣa. [The converse is also true: where there is mokṣa, there is no bhoga.] But whosoever does Ambā's upāsana (“sundarī puṅgavānām”) is assured both bhoga and mokṣa in the palms of their hands (“bhogaśca mokṣaśca karasta evā”). They will enjoy a comfortable life, and be wholly self-sufficient and content always (“nitya tṛptā”). Ambā is watching over them and carrying out all their affairs, and will finally confer mokṣam too. The assurance “bhoga-

svargā'pavargadā" refers to Ambā bestowing liberation after a life of contentment. In the case of the Rājā Suratha, he attains mokśa at the end of the manvantara during pralaya -- where he, like all the devatās, is granted sāyujyam with the Divine Mother and is absorbed into Her laya. Ambāl has the attribute of giving/conferring way more than what we ask of Her. Because She is the Divine Mother; and as Mother, She will do more for her children than the children could ever ask for.

If one were to pose the question: Why did Suratha ask for bhoga and Samādhi seek mokśa? The answer lies in their relative ages: Vaiśya Samādhi is much older and is past his generative phase, and entering a retirement age; whereas, King Suratha is in his thirties. The king has had to leave his young wife and children and flee to the forest to save his own life. He has also earned disrepute for abandoning his family and fleeing in this way. He needs to clear his name; he needs to return to his family and take care of them. He needs to govern his kingdom and his subjects and carry out his duties as a King to the best of his ability. Ambā confers a boon to the King in such a way that the King is able to reclaim his kingdom on his own; he is able to amass an army on his own merit, strength and valor. He is then able to reclaim his kingdom and his reputation and fame. In addition, in his subsequent birth, he becomes the unrivaled leader and sovereign of fourteen lokās. Ambā sees to it that he is accorded all the bhoga he wishes for, and further grants him mokśa at the time of pralaya as well.

Let us now look at what Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna: When Arjuna is disillusioned and distraught in the battlefield, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that it is Arjuna's dharma to fight in the Mahābhārata war, even if it means to face off with and kill his own relatives. Arjuna's duties to his own family and responsibilities towards his subjects and allies who have rallied to his side in the war, dictate that he must fight. With all his subjects and allies depending on Arjuna's strength and leadership, Kṛṣṇa counsels Arjuna to adopt karma-sanyāsam--the path of a renunciate who has renounced all but the actions required for him to uphold his svadharma.

Remember that there is no difference between Ambā and her brother Kṛṣṇa. Here we have Nārāyaṇi, and there, Nārāyaṇa. Lotus-eyed ("puṣkarākśa") Śrī Kṛṣṇa assures that no harm will befall those who take refuge in Him. Ambā accords the same assurances to her children. As Divine Mother, She goes a step further and grants not only all our wishes, but sees to it that we attain liberation.

Conclusion

You see, what is required of you is not much. You may do minimal pūjā and japam. That is sufficient. I mentioned "Yagjñānām japa yagñosmi" for a reason. What is Japam? The Devī Māhātmyam pārāyaṇam is itself a japam. Devī Māhātmyam starts with the syllable "Ma" and ends with "Nuḥ". 'Manuḥ' means 'mantram'. The whole Devī Māhātmyam is one whole mantra. Remember the nyāsam that evokes a garland of seed syllables: "mālā mantrasya" --mantrās can be 1-, 2-, 3-, 4-, 5-, 6-, 100- or even 1000-syllabled as in the case of the Khaḍgamālā (which is known as sahasrākśarī vidyā).

The Devī Māhātmyam is one continuous mantra--that is why, we chant it at a stretch from the first chapter to the last. I've also instructed you about the upāyās to chant the Caṇḍī in smaller portions.

Today, in this setting, let me pray to the Guru that everyone of you is blessed with Ambāl's complete

anugraham. I want to remind you of what I said about Guru earlier. Always remember that Guru and Ambā are equivalent. Ambā is Guru-svarūpiṇī. **If Guru [exists in human form], it is Ambāl in the embodied form of Guru. If Ambāl is apparent, Guru already exists in Ambāl and is one with Her.**

May you all be safe; may you all be comfortable and well; may all your wishes be fulfilled and may you be bestowed with all auspiciousness. Whenever possible continue to think of Ambā--even as you work, think of Her. It is relatively easy to think of Her as you work, isn't it? Can't you think of her as you go about your work? Can't you mentally chant "Acyuta, Ananta, Govindā" even as you ingest medicine? Do keep meditating on Ambā. [Doing so,] you will all beget prosperity and wellness. All your heart's desires will be realized. You will be well.

We will meet again next week.

Śrī Gurubhyo Namaḥ

Śrī Mātre Namaḥ

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