

Durgā Saptaśatī - Inquiring Beyond the Stories

FROM A TALK GIVEN BY GURUJI ON JANUARY 3, 2006, AT DEVIPURAM

BY GURUJI AMRITANANDANATHA SARASWATI

|| ōm prathama caritrasya brahmā ṛṣiḥ mahākālī dēvatā gāyatrī
chandaḥ nandā śaktiḥ raktadantikā bijam agnis tattvam ṛgvēdaḥ svarūpam
| śrī mahā kālī prītyarthē prathama caritra japē viniyōgaḥ ||

We humans are called Manujās, those who are born out of Manu. Sāvārṇi is the Eighth Manu; he is Sūrya Tanayaha, the Son of the Sun. I'll begin by telling you the story of Sāvārṇi and how his manvantara came to be.

The Nature of Mother

|| mahāmāyānubhāvēna yathā manvantarādhipaḥ sa babhūva mahābhāgaḥ
sāvārṇistanayō ravēḥ ||

The manvantara before Sāvārṇi's was the Svārociṣa manvantara, where we find the story of a king who goes out for a hunt. In fact, his kingdom has been usurped by his ministers and he has had to run away.

On the pretext of this royal hunt he escapes into the forest, where he meets a Vaishya, a merchant. The king's name is Suratha, and the Vaishya's name is Samadhi. The king goes to a place where a muni, a sage, is staying. He likes the place. The muni says, "Sit down and stay awhile." Free food is provided there, free everything—no worries. So the king settles in.

Then this Vaishya comes along with a similar experience: he has been thrown out by his family. The king asks him why he is so sad, and he replies, "What can I do? I've been cast away by my family. They only want my money; they don't want me." The king explains that the same thing has happened to him, as well, and says, "Let's find out why this is happening to us! Why all this misery?"

The king adds, "I came to this ashram in order to find peace, but my connections with the past—like wondering whether my war elephant is getting the proper food or not—are still troubling me. Moreover, I used to take such

great care in collecting money from my subjects—and now, whether my ministers are spending that money wisely or not, I don't know! These are the kinds of questions that are bothering me, and I just can't get over them no matter how hard I try." He says, "Let's go and ask this muni for a solution to this problem."

So the king tells the muni the story of the Vaishya, and he tells his own story, and then he says, "I'm not able to forget the people who left me behind. What is that all about? I know that they are bad, and they've cast me aside, but I still can't shake off my affection for them. How can I get rid of this affliction?"

The muni replies, "It is true. It is Mahā-māyā." Then he adds, "Let me tell you a story." (This is the beauty of our culture: we always tell stories! And the stories are not without purpose, either—each has a purpose and a moral, and each one is true!)

**|| jñānināmapi cētāmsi dēvī bhagavatī hi sā balādākṛṣya
mōhāya mahāmāyā prayacchati ||**

He continues, "Even the greatest among the wise, even God himself, is by her power transformed into a small puppet that she plays with in her hands."

|| mahāmāyāprabhāvēṇa saṃsārasthitikāriṇā ||

"She creates the samsara and she maintains it."

|| tannātra vismayaḥ kāryō yōganidrā jagatpatēḥ ||

"But don't be surprised at her behavior. It is simply her nature; what can we do about it? She creates the world, she sustains it and she causes us to get attached to it." The muni then gives an example: "Look at that bird. She is almost dead of hunger, and yet there she goes, flying off to find food for her children."

|| kaṇamōkṣādr̥tān mōhātpīḍyamānānapi kṣudhā ||

"Though she is dying of hunger, she still tries to feed her children—sacrificing herself for the sake of others out of compassion. The nature of Mother is compassion, and that is what drives this world."

Therefore, don't be surprised. It is natural. You don't have to put yourself down just because you're thinking about these things all the time. It is simply her nature."

She Is Always There

The king says, "You are telling us about Mahāmāyā—but just who is this Mahāmāyā? How was she born, and when did she come into existence? Please tell us the story."

The muni told him: she is always there, but she is not always visible. Sometimes she makes her presence known to us, and at such times we say, "She is born!" But she is not born, and she does not die. On the contrary, she is always there somewhere—and when she makes herself visible to us, we say she is born.

|| nityaiva sā jaganmūrtistayā sarvamidam tatam ||

She is spread out everywhere.

|| tatam idam sarvam ||

Everything is pervaded by her.

|| utpannēti tadā lōkē sā nityāpyabhidhīyatē ||

We say that she is born, but she is also called Nityā: the ever-present or everlasting one. In her transcendental form, she is always there. In her visible forms, she appears and disappears. And likewise, this visible world, which is made by her, appears and disappears. But in fact, the world really does not go anywhere; it is still here. Before you came to be, it was here, and after you cease to be, it will still be here. Nityaiva sā—her form is the world. The world appears and disappears, and yet it is always here.

Once I was a little child. I drank my mother's milk. That part of me came into existence, lived for a time and died. Then I went off to school and later to college, and those parts of me also came and went and died. Now I'm 71, and this part of me will stay for a time, and then it will go as well.

Can I show you, here and now, the childhood part of myself? No, I cannot see it now, nor can you. It is dead. But if we could somehow travel back in time 65 years, we would see that child of six years old playing. It is only my inability to

go back in time that makes me think that part of me is dead, even though it is not. That is because I experience time differently than I experience space. In space, I can move about from here to there and there to here. But I can't do that in time, nor can I control the flow of my time. As a result, something is here and then it is gone. Why? Because I have passed that time and moved on. It is basically the motion of time that creates these appearances and disappearances. In actuality, there is no death and there is no birth.

The Infinite Serpent

|| nityaiva sã jaganmũrtiḥ ||

Her form is the world. In the beginning, the world was filled with water. When we do kalaśa sthāpanam, we say:

**|| ōm āpō vā idam sarvam viśvā bhūtānyāpaḥ prāṇā vā āpaḥ
paśava āpō annamāpō amṛtamāpaḥ samrāḍāpō virāḍāpaḥ
svarāḍāpaśchandāmsyāpō jyōtīmśyāpō yajūmśyāpaḥ
satyamāpaḥ sarvā dēvatā āpō bhũrbhuvaḥ suvarāpa ōm. ||**

The whole world is water filled with light, Āpaḥ-Narayana. There is no place untouched by waters of light. That is the concept here.

And in those waters, Mahā Vishnu—the adhiṣṭhāna dēvatā of the waters of life—is sleeping upon the coils of Kundalini, the serpent Śēṣa Sai. Śēṣa means “the remainder.” Say we divide a circle into three parts: one-two-three. That gives us 3.1415—in other words, Pi (π), the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter—an infinite sequence of numbers. That is what's called śēṣa: it is unending.

They say that jāgrat, svapna and suṣupti are also the three states of a circle unending, and the remaining part is an infinite sequence. That remaining part is called śēṣa: Śēṣa Naga, the Infinite Serpent. And Vishnu is sleeping on its coils. Then, from out of his nābhi kamala—the center of his navel—a lotus arises, and Brahma, the creator of the world, is growing within it.

And here we find an interesting reciprocal relationship: in this story, Brahma is the son of Vishnu. But if we look at the picture at Kāmākhyā Temple in Assam, we find it's Shiva who is sleeping—and who is emerging out of his navel center? Shakti! You've got to decode this imagery; I'll leave it as an exercise for

your imagination. But why is there this inversion between Shiva and Vishnu? Why is Shakti there in the lotus that is growing out of Shiva's nābhi? This way, Vishnu becomes the mother, and Brahma the son. There is an equation between Brahma and Shakti there, and between Vishnu and Shiva.

If you understand the principles that govern the cosmos—space and time—all that pervades space-consciousness is called Vishnu, and all that pervades time-consciousness is called Shiva. Shiva is called Kāla. Kāla means time.

The power of time is to move, manifest, change—to make things appear and disappear, to give birth to them, to grow and nurture them, to bring death to them, and finally to fully reabsorb them. And this power is called Kali. Mahākālī kills time, but she can also give birth to time. She kills Shiva—because, again, Shiva is an expression of time—and so Shiva is afraid of Mahākālī. He doesn't dare go near her. Mahākālī is the primordial power of the primordial energy, which is beyond the limit of Brahma.

§§§

The Birth of Demons

So we have Vishnu sleeping in the ocean of milk atop the coils of Kundalini, and out of his navel Brahma has come. And now we also encounter two demons, called Madhu and Kaitaba, who have come to kill him. Their origin is strange.

|| viṣṇukarṇamalōdbhūtau hantum brahmāṇamudyatau ||

Madhu and Kaitaba are born out of an impurity in the ear of Vishnu. But what is this impurity in Vishnu, and how does it manifest rākṣasa, or demons? That is a story that you've got to go behind the words to understand.

Here the analysis begins: if you have an impurity in your ears, what happens? You cannot hear. And the Vedas are śruti; that is, heard revelations. If you don't hear the Vedas properly, you cannot understand them properly. And from the misunderstanding of śruti two tendencies arise, both of them demonic.

The first tendency is called madhu, or sweetness, honey. You're searching for honey all the time, seeking pleasure—you're totally pleasure-driven. This is called piṅgalā; it is marked by extreme lust and kāma-driven behavior. Piṅgalā is the passion of the sun; the drive to create. The second tendency is called

kaitaba—extreme asceticism, the rejection of life; i.e., “There is nothing of substance in this world, so let us ignore it.” This is iḍā. Iḍā is the moon—cold, dispassionate, utter vairāgya—that is iḍā: totally satisfied, with no desires left.

It is in between these two that we find what we’re looking for—the madhyama mārga, the middle path. The sun is too hot and the moon is too cold; but between these two is the warmth of the Earth, where you can live. And so, accordingly, does the warmth of the suṣumṇā channel begin at the Mūlādhāra Chakra.

Madhu and Kaitaba are the extremes of the pendulum. If you take your mind all the way to the passionate side and leave it, it does not remain there. It swings back—past the center and all the way over to the other side, to detachment.

You can observe this in your own life: sometimes you’re very passionate, and sometimes you don’t want to do anything at all in this world. These tendencies oscillate, and this oscillation keeps on going. If you really want stability or rest for the mind, you should be attached neither to asceticism nor to too much sensory stimulation. It’s the middle path you’re looking for. If you really want to stop the pendulum from swinging, then you’ve got to bring it carefully to the center and leave it there. Then you are neither attached nor detached; you might call it “attached detachment” or “detached attachment.” You are living in this sensory world and enjoying it. But still, you are maintaining your separateness.

Take for an example a drop of water on a lotus leaf. It is attached, and yet its own surface tension creates a sort of separate shell for itself. This “attached detachment”—halfway between attachment and detachment—is the proper way.

If we do not recognize this proper way, however, we misunderstand the Vedas, believing either that they are preaching total asceticism or total sensuality. Because of this error, those two demons—Madhu and Kaitaba—are born. And whom have they come to kill? Brahma. Brahma represents the knowledge of creation—brahmajñāna. They are trying to destroy brahmajñāna. They are born out of a misunderstanding of the Vedas.

“Killing” the Demons

So yes, this Brahma is a knowledgeable guy, but he has no power. He is no martial artist! And when these two demons suddenly show up ready to kill him, he’s unable to protect himself. So he prays to the Divine Mother, and Yoga Māyā appears before him. She says, “What’s the problem?” And he replies, “Don’t you see that these demons are coming to kill me? Do something about it!”

Thereupon, she occupies the sleeping body of Narayana. His body is inert. Even though it is capable of life, it appears almost lifeless in its state of deep-sleep samadhi. But Yoga Māyā wakes him up from that sleep. Vishnu then sees the two demons and begins fighting them. They are equally matched: the fight goes on for thousands of years and neither side is winning. Narayana is getting tired. The demons are gaining strength.

At this point Devi—here called Narayani—takes pity on him and enters Madhu and Kaitaba in the form of pride in their achievements. Under her influence, they tell Narayana, “We’ve fought with you for so long and nobody has ever fought us so valiantly! So come, ask any boon of us!”

Narayana uses this opportunity to the fullest because Devi has also entered him, in the form of wisdom (if you read the Dēvī Bhāgavatam, you get all of these behind-the-scenes stories). He replies, “No, you may ask me for a boon!”

The demons say, “What are you talking about? As if you are capable of giving us boons? No, we’ll give you the boon.”

So Narayana says, “Okay, that’s fine with me. I have no pride and no ego. So what else could I want, then, but that both of you two should die at my hands?”

Now the demons suddenly realize their mistake: they have to give Vishnu a boon that will enable him to kill them. So they think, “How do we escape this situation?” And Devi enters them in the form of intelligence, and they decide, “Why should he kill us? We’ll simply find a place where he cannot kill us.” So they try making an impossible request, saying, “āvām jahi na yatrōrvī salilēna paripltā” — “where the earth is not filled with water, there you may kill us.” Because they’ve seen that (in this interlude before creation) everywhere is filled with water; there is no earth anywhere.

Vishnu realizes, “Bhūḥ bhuvāḥ suvāḥ āpaḥ.” Bhū lōka, bhuvā lōka, suvā lōka—all the worlds are filled with water, therefore he cannot kill them. So what does he do? He goes into the transcendental state. (Again, this is the śēṣa naga, which is the convolute of all three states of life—waking, deep sleep and dreaming—but which is itself not filled with life. It is primordial śēṣa naga, the state in which life has not yet come into being. Life and kāla are identical. Life is the movement of time. If time’s motion is stopped, there can be no life. In that sense time is like space, where if no motion is possible then no life is possible—and no death is possible.)

Narayana takes Madhu and Kaitaba into that state with him, but what can he do then? He can only absorb them into himself. That is how he “kills” them. And that is the first chapter. It talks about the creation of the transcendental state out of the three existing states. The nature of Mahāmāyā is that she conceals the world at different instances in time. What was there in the past cannot be seen in the present. As we move away from every present moment, the world that we saw in that moment disappears.

So, how does Devi manifest? By coming into the present. And how does she unmanifest? By moving away from the present. These are the truths discussed in the first chapter of the Dēvī Māhātmyam.

Two States of Being

Uru means “to grow beyond limitations.” Narayana takes Madhu and Kaitaba to the fourth state—that is, the turīya or transcendental state—and then absorbs them into himself. He brings them to the Śēṣa Naga—which is the Kundalini—and there he annihilates them.

How do we awaken from our sleep? The dreaming state negates the experience of the deep-sleep state. The waking state negates the experience of the dream. So which is true, and what is truth? Before attempting to answer such questions, we must further consider this fourth state—the one that goes beyond the other three. It is when you wake up from your waking state that you enter this fourth state, in which you are spread out to infinity. Then these “real-world experiences” that we see in our waking state suddenly themselves appear to be a dream.

We have to realize that there are two states of our being, both of them being simultaneously true. One of these is our “localized” state, and the other is a state in which we are like waves spreading out.

If you’ve seen the movie *What the Bleep Do We Know!?* you may recall the scene in which a boy is playing with a single ball, and yet we see so many balls existing and moving about simultaneously. If one state of existence can be described by its function, then similar states of existences can be described by different functions—which means a single entity can exist simultaneously in different places.

So the boy can see all of those balls—but which particular ball is being seen in a given moment depends entirely on the subject, the seer. The subject makes the choice; this subject-object relationship is fully explored in quantum mechanical descriptions. Previously, in the classical mode of thinking, we used to say that only the object existed. There was no seer included in the calculation. Quantum mechanics, however, brought out the necessity of including the seer, and how the seer interacts with and influences the position of the object. The problem then became how to create the subject out of the object.

What we have to understand is that one part of our being is localized in space and time, and the other part is completely delocalized and spread out everywhere, all over infinity. This means that anywhere in the world of space and time, God can know about your existence—which is localized—because the wave aspect of your being, by definition, extends from minus-infinity to plus-infinity and is everywhere. There is no materiality as such. That is what the Upanishads say.

|| brahma satyam jaganmithyā ||

The jagat—the world, the thing that you see in your waking state—is mithyā; is kalpita; is created. Created by whom? Created by you. You are the creator of this world. And how many universes are there? An infinite number of them. As many subjects as there are, so many universes there are. Every one of our thought processes manifests somewhere in space and time, and these are what make up reality. The universe that we live in is not one but an infinity of universes. Each one of us is creating a universe, growing in it and then reabsorbing it. And in that reabsorbed state, we are all one. Meanwhile, in our

individual, “localized” states, we’re like waves rising out of the ocean and briefly experiencing what seems like a separate existence.

Beyond Time and Space

The second chapter in the Durgā Saptasatī talks about what sustains the world. She is Mahālakṣmī, the Mother in whose womb Brahma grows. And what is Brahma? The whole of the universe.

The womb determines the size of the child that is growing inside. So what is the size of the universe we’re talking about? What are the dimensions of brahmāṇḍa? From the moment the universe was born until today a certain amount of time has elapsed. How far can light travel in that time? The answer is c (the speed of light) times t (the time that has elapsed). That is the radius of the universe that we are in. Nothing can exist outside of it because nothing that is created can travel faster than the speed of light. Or can it?

Can anything travel faster than the speed of light? There is a theorem which talks about converting phase velocity into group velocity. Phase velocity is the speed of the wave, and group velocity is the speed of the particle. The product is c^2 . If one of them is larger than c , the other has to be less than c . Since a physical particle must travel slower than speed of light, then the waves must travel faster than light. If something travels faster than speed of light—then time necessarily reverses.

Physicists have created particles that can travel faster than light. How did they do it? They constructed a “wave packet” consisting of one monochromatic wave and another monochromatic wave, and the packet moved faster than light. In effect, they made the wave enter a crystal—but it left the other end before it had entered the crystal. Before it entered this end, it had already left the other end. A Nobel Prize was awarded for that one.

They also measured the simultaneous presence of a particle—one in the UK and one in Australia. If you flipped the polarity of one, the other one would also flip. How did one know that the other had flipped? Because it traveled faster than speed of light; it traveled at infinite speed. Infinite speed means covering the entire universe in zero time. Thus we now know that the speed of light is not a barrier for matter waves. For matter it is, but for matter waves it is not.

Now we might ask ourselves, “All right then, what is the algorithm or procedure for converting ourselves from matter into matter waves?” And the answer is very simple: there is no such procedure, because you are already both one and the other simultaneously. There is nothing that needs to be transformed or converted. If the process involved becoming something different than what you are, then sure, you’d have to transform. But it does not, and you don’t have to transform into anything.

These are the ideas behind the ancient stories. The sages of old were not able to explain these concepts in our modern language and scientific terminology, but they saw the truth of these things while in the transcendental state.

Order from Disorder

Sometimes in my meditation, I see discs and circles of light, like color-blindness test patterns. In those circles of light, I see Buddhas sitting and meditating, and I used to ask them, “Who are you and what are you?”

Then one day I got the idea that I should enter one of those circles. And when I entered, I found myself in an entirely different space and time. You can go to the next galaxy and come back again by simply overcoming the speed-of-light barrier in your matter-wave pattern. In my opinion (which is not proven), matter waves consist of intelligence. The function of intelligence is to create order out of disorder—and matter always moves from order to disorder.

We have a theorem on the conservation of energy, according to which entropy almost always increases. But entropy is also a form of energy, though we generally fail to see the equation between them; so entropy must also be conserved. For every degree of increase of disorder, there must be a corresponding increase in order as well—but we can’t see that part, so we ignore it; and therefore, we observe that the entropy is not conserved.

But if you include entropy as a form of energy—if you see that disorder must create order as much as order must create disorder—then you can understand the statement made by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gītā:

**|| yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata
abhyutthānamadharmasya tadātmānam sṛjāmyaham ||**

“Whenever there is a great calamity or a disorder in this world, I create myself.”

That manifestation is a function of intelligence, and that intelligence is a function of matter waves. Hence, we have the reality of the world, and then we have the reality of the non-world. The non-world consists of pure waves, nothing more. They spread out everywhere and everybody knows about everything else. And that is the conception behind creation: how do you create something out of nothing? How do you create a phenomenal world out of nothing?

If you want to make something out of 0, then zero must remain zero. To create a +1, you've got to create a -1. That is to say, when you create something—thus making an addition of some sort to zero—then you've got to pull something else out, so that the zero remains a zero!

Remember this: the world is a myth that is created out of nothing. Who creates this world? You do it yourself. Where was this world before you were born? It was not there. Where will it go after you are gone? It will not be not there anymore. That is the concept of sat-cit-ānanda: sat is existence. There is no validity or proof that existence exists without cit, consciousness. And likewise, consciousness cannot exist without existence. So we have an equation between sat and cit. Sat is called Shiva and cit is called Shakti. They are inseparable, though they appear to be separate. And their inseparability is ānanda, is bliss.

So that is the fundamental theorem: "I am the world." Or we can say it as a formula: I = WORLD. These are all called tripūtis.

Again, you are those matter waves already, and so you cannot become them. The whole process of becoming has to be eliminated. All effort must go; effortlessness is the only way. So stop your pujas, stop your meditations, stop everything. Effort is there for as long as you think that you are different from that. Because if you're already that, what is the effort for?

Of course, until the time comes when you realize that you're that, you need these efforts to help you reach your goal, which is this very realization. But still, you must be constantly aware that these efforts also try to push the goal away from you. So you can start off with rituals, meditations, bhakti, jñāna, vairāgya, and so on; but ultimately you've got to drop them all. Elimination of all supports—that is the way.

But don't think this means you're inactive. Quite the contrary: she does not allow you to sleep at night! Far from being inactive, you are obsessively and compulsively active!

The Power of Kāma

Let us now move on to the next state; that is, sthiti, or cosmic maintenance. What maintains this world is kāma, or desire. Where there is no desire, there is no will to live and the body ceases to be. Kāma is the desire that makes us survive. That is why we include kāma as one of the puruṣārthās, the four goals of human life: dharma, artha, kāma, moksha. Because without kāma there is no life.

|| so'kāmayata bahusyām prajāyēyēti ||

He desired to see himself in many, many forms. And it is because of this desire that we're all experiencing life, which is the sum total of our desires. And in addition to desire, we have also inherited another property of the creator, which is free will. Free will too is capable of creation, which means that we are ourselves capable of creating the future. We are the co-creators of this world, along with God.

|| māyā kalpita brahmāṇḍa maṇḍalāyai namaḥ ||

So you see, God creates through our imaginations. But again, without this Cit-Śakti, which manifests through us—without her, he cannot manifest anything at all. And without him, she cannot exist either. This is the combination of Shiva and Shakti, of sat and cit. They are completely interwoven at every moment in time and in every part of space. That is their eternal union; that is their conjugal bliss.

So in the second story of the Durgā Saptaśatī, the demon is Maḥiṣāsura—he is the embodiment of kāma, desire. And this desire is expressed in the field of maya, the power that makes you think that you are separate from the world. You think you are separate from it, and so you want it. You don't know what "it" is, but kāma makes you see it as being separate from you and makes you want it. Fear, too, is born out of this separateness; fear of not having something that is separate from you; fear of losing it; fear of being hurt or diminished by someone or something that is separate from you.

If you get what you want, you are satisfied—for now. If you don't get what you want, you feel *krōdha*, anger. And if you do get what you want, you feel *lōbha*, the desire to repeat this enjoyment again and again—by wanting and getting more things. *Mōha* is coming to a stage where you can't live without the thing you want. You've seen a beautiful girl, you've married her, and now you've come to a stage where you cannot live without her. Never mind that you used to live without her before marriage. You've forgotten that, and now you feel that you're incapable of living without her. That is illusion, *mōha*. Then there's *mada*, the pride of ownership—"I've got it and nobody else has it!" And there's *mātsarya*, or envy—"Others have it and I don't! I crave it!" *Krōdha*, *lōbha*, *mōha*, *mada*, *mātsarya*—all these are different manifestations of *kāma*.

Everything is born out of *kāma*. *Kāma* drives the whole world. *Mahisha*, as the embodiment of *kāma*, wants everything in the universe! He doesn't care whether another person wants it or not, he needs to fulfill his desire. But you cannot desire the whole universe.

A small anecdote: once upon a time, this guy met God and said, "God, all the wealth that we have in our world, how much is that in your measure?" God replied, "Not even one cent." Then the guy asked, "God, in our world regular people live for maybe a hundred years, and yogis can live for even hundreds of years—how long is that in your time?" And God says, "Not even one second." So then the guy cleverly asked, "God, will you give me one cent of your money?" And God replied, "Sure, wait just a second."

Transforming Desire into Love

You cannot have *kāma* to infinity. You would quickly become overwhelmed by her desires, which are a million million times more powerful than anything you are capable of containing.

So let's say we manage to shut off *Mahisha*, *kāma*, desire. Let's say we've turned off our lust to obtain more and more. What do we substitute for it? *Eros*, *śṛṅgāra*, love. You want to beautify the world—you are tuning in to the desire of the Mother, and her desire is to discover better and better expressions of her love in this world: better civilizations, better understanding, better manifestations of her beautiful creations; that is what she is after. And when you tune into that desire, that's when *kāma* becomes *śṛṅgāra*.

The transformation from kāma to śṛṅgāra is the story of Maḥiṣāsura Mardini, Devi as the Slayer of Desire. When she comes and kills Maḥiṣāsura, ardhanīṣkrānta ēvāsau—he “comes half out of it” (i.e., halfway out of the buffalo he has transformed himself into; halfway out of the body of his desire) and dēvyā vīryēṇa samyutaḥ—he is “filled by her energy” and thus he emerges. Devi transforms the lovable part of kāma into love, and she slays carnal desire, the hateful part that remains. Then she grants Maḥiṣāsura a boon: “Whenever my name is mentioned, your name will be mentioned first.” And thus is she called Maḥiṣāsura Mardinī. She has controlled him.

So lust-transformed-into-love is what preserves the world. That is why it is called sthiti, cosmic maintenance. This is the function of Mahālakṣmī. Mahākālī (or Mahāmāyā) governs the first part of the Durgā Saptaśatī—the birth of the child from inside the womb of the mother. And then, in the second chapter, we have its continuance in the form of love sustained by erotic desire. The erotic expressing itself in waves of beauty, waves of organization.

The final part is the Śumbha-Niśumbha vadham, governed by Mahāsarasvatī. In the film *The Matrix Reloaded*, there is a version of the Durgā Saptaśatī demon called Raktabīja. Each time a drop of this demon’s blood falls to the ground, another demon is born out of that drop, in equal proportion to the original. Rakta here means desire, the seed of desire as it exists at the Mūlādhāra level. You kill kāma, and it becomes anger; you kill anger, and it becomes lōbha, and so on. And once again Kali has to come to the rescue. When the Devi tells her, “Extend your tongue and make sure that the seed does not fall to the ground!”—that means that the seed of desire is not allowed to return to the Mūlādhāra Chakra, where it would multiply into more and more desires, but is stopped at the Agni Chakra, which simply burns it away.

§§§

The purpose of Sri Vidya upāsanā is to loosen the structures that constitute duality and bring them into unity. What we’re trying to establish is the identity between what you see and what you are. One way to conceive this is to see the whole world as collapsing into ourselves; another way is to see ourselves as expanding into the whole world—both are equal. The first is achieved by the pāśam, the noose that attracts everything to you. The second is achieved by the ankuśam, the goad that pushes everything away.

In fact, we need both; they are the very atoms of life. If we have only attraction, everything reduces to a point. If we have only repulsion, then everything expands away to infinity. First you need attraction and then, if it comes too close, you need repulsion to push it all away.

Just remember this: our inquiries should never stop at the stories themselves. We must always go behind the stories and understand the meaning of every single line.

lōkāḥ samastāḥ sukhinō bhavantu

Let the whole world be happy.

praṇāms.

