



Aghoreshwar Baba Bhagwan Ramji

Navaratri Issue

Navaratri is the time to engage ourselves in the upasana of Shakti. Upasana literally means to obtain a seat next to, to get close to, enrich oneself with, worship etc. Shakti is the all pervading energy that is the source of the existence of the world. All the living creatures become lifeless for lack of Shakti. It manifests itself in numerous ways. Seers of the ancient time have tried to describe Shakti in various ways. Shakti is the power, strength or capability of "God" In order to speak about Shakti, seers have called the Shakti "Mother". Shakti manifests itself as creation; it is the mother who gives birth to and nurtures the newborn.

Although Shakti is beyond the boundaries of gender, form or color, we call It Mother because of its qualities as a mother. Out of this idea different names and forms came into existence. It is the formless that takes form depending on the intensity of the seeker's longing and devotion. Navaratri is the time to acknowledge and revere that formless by giving it a form.

Navaratri was observed at the Sonoma Ashram from March 19 through March 27th. All the participants intensified their sadhana during this period and dived down deeper within. In this issue we are printing their reflections. Hopefully these experiences of the participants will tell the story of Navaratri.

Reflections on Navaratri:

John MacKay.

Navaratri is a special opportunity for me to further my inward journey through Maya, through matter, through Mother to myself. At first I think I already know the end, what these nine days will reveal. But this voyage is real, and the waters are uncharted, I encounter hidden logs, temptations, and stretched emotions. In my fragile state I'm reminded of the unconditional love of Mother. The power of mother is love, and love is the greatest power in the world. Remembering the Divine Mother brings me peace and brings me home. On the last evening as we all sat before Her, Her face became the one of my own mother. My faith in the destination of this voyage is complete. Thank you Baba.

Howard Morris

Navaratri was a very reflective time, with a lot of energy devoted toward going inward and getting to the essence of what is important to my deep self. Quieting the mind takes a great effort with thoughts cascading through my japa. Navaratri offered me a chance to disassociate from my normal patterns of stress and overindulgence in sensory pleasures. I find it hard to block out the external world and get to the core of what is real. My mind constantly judges what other people are doing or not doing and I tend to be very hard on myself and the growth of my practice. It was very strengthening to observe the other participants doing their sadhana, japa and daily routines. Everyone was an inspiration to me in one way or another especially John, Penny, Melissa and Ken. Hariji's talks and actions are pure love and his teachings through parables have a profound impact on the sweetness of the process. The purity of love for the Mother is very non-judgmental and simple, bowing and praying to the form and formless have a great influence on my general well being. The real sadhana is taking the beauty and grace of the practice and applying it to the ins and outs of every day life, staying centered and keeping the beauty of unconditional love in my heart. Slowly, slowly everything will make sense and unfold in the way it is supposed to be.

Penny Snyder

Navaratri has become a time for me to take time out of my working routine and to get in touch with my spiritual side. It's a time for focusing my energy on feeling that quality that's called Divine Mother. This year, I started weeks before preparing my body and mind. I wanted to appreciate the experience in the best possible state. The word "Divine Mother" has been without meaning almost all my life. My religious upbringing related only to the father--

Almighty God. The worship of Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi and Maha Saraswati during Navaratri gives me a form for aspects of the Divine Mother. I am able to associate Divine Mother with: the power, strength and ruthlessness of Maha Kali destroying the demons; Maha Lakshmi's blessings of wealth and abundance; Maha Saraswati's harmonious relations and sweet words of wisdom. It was a time for feeling those qualities of Divine Mother inside myself. Previously, during Navaratri I experienced Bhagwati (Divine Mother) as being an external presence, sitting on the altar. There was a sadness in her departure during the send off. This year I felt more was inside me and less outside. The departure didn't feel like She was going anywhere. She was still here with me.

Robin Brett.

Navaratri has tenderly opened my eyes to my own inner glow and strength. In this sweetness of presence the Divine Mother speaks to me making my house and the world around me full of peace. Navaratri has given me a suppleness in the purpose of my life to ease the pain of others through my work and in the joy of loving them. Calmed and refreshed by these bountiful days, I use this song of the heart to enrich all life put before me. In a stilled mind I see my reflection. Then I am fearless and shall never lose the way of my direction for love and peace and harmony to dwell within my soul. May this temple of radiance carry with it an inspiration for all.

Marilyn Goode

Each time I have taken part in the observance of Navaratri it has become more meaningful for me. The first few times it was as if I were a tourist partaking in an exotic Indian ritual, even though the prayers, rosary, incense and abstinence were at times rather similar to the Roman Catholic Lenten and Advent celebrations. Both faiths practice meditation, have saints and gods which portray different aspects of the divinity, prescribe silence and self examination; however, the concept of Karma and a Guru are different. Thus it took a bit of getting used to. Now I realize the more you can become absorbed in the meaning of these nine days the richer will be the reward. I have yet to give my self totally to the observance. If I can really let go of my every day world, the return to the sacred will be a coming home. Hariji's kindness and love is a joy and an inspiration for me. Also the coming together of our spiritual community was a loved filled experience.

Susan Bundschu

What I carry into the present is my history. How I think about something, how I see

something for the first time, offspring of the past. Further distorting the present, I impose what I expect to see, what I want to see, all manner of unfinished business,... or what I am afraid of seeing. All of it illusion, jumbled as a jar of jellybeans. The state of my mind, OPEN: Free admission, but no escape. My mind the gatekeeper, the hostage-taker. My memories, the moat. My heart is the witness. Silent, solitary, steady. Fed by my breath. Like the pitcher with the coconut head, which became the Adored Mother, which became the Sacred Presence, which held us all in Her lap, beyond mind, beyond doubt, beyond time, so my heart is. My breath acknowledged becomes my prayer. Through practice, through returning to my breath, listening to my heart, I am allowed glimpses of, moments of, being. My mind is wild and undisciplined. I am in training.

Ronica Wilson

The chill is penetrating the crevices of this tiny ashram, but the flowers are brilliant and all shades of warm red. Baba is waiting for us all to come see His loving grace, with Hariji. He moves us, He shakes us and then so quietly We move towards oneness, and Divinity. When all is spent What do we become, Guru's grace and Shakti All in one. The more I do "jap" The wholer I get delusions and sadness are simply put to rest. The centering becomes my total test. The outcome right now, is anyone's guess. The more I look, the more I ponder The more I know, there's more to follow. When you turn the key of the ultimate test, the screen turns blank and you know the rest. When all harshness exists and the world disallows me I find my place with...Hariji. A look or a nod, a rebuke or a snort, He always conveys, what we're needing the most. The more I remember, the more I forget, oh, what a moving...Navaratri. When all is over, it can be so sweet When you can surrender, come to Navaratri.

Hanuman (Tom Witherspoon)

O Ma Now I remember crying in the cold night warmed between your hard arms and soft breasts You lovingly licked the dust from my eyes. My heart is yours Across time.

Melissa Goode

Learning to be human: I was not looking forward to Navaratri. Being tired from the mental strain of my own mind, the thought of doing anything extra was not appealing. I felt covered in a cloud of apathy, smeared with an unholy attitude and in general suffering from an invasive type of spiritual destitution. During those eight days of reflectiveness I did not fast. In fact, I gorged. I ate so much that eating took on a whole new level of meaninglessness. Senseless consumption or anything edible that was in my proximity was quickly devoured. Even the meadow was not safe in my presence - minors lettuce, wild mustard greens... all

mercilessly snapped up. Besides making leis for the altar, morning coffee and evening whisky sours became rituals that could not be missed. I made myself quite sick really. The totality of all this was especially felt at 5:00 AM each morning when it was time to get up. Puffy eyes, the breath of death and a general aura of wretched tiredness surrounds my entire being, I could not take enough hot showers to cleanse my soul. Everything inside felt sick, death, decay and mortality all too evident; still I indulged in very long showers, usually until all the hot water ran out all the while thinking how much water I was wasting...(misery most masterfully perfected indeed). With chest as tight as a steel drum and legs stiffer than coffin plank nails, there is no wonder why I still have difficulty in bowing. Yet somehow everyday I make it to the altar and bow; that is, if you call bending over and bumping your head on the floor bowing. Now about flowers. Finding them was a tricky business and the abundance we enjoyed would not have been without the help of Robin Brett, who clothed Saraswati in white, Lakshmi, Susan and Ms. Polly were the other jeweled bees who wafted in with flowers of most exquisite perfection. Meanwhile, still immersed in my cloud, I went through quite the Lady Macbeth dilemma. No matter how many times I washed each flower, I could not get them clean enough. My very gaze alone was enough to curl all the petals on each lei. Life took on the appearance of some divine joke. Even the Mother Bhagwati on the altar appeared to have a large scowl etched across her face. On the morning of the "send off" I awoke to a white blanket of clouds peeking through my window. This must be the color white that Mother Saraswati wears, I thought. I actually felt very peaceful.

Doris Hearn

The requirements for participation in Navaratri set my daily routine into better order. Getting up early and completing my toiletries allowed me more focus on the morning with its freshness, stillness and beauty. Retiring earlier at night, I found more mastery over mindless activities that seem to take control in the evening. These activities are rarely fruitful and seem to be the mind's reluctance to relinquish power.

Tom Pickford

Navaratri, for me, was not difficult or even unpleasant. While I was not silent for most of the period, I did become very quiet, both inside and out. (Quiet is a relative term.) I became very aware of my senses and surroundings. I ate more slowly, moved more purposefully. It was very easy to feel and experience reverence. I was able to actually "watch my thoughts". I have heard about this phenomena, watching one's thoughts, but had never really experienced any more than a few brief moments at any one time. One thing that I learned was that if you watch your thoughts rather than speak them you don't create and therefore get caught up in as much

drama. If you watch a thought it is only a thought and not an action. A thought becomes an action when you give it voice. When a thought becomes action it is much easier to become attached and therefore much harder to let go of any outcome (an enormous challenge for me personally). Sounds easy, doesn't it? Another thing I learned about myself was how hard it is for me to stay put and do nothing. Much like my mind during meditation. For some reason this seemingly simple correlation between my mind and my body has eluded me until now. I'm not sure what I will do with this newfound, old wisdom, but I know that it is important. I realize that I have only just put my foot in the water and yet Navaratri was very rich for me.

Namaste.



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