

॥ श्रीः ॥

Devi Māhātmyam
Apr 2020 Discourse Series
Part - 6

By

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Bhaskara Prakasha Ashram

॥śrī sadgurucaraṇāravindābhyāṃ namaḥ ॥

॥श्रीः ॥



śrī vimarśānandanāthaṃ satyāmbāsahitaṃ gurum |
hṛtpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||
śrī prakāśānandanāthaṃ vimarśāmbā sahitaṃ gurum |
hṛtpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||
śrī rāmānanda nāthaṃ rāmāmbā sahitaṃ gurum |
hṛtpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||

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śrī gurubhyo namaḥ ||
śrī māt্রে namaḥ ||

śiva-śakti samārambhām bhāsurānanda madhyamām |
asmat śrī nātha paryantām vande guru paramparām ||

Introduction

sarva-maṅgala-māṅgalye śive! sarvārtha-sādhike |
śaraṇye! tryaṃbake! gaurī! nārāyaṇī! namō:'stu te|| (chapter 11, verse 10)

śaraṇāgata-dīnārta-paritrāṇa -parāyaṇe |
sarvasyārti-hare devī! nārāyaṇī! namō:'stu te|| (chapter 11, verse 12)

sarva-svarūpe sarveśe sarvaśakti-samanvite |
bhayaebhyastrāhi nō devi! durge devi! namō:'stu te|| (chapter 11, verse 24)

Last week, we finished here, with Nārāyaṇī stuti. Nārāyaṇī stuti has sixteen ślokās. Please keep in mind that Nārāyaṇī is about the samaṣṭi rūpam of Caṇḍī. To illustrate that Ambā is in all the divine forms that participated in the fight against Śumbha and Niśumbha, all the deities are invoked in this stuti. Additionally, at the end, the Ṛṣi also describes Caṇḍī as [the composite form of] Lakśmī or Auspiciousness, Modesty/Hesitation, Great Knowledge, Faith, Prosperity, and other attributes:

lakṣmi lajje mahā-vidye śraddhe puṣṭi-svadhe dhruve |
mahā-rātri mahā:'vidye nārāyaṇī! namō:'stu te|| (chapter 11, verse 22)

So far, only namaskārams have been offered to Ambā; and in each of the namaskārams, we recall the form She took and how She helped us.

But you see, we as human beings, always have some hidden agenda! Let us say: We need to meet someone and have a favor to ask. When we talk to them, we will beat around the bush, just talking about this and that; and only at the very end will we typically start talking about why we are meeting them. Similarly, recall that in the Rātrī Sūktam, it is only in the last two ślokās that Brahmā articulates clearly what he wants.

Articulating What We Want

First Story

If you remember, in the very first chapter, Brahma talks about Mahāmāya. [This hymn is known as Brahmā Stuti or Rātrī Sūktam] wherein, in the last ślokā, Brahma finally states what he wants from Ambā: “The demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha need to be killed! For that to happen: please wake up Viṣṇu, delude Madhu-Kaiṭabha, so that I can be relieved of these Asurās”. Remember too,

that in the first story, there are no human beings. For that matter, there is no real śṛiṣṭi (creation) involved. We see only four people: Brahma, Viṣṇu, Madhu, Kaiṭabha and Ādiśeṣa forming the bed of Viṣṇu. Recall in the first chapter, the king asks the Ṛṣi to tell him (and the merchant) about Mahāmāyā. But if you look at the first chapter's story, you don't really encounter Ambāḷ in action.

In the Madhu-Kaiṭabha *vadham* context, the role of Ambā is a mystery until the end for many. Once again, remember what the King asked for:

tat sarvaṃ srotumiccāmi tvatto brahmavidām vara ||
(Chapter 1, Verse 62)

But the story does not reveal the form of the Mother. Won't the listener feel sad? That is why, at the end of the first chapter, the Ṛṣi will assure the king (even without the king asking) that he will recount the *prabhāvam* (glory) of Ambāḷ very elaborately:

prabhāvamasyā devyāstu bhūyah śṛṇu vadāmi te ||
(Chapter 1, Verse 108)

So ends the last verse there.

Second Story

From the second chapter onwards we see devatās and also humans coming into existence. We see in the second chapter how Ambāḷ becomes an amalgamation of the energies of all the devatās, engages actively in the war with Mahiśāsura, and kills the demon at the end. [If we] look at Śakrādi Stuti in Chapter 4 after the killing of Mahiśāsura, [we see] how beautifully Devi is eulogized by the devatās.

But [first, let us understand the dynamic between the celestials and human beings]. You see, even the devatās have a limitation--they have dependencies. The offerings from human beings in yagnās is what sustains them. Imagine a family with many kids --there is always a chance that one child in the mix may have a wavering mind. In this devā-mānuṣā mix, among all creations: think of us, the human beings, as weaklings. [The celestial beings and human beings have a symbiotic relationship]. The devatās and human beings depend on each other. The devatās [take on] the responsibility of protecting human beings, so that they may receive their food from the offerings in various fire oblations/yagnās performed by humans. That is to say: in order for the devās to be happy and not starve, they also need the human beings to be well. So keeping us in mind, at the end of the Śakrādi Stuti, the devās chant the last four ślokās starting from:

śūlena pāhi nō devi! pāhi khaḍgena cāmbike |
ghaṇṭāsvanena naḥ pāhi, cāpajā-niḥsvanena ca|| (Chapter 4, verse 24)

When devatās say, "You have to protect us wherever we are"-- remember that that supplication is also on our behalf. We see even more clues later that these verses are applicable for all of

us (human beings) too.

The devatās continue to say, “You take all forms, Mother--good as well as fearful-- just to protect us”. When Ambāḷ becomes immensely pleased and asks the devās what they want, they respond: “We don’t need anything. We are very happy-- we are ready to go to our place. However, since you are asking us to seek boons, we request the following: when we face trouble or very challenging situations in the future, the troubles should be thwarted just by the mere thought of you”.

Note: The devās could have stopped with that phrase, [but they do not stop here]. They specifically ask for us to be blessed with knowledge, prosperity and greatness--the word “martyaḥ” (meaning ‘mortal’) in verse 36 refers to us as, it is only human beings that experience death.

yaśca martyaḥ stavairebhi-stvām stōṣyatya-malānane! || (Chapter 4, Verse 36)
tasya vittardhi-vibhavairdhana-dārādi-sampadām | (Chapter 4, Verses 37)

[The Divine Mother grants the devās all their boons, and thus protects us all.] This is akin to a direct money transfer into our bank accounts!

Third Story

Someone in the future may ask a question, “Did that happen? Does Ambāḷ really come to save you when you think of Her”? [To illustrate that the Goddess does indeed come to the rescue of the devās as soon as they think of Her,] the Ṛṣi begins recounting the final story of [the destruction of] Śumbha-Niśumbha. At the very beginning, you see the devatās chanting “Devi Sūktam”, a hymn of 30 ślokās starting with:

namō devyai mahā-devyai śivāyai satataṁ namaḥ |
(Chapter 5, Verse 9)

There are more than 108 namahas that we hear in these verses. A question similar to the one above will pop up again here as well: Why should we do so many namaskārams? The answer to that question lies in the last two verses (verse 81 and 82): “any dangers, adversities that may come our way, Mother--you have to remove them and protect us”.

stutā suraiḥ, pūrvamabhīṣṭa-saṁśrayāt tathā surendreṇa, dineṣu sevītā |
karōtu sā naḥ, śubha-heturīśvarī śubhāni bhadrāṅya-bhiantu cāpadaḥ ||
(Chapter 5, Verse 81)

That was the request that the devatās made to Ambāḷ. The reason I am mentioning this so many times is: You can praise Ambāḷ--or anyone for that matter--but you should be able to articulate

what you need very clearly.

Now let us go back to the eleventh chapter.

Eleventh Chapter: Nārāyaṇī Stuti

After Śumbha and Niśumbha's destruction, devatās do stotram to Ambā!:

**devī prapannārtihare prasīda prasīda mātā jagatō:khilasya |
prasīda viśveśvari pāhi viśvaṁ tvamīśvari devi carācarasya||
(Chapter 11, Verse 3)**

“Amma, Please be considerate to us, please protect us. Your greatness is something that even gods have a hard time explaining. What becomes of us?”. These ślokās are almost a cry from the devatās -- in addition to being the highest glorification and eulogy. Ambā! however is just waiting to hear what the devatās want!

The actual prārthana on the part of the devatās (where they pray for something) begins with the 24rd śloka:

**sarva-svarūpe sarveśe sarva śakti samanvite |
bhayebhyastrāhino devi durge devi namo'stute ||
(Chapter 11, Verse 24)**

[Six ślokās beginning with the aforementioned verse “sarva-svarūpe” and up to and including ślokā 29, encompass a poignant prayer.]

If you ask: Who is the first or primary enemy of human beings? The answer is: It is Fear! [Fear in the everyday context takes the form of:] How is tomorrow going to be? Will I get my money back? Will my sick child get better? The life of human beings passes so quickly with all these worries and expectations. [Life seems consumed with worry and fear].

Of the six ślokās 23-29, three of them are specific supplications to remove fear in us.

“Amma, we know that you are everywhere; we know you have enormous power; we know that there are devatās who are ready to assist you (recall the aṣṭa-mātrkā śaktis who came to the Mother's side when She was surrounded by countless asurās in the 8th chapter).”

“So Mother, please remove the fear from us. You have the trident given to you by Lord Parameśvarā, which will scare off the fear [even as it scares off enemies]. May the Trident save us!”

[A note on the trident: Just like when a security guard at a house holds a stick/club, to deter intruders, the Trident has the power to deter evil].

In the fourth ślokā (in this set), the devatās ask (for themselves as well as on our behalf) that any

demerit or *pāpam* that we may have accumulated be removed. Just as the sound of Ambā's bell shattered the strength and confidence of the enemies, we want our sins or demerit to be decimated.

**hinasti daityatejaṃsi svenānāpūrya yā jagat |
sā ghaṇṭā pātu no devī pāpebhyo nah sutāniva ||
(Chapter 11, Verse 27)**

“Mother, it is not just me-- I have a big extended family. Please save all of us. All I can do is offer namaskārams. Please accept my namaskārams and take care of our families too.”

Next, in the ślokaṃ “**rōgānaśeṣānapahaṃsi tuṣṭā**”:

“Amma, in order for us to enjoy all the auspicious blessings that you are giving us, we need to be free from physical and mental ailments, diseases of all nature. So please make sure that we are free of any and all diseases.”

**rōgānaśeṣānapahaṃsi tuṣṭā,
ruṣṭā tu kāmān sakalānabhīṣṭān |
tvāmāśritānāṃ na vipannarāṇāṃ,
tvāmāśritā hyāśrayatām prayānti||
(Chapter 11, verse 29)**

“Mother, by the influence of bad thoughts in me, I may do things that I am not supposed to do; I may move with people I am not supposed to. Just like a mother who will discipline her child, please remove all those negative thoughts in me with your anger (“**apahaṃsi tuṣṭā**”).

“Amma, it is by doing the namaskārams to you that I attain recognition and support. I am content. This is all due to your blessing”.

After these six ślokaṃ, there are some bonus ślokaṃ too! The subsequent ślokaṃ in the eleventh chapter are so beautiful and will genuinely fill you with wonder.

The devās continue:

“Mother, [when we contemplate] the kind of amazing forms You take, Your enormous strength and power on display in the wars against the asurās, Your glories--how can we even attempt to praise You? It is an impossible task for us. Even scholars who are experts in vedānta, can be deluded by You and fall into the pit of ego (ahaṅkāram).” We saw this in the first chapter.

The only way for these wise souls to come out of their deluded states, is to pray to you sincerely-- and through Your Grace or *anugraham*.

**vidyāsu śāstreṣu viveka-dīpeṣvādyeṣu vākyeṣu ca kā tvadanyā |
mamatva-garte:'ti-mahāndhakāre, vibhrāmayatyeta-datīva viśvam
(Chapter 11, verse 31)**

This verse is here to remind us of Mahāmāyā's prabhāvam. This reminds us of the fact of life that no matter how intelligent or rich we may be, we are likely to encounter tough times. The only way out is to hold on to the feet of Ambāl. Once we hold on to Her feet, She protects us from rākśasās, poisonous creatures, toxins, thieves, natural calamities, and all enemies, both external and internal.

“Just as you protect the universe, Mother, protect me also.” How beautiful!

[Let us also reflect on the above verse in the context of Śumbha-Niśumbha. These brothers are not only valorous and handsome; they are also scholars, who are highly learned and knowledgeable. However, they are blinded by “I”-ness and “Mine”-ness (*ahanta & mamatva*). Śumbha is highly egotistical -- the Divine Mother gives him multiple chances to reflect on Her; though he is learned, he fails to see or accept that Caṇḍikā is the Supreme Soul who is the source and sustaining principle of this Universe. Together, the demon brothers represent ego and attachment. The utara caritam is a most poignant story about the ultimate hurdles that we face in our sādhanā. For, our penultimate enemies are indeed internal: they are our ego and attachment. Even the most learned among us have to overcome these ultimate obstacles to *sāyujyam* or *mokśa*. It is the Mother's Grace or *anugraha*m that enables us to transcend these most insidious hurdles in our practice.]

“Mother, You create the universe; You sustain it and You also destroy it at the end.” When you offer our prostrations/namaskārams to Her with faith and sincerity, She will not just take care of you and award you stature and recognition and fame--She will ensure that others offer their salutations to you! Remember, we don't even have to chant the ślokās (many may do so just to show off!) but we must surrender to Her with total sincerity.

The Timeless Relevance of the Devi Māhātmyam

[Let us continue on with the Nārāyaṇī Stuti..]

© **viśveśa-vandyā bhavatī bhavanti viśvāśrayā ye tvayi bhakti-namrāḥ**
(Chapter 11, Verse 33)

You and I cannot see what is coming in the future. But devatās can see events in the past, present and future. [As human beings we have a great fear of the unknown!] Also, you see, the main source of our fear is our enemies [our past histories inform our current fears and worries about enemies in future]. In the Mahābhārata, you may have read about Śakuni hatching one insidious evil plot after another against the Pāṇḍavās. We know from the killing of Śumbha, Niśumbha and Mahiśāsura that Ambāl takes care of the devatās instantly. Much like the devās encounter one challenge after another in the form of their demon enemies--for us human beings, our *pāpams* (past sins or demerit) can place us in situations that are too dangerous to

even fathom.

“Oh Mother, when we are faced with situations resulting from our own demerit, please just take care of us instantly just as you did for devatās!”

What is the one situation that is afflicting us all now? The coronavirus pandemic is [threatening the safety] of the whole world. [We could never have even fathomed such a calamity!] The cause of the virus could be the result of *pāpam* on the part of any one person, or the *pāpam* [of a collective]. However--no matter who may have caused the pandemic, the *entire* world is suffering.

**pāpāni sarva-jagatām praśamaṁ nayāśu,
utpāta-pāka-janitāmśca mahōpa-sargān||
(Chapter 11, Verse 34)**

The phrase “**utpāta-pāka-janitāmśca mahōpa-sargān**” means all types difficulties: the term “*utpāta*” specifically means “calamity”. “O Ambā, You need to save us post haste!”

This is a prayer done for us. It does not matter which time frame we are in. The Caṇḍī is timeless and always relevant. I feel compelled to add that the way the help and guidance are sought from God (as seen) in the Devīmāhātmyam-- is something we cannot find in any other stotram that I am aware of. You will find answers to your day to day problems in life in the Devī Māhātmyam.

**praṇatānām prasīda tvam̐ devi! viśvārti-hāriṇi |
trailōkya-vāsināmīḍye lōkānām varadā bhava||
(Chapter 11, Verse 35)**

In the above ślokaṁ, the devās beseech Devi to grant them a boon and to bless them.

Devi replies: “You have praised all of my aspects so very well. Please state the boons that you desire.

**taṁ vṛṇudhvaṁ prayacchāmi, jagatāmupa-kāraṁ||
(Chapter 11, Verse 37)**

I will grant whatever boon you seek for the sake of the welfare of the world.”

If you were to stop and think about this (statement from Ambā) as a devatā would, you would realize the following: the devatās need to ask for a boon which must help the world, and also help them. In other words, the boon must help one and all, no matter the time frame. The prayer for the boon should ideally also be presented in the most succinct form. The devās do an excellent job of this in the following śloka. [Note, in just one śloka, they achieve all of the above goals:]

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

Oh Akhileśvarī, You are the Mother of the whole world. [There may be enemies] in all the three worlds (svarga-loka, bhūloka, and pātāḷa-loka). The enemy or *vairi* may take any form. For, an enemy does not need to be only an anthropomorphic being: it can be an animal, a paranormal being, a microscopic being etc.

From our perspective, anyone or anything can drive us into a deeply problematic situation. Hence the devās ask Devi to protect anyone who prays to Her, by vanquishing the troubles that could potentially be caused by anything or anyone. This is such a beautiful verse. “Whatever pain the world experiences, we beseech you to vanquish that pain. We seek your protection!”

Let us review all the glorious hymns so far: Brahmā Ṛṣi himself extolls the Divine Mother as Mahāmāyā in Chapter 1--this is the celebrated Brahmā Stuti in Chapter 1 which is called the Rātri Sūktam; next, we have the Śakrādī Stuti (or Indrādī Stuti) in Chapter 4; followed by the Devi Sūktam or Aparājita Stuti in Chapter 5; and the Nārāyaṇī Suktam or Nārāyaṇī Stuti in Chapter 11. Please remember all these special hymns.

The devās beseech Devi to protect them at all times in future-- from any and all enemies. Ambā assumes the responsibility and then gives the devās a glimpse of what is yet to come (i.e., all of the trials they are yet to encounter in the way of adversaries and challenges). Ambā promises the devās that She will reappear at all the junctures where the devās may need Her protection. Devī reveals to them that She will return as Nandaja, Rakta-dantikā, Śatākṣī, Śākambharī, Durgā, Bhīmā-devī and Bhrāmarī.

Out of these 7 incarnations the Divine Mother mentions to the devās, Śatākṣī, Śākambharī, and Durgā all appear in the same story. Ambā recounts that She will return as Nandaja to vanquish (two other) asurās named Śumbha and Niśumbha. As Rakta-dantikā, Ambā reveals that She will vanquish an asura named Vaipracittā. In addition, it is revealed that after vanquishing an asura called Bhīmā, Ambā will come to be known as Bhīmā-devī. The devās also learn that Ambā will return to destroy an asura named Aruna in the form of a bee (*bhrāmara*)--and hence will come to be known as Bhrāmarī.

After recounting the stories and contexts surrounding her various incarnations, Ambā finally says:

itthaṁ yadā yadā bādhā, dānavōtthā bhaviṣyati|| (Chapter 11, Verse 54)
tadā tadāvātīryā:'haṁ, kariṣyāmyarisamkṣayam|| (Chapter 11, Verse 55)

“In the future wherever (and whenever) you face problems, I will protect you by thwarting the problems. The *padam* “*dānavōtthā*” here denotes asura, people with bad intentions, evil forces. So says the Divine Mother. She assures: “I will return to vanquish all problems and calamities [that threaten you].”

You need to understand the Magnanimity and depth of Compassion of the Divine Mother. There

is no qualifying clause for the problems; there are no conditions. She will protect us from all hurdles and problems--from everyday fears to global calamities.

In the Śrīmad Bhagavad-Gīta, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:

**paritraṇāya sadhūnam vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām |
Dharma-saṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge ||**

Even Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa adds a clause about when he will reincarnate: “I will reincarnate over and over to protect the sādhu (or practitioner of righteous living) and to reinstate Dharma.”

In contrast, here, Ambā does not state any clauses or conditions. She merely assures the devās and all of creation: “I will be there to protect you when you face calamities and threats.” [This is so because She is the Divine Mother.] And just as every good mother knows when the child needs help--and drops everything to quickly run to the side of the child, Ambā assures that She will confer her Motherly protection and Grace on us.

The Twelfth Chapter: Phala-Stuti

After granting boons of protection to the devās, Ambā proceeds to talk only about mankind. The entire twelfth chapter is Ambāḥ granting boons to mankind: this chapter is also called the *phala-stutiḥ* for the Devī Māhātmyam. Ambā herself lists the means to receive Her Grace or *anugraham*. She herself lists the fruits (*phalam*) or rewards of propitiating Her. Chanting the 12th chapter will ensure that all of our problems are resolved.

The chapter starts with Devī stating:

**ebhiḥ stavaiśca māṁ nityaṁ stōṣyate yaḥ samāhitah |
tasyā:'haṁ sakalāṁ bādhāṁ, nāśayiṣyāmya:'saṁśayam ||
(Chapter 12, Verse 2)**

The *padam* “**ebhiḥ stavaiśca**” refers to all the *stava* or hymns to the Divine Mother in the Devī Māhātmyam. I mentioned four exquisite hymns earlier:

- Rātri Sūktam (also the Brahmā Stuti in Chapter 1);
- Śakrādi Stuti in Chapter 4;
- Devī Sūktam or Aparājita Stuti in Chapter 5;
- Nārāyaṇī Stuti in Chapter 11

Please include all these 4 hymns in your daily prayers--that is, add them to your daily pāraṇam/chanting for Devī. Engage in the contemplation and worship of the Divine Mother with concentration, and with full faith/confidence (“**samāhitah**”) in the following phenomena: that Ambā will hear you and will only do the best for you. When your heart is filled with devotion,

love and affection towards Ambā, then you will resonate with the divine assurances of the Devī:

tasyā:'haṁ sakalāṁ bādhāṁ, nāśayiṣyāmya:'saṁśayam||

Devī assures: "I will resolve your problems without question. Do not harbor any doubt."
[The *padam* "saṁśayam" means 'doubt'.] Ambā gives this assurance right at the beginning of the chapter.

**madhu-kaiṭabha-nāśaṁ ca, mahiṣāsura-ghātanam |
kīrtiyiṣyanti ye tadvad, vadhaṁ śumbha-niśumbhayōḥ ||
(Chapter 12, Verse 3)**

**aṣṭamyām ca caturdaśyām, navamyām caika-cetasāḥ |
śrōṣyanti caiva ye bhaktyā, mama māhātmya-muttamam||
(Chapter 12, Verse 4)**

Ambā continues in this way:

"Those who either recite:

- the story of the destruction of Madhu-Kaiṭabha (prathama caritram),
- the story of the killing of Mahiṣāsura (madhyama caritram), &
- the story of the slaying of Śumbha-Niśumbha (uttara caritram)...

-with single-minded devotion and focus, **on**:

- aṣṭami (the 8th day of the lunar fortnight)
- caturdaśi (14th day of the lunar fortnight)
- navami (9th day of the lunar fortnight)

-and those who listen with love and devotion to this exalted poem of my glory"

-will have no hardship or peril befall them, nor any misfortunes arising from non-meritorious deeds."

The Divine Mother refers to her own *māhātmyam* as *uttamam*, which means 'supreme' or 'exalted'. [It follows therefore, that contemplation of her glories or *māhātmyam* is the penultimate practice for liberation].

**na teṣāṁ duṣkṛtaṁ kiñcid duṣkṛtōtthā na cāpadaḥ |
bhaviṣyati na dāridryaṁ, na caiveṣṭa-viyōjanam||
(Chapter 12, Verse 5)**

The Divine Mother employs a beautiful but simple *padam* to convey her assurance: She uses the term "*kincid*" which implies that Her Grace will ensure that we do not encounter even the smallest amount of hardship from wrongdoing and the resulting demerit or *pāpam*. Why is this

important?

Recall from earlier that all our suffering in this world is only due to our *pāpam* or the demerit that we have accrued as a result of non-meritorious or questionable actions on our part.

To give you a colorful example: if you blindfold yourself before heading out for a walk, you will naturally bump into objects--this may in turn cause trauma and you may end up with bruises or worse injuries. [You could potentially also have caused trauma and injury to others]. The injuries may even be so severe as to warrant medical attention. The doctor's visit may have been caused by the injuries; but what caused your pain and injury [and possibly others' pain] was the wrongdoing on your part (--it was wrong to choose to walk blindfolded out of the home). We choose to engage in so many choices/actions every day that resemble walking with a blindfold! Choices such as these in our day-to-day life end up causing a great deal of suffering, and accrue demerit or *pāpam*.

[Conversely, engaging in the right choices and actions can help ensure that we do not accrue more demerit or *pāpam*. Chanting the Devī Māhātmyam results in the complete Grace of the Divine Mother, which protects us from demerit and the ill-effects of our non-meritorious deeds]. In Verses 3 and 4, Ambā protects us from the *āpadah* or peril/threats arising from wrongdoing.

Let us look at the phrase “*na bhaviṣyati dāridryam*”: Ambā not only assures us protection from the misfortunes that arise as a result of our *pāpam*, but ensures that we will never face any kind of poverty *dāridryam* in the future. One may worry about financial security--or being unable to secure the money for the day to day subsistence of one's family. Ambā assures that you will never be faced with financial insecurities or fears.

Aside from financial insecurities, there are other compelling hardships that one may face. It is a reality for many of us that we are separated from our families and friends. This distance feels even more poignant these days due to the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread fear. Even when we wish to visit or help someone, that simply is not possible due to this pandemic. Mandatory social distancing has led to families being separated and becoming distressed as a result. In the 12th chapter of the Caṇḍī, Ambā offers her Grace in this regard too. She says: “*na caiveṣṭa-viyōjanam*”, which refers to “no separation from loved ones”. This reference to “loved ones” is to family, close friends and well-wishers, is it not? Ambā's Grace will undoubtedly help resolve the pangs of separation from loved ones.

**śatrutō na bhayaṁ tasya dasyutō vā na rājataḥ |
na śastrānala tōyaughāt kadācit-sambhaviṣyati||
(Chapter 12, Verse 6)**

In this verse, Ambāḥ assures us that She will protect us from: the dangers from enemies, burglars and kings --here, the *padam* ‘kings’ denotes all people of power and influence. She also assures that no danger will arise from any weapon (which could include guns, firearms, and the like), fire or flood. None of the aforementioned kinds of danger or peril will come near my

devotee.” [How poignant and relevant this verse is, given the range of threats that human beings are facing around the whole globe today!]

**tasmānmamaitan-māhātmyaṁ paṭhitavyaṁ samāhitaiḥ |
śrōtavyaṁ ca sadā bhaktyā, paraṁ svastyayaṁ hi tat||
(Chapter 12, Verse 7)**

“This poem of my glory is to be recited by those with a single-pointed focus and heard always with devotion--for it is the ultimate way to well-being (*svastya*) and righteousness.”

Note that here, while assuring us of her protection, Ambāḥ adds the qualifying clause of devotion and single-minded concentration on Her. Therefore, whatever you do, do it with devotion and concentration. Be sure to offer even your daily pāraṇam to Ambā with great devotion and sincerity.

**upasargāna-śeṣāṁstu mahā-mārī-samudbhavān |
tathā trividha-mutpātaṁ māhātmyaṁ śamayemama||
(Chapter 12, Verse 8)**

Ambā herself says: “May this glorification of mine destroy all misery that arises from pestilence; and also put an end to the three types of calamities.”

In the above verse, the word “mahā-mārī” deserves a closer look. The *padam* “mahā-kālī” is the power of kālāgni-rudra. During the mahā-pralaya (or time of dissolution of a *kalpa*), mahā-kālī is the power that causes the destruction and total dissolution of the world. She joins hands with mahā-mārī like twins would hold hands: think of the power of mahā-kālī and the power of mahā-mārī as going hand in hand.

This mahā-mārī can be better understood if we were to reflect on diseases caused by organisms which are not visible to the naked eye--which affect communities at a large scale. Diseases such as smallpox, cholera, plague and other pandemics caused by microorganisms such as the CoronaVirus have the potential to wreak havoc and cause the death of millions around the world--the power of destruction unleashed through these pandemics is the power of mahā-mārī. At the present time, the entire world is suffering as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The power of mahā-mārī is described as mṛtyu-jihvā meaning, “the tongue of Death”. Ambā as mahā-mārī is jagat-saṁhāra kāriṇī--so great is Her power that it can destroy the universe. She is described as kāraṇa-jvālā--her countenance is comprised of an all-consuming blazing fire (emanating from her face). One can begin to imagine the awesome, unfathomable power of mahā-mārī. However, She is the same power who is celebrated as “Māriamman” or “Mahāmāriamman”.

However you might have encountered people afflicted (for instance) with chicken pox--who have

resolved to offer kṣīrābhiṣekam (abhiṣekam of milk) to Māriamman to “appease Her” and earn Her Grace. The idea behind this prayer is that only the great Power that is thought to be the cause of the pain or affliction, wields the power to eradicate the affliction and pain. A simple analogy to this would be: the key needed to unlock a door would have to be the same one that used to lock the door in the first place. It is the belief that only with the Grace of mahā-mārī or mahā-kali can we be rid of the pain and suffering caused by pestilence. Here, in this (aforementioned) verse, Ambāḷ states that Her Grace and blessings will see to it that **no** misfortune from pestilence would befall Her devotees.

Another important paradigm is addressed in this ślokaṃ:

We usually suffer from these 3 types of difficulties or calamities (“trividham-utpātam”) arising from three types of miseries or *tāpa-trayam*:

- Ādi-daiṃkā: Problems arising from unseen forces and gods belong to this category (miseries arising from paranormal beings like ghosts, etc. also fall under this category).
- Ādi-bhautika: Problems arising from natural disasters like lightning, flood, storms, wildfire, earthquake, tsunamis, tornadoes, all belong to this category.
- Ādyātmika: Problems that we invite onto ourselves.. For example: If we were to insult a neighbor because of jealousy, and if the neighbor were to retaliate in a violent way, the resulting injury would be our own fault. Therefore, all problems caused by one’s own foolishness, jealousy, anger, ill-feeling, rage, greed or hatred belong to this category. An action we engage in as a result of our bad intentions will only result in our own pain and suffering.

Ambāḷ being the Divine Mother, assures us that no harm arising from *any* of the above categories of calamities would befall us. Chanting or listening to my Māhātmyam with devotion and single-minded concentration will result in protection from all ailments, afflictions or peril (*utpāta*) arising from the *trividha-tāpa* --all such misfortunes will just disappear and will not touch us. None of these are my pronouncements. I’m sharing with you all of Ambā’s words that She states Herself!

**yatraitatpaṭhyate samyañ-nityamāyatane mama |
sadā na tadvimōkṣyāmi sānnidhyañ tatra me sthitam||
(Chapter 12, Verse 9)**

The *padam* “*āyatane*” means “home”. Usually in our homes, we designate a room, a shelf or a space as the sanctuary for prayer--and we place a picture or idol of Ambāḷ there to be worshipped. It is not a matter of how big or how small the space is. The point is that we usually create a space for worship in our home. You believe that Ambāḷ is in that space you have created and that is why you bow down and pray in that space, isn’t it? Your intent and faith have created that space “for Her”. In the above verse, Ambāḷ says: “Wherever [my Māhātmyam] is always chanted, there my presence will be abiding.”

If you are going to do *pārāyaṇam* daily--which many of us do--then remember the shortcuts that

you can easily incorporate into your daily routine: Chant the 4 stutis! Again, remember: It is not I that is saying all this. It is Ambā Herself who has said this.

“Wherever you sit (always) and chant my *māhātmyam* with respect, my presence in that space will be abiding. I will come and sit in that space; I will never abandon it.” These are Devī’s words. The phrase “**sadā na tadvimōkṣyāmi**” refers to the abiding nature of Ambā’s Grace.

This is because Ambā is filled with Motherly love towards her children (all of us). Just like a Mother waiting with her child, and listening to the calling of her child. Once she is called, she will not leave the side of the child until she has taken care of the child’s needs.

Similarly, Caṇḍikā Mahālakṣmī is waiting. The minute you start your chanting, She will arrive and sit nearby in order to listen. This is the reason why in big temples they often perform Caṇḍī Pārāyaṇam to feel the *sānnidhyam* (the presence) of the Divine Mother and obtain her *anugraham* or grace. The Divine Mother Herself asks us to chant her *Māhātmyam* in order to feel Her *sānnidhyam* --to commune with her and feel her divine presence. Think of Ambā Caṇḍikā Mahālakṣmī as your own Mother. If you were to ask me, the Devi Māhātmyam is in actuality what a mother would do to take care of her own children: In the Devi Māhātmyam, Mother Caṇḍikā Mahālakṣmī assures us that she will nourish and protect us. [Her Grace for us is ever-present, without conditionalities]. But in order for you to *feel* Her Grace and Presence all the time, you need to invoke Her in your daily parayanam.

Note: When yagnās (homam/havan) are conducted, there may still be lingering doubt at the completion of the oblation--as to whether every part of the homa-krama was conducted correctly and in the prescribed ways. In this case, Devi Māhātmyam Pārāyaṇam is almost always included [as prāyascitta and to complete the oblations to the great satisfaction of all gathered]. This is because Ambā graces the place where the chanting takes place with Her divine Presence. [With the Divine Mother Herself sanctifying the homam in this way, the oblations come to the most exalted conclusion one could hope for]. Similarly when a temple consecration (Kumbābhishekam) or other utsavam is performed, scholars and adepts are invited to offer Devi Māhātmyam pārāyaṇam.

**bali-pradāne pūjāyām-agnikārye mahōtsave |
sarvaṁ mamaitaccaritam-uccāryaṁ śrāvyameva ca ||
(Chapter 12, Verse 10)**

In the Vedas, there is a *śruti vākhyam*: “*jñātvā karmāṇi kurvīta*”. The śāstrās state the following condition: before engaging in any task, be it *pūjā*, *agni kāryam* (fire oblations) or other type of worship, the practitioner needs to fully learn and understand all the details pertaining to the successful completion of the task--only then can the practitioner derive all the *phalam* or fruits of the oblation. This axiom is true of work in any context: whether one takes on a task at their place of work, at home or at a yāga-śālā for a yagña, performing the task with proper knowledge is essential. However, even the most learned among us, will sometimes make mistakes. Most people will make mistakes unwittingly--and in some cases, one may make mistakes knowingly.

But even in such cases, Ambā is an ocean of compassion:

**jānatā'jānatā vāpi balipūjām tathā kṛtām |
pratīcchiṣyāmyahaṁ prītyā vahni-hōmaṁ tathā kṛtam||
(Chapter 12, Verse 11)**

When you engage in worship, whether it is a homam, mahāyagña or a pūjā, offer Devī Māhātmyaṁ or arrange for Pārāyaṇam of Devī Māhātmyam--and be assured that the Divine Mother will receive all offerings made in worship and in oblations gladly, whether or not the worship was offered with proper knowledge. [She gives us this assurance in the above verse.] All mistakes that were made unwittingly and with full knowledge; and all errors of omission and negligence--the Divine Mother will forgive these errors and bestow Her Grace on you.

**śarat-kāle mahā-pūjā, kriyate yā ca vārṣikī |
tasyān-mamaitanmāhātmyaṁ śrutvā bhakti-samanvitaḥ||
(Chapter 12, Verse 12)**

**sarvābādhāvinirmukto dhanadhānyasutānvitaḥ |
manuṣyo matprasādena bhaviṣyati na saṁśayaḥ ||
(Chapter 12, Verse 13)**

The aforementioned verses are important verses. During sharan-navarātrī (navarātri in the Fall), the Divine Mother is celebrated with great intensity in all parts of the world. You may have witnessed the colorful Durgā Pūjo conducted for 5 days with great pomp and devotion in the state of West Bengal. In such places where great festivities or *utsavam* are being conducted for Devī, be sure to listen to the Devi Māhātmyaṁ. If that is not possible, you may do *pārāyaṇam* of the Caṇḍī yourself. Be sure to chant Her Glory with great devotion and concentration on Her. Ambā provides the following assurance to all those who are engaged in the act of either listening or chanting Devi Māhātmyaṁ with single-minded focus “and become filled with devotion” during the great autumnal worship (“*śarat-kāle mahā-pujā*”): These [devotees] will be (a) freed from all afflictions and ailments and (b) endowed with wealth, grain and good progeny.

**śrutvā mamaitan-māhātmyaṁ, tathā cōtpattayaḥ śubhāḥ |
parākramaṁ ca yuddheṣu, jāyate nirbhayaḥ pumān||
(Chapter 12, Verse 14)**

Whether on a battlefield, or while facing trying circumstances in day-to-day life, the biggest enemy that one faces is fear. A quick look at the Mahābhārata will reveal: Before the war begins, Krishna advises Arjuna to pray to the Goddess Durgā. Arjuna then extolls Durgā in a Stuti (about 20-22 verses long) and prays for Her Grace in conquering his fears. Similarly, in the same dwāpara yuga, Princess Rukmiṇi prays to Goddess Durgā asking Ambā to bless her with Kṛṣṇa as her husband!

[In the tretā yuga] as we see in the Rāmāyaṇa, Sītā is very worried at the time of her *swayamvara*. Not one King or Prince is successful in even lifting the great bow of Śiva. Sītā

prays to Ambā to bless her with a suitable husband.

Similarly, irrespective of what we face in our lives, we should always pray to Ambā. The Goddess removes all our fears and worries. The Divine Mother gives this powerful assurance: “Hearing of my glory, my auspicious manifestations, and my prowess in battles, they become fearless.” This is the meaning of the above verse.

The pūjā for the Divine Mother can be very simple: please offer just one flower, one dhoopam, one dheepa-jyoti, and a simple neivedhyam. If you are unable to offer dhoopam, dheepam or naivedyam, at least offer some akśata (rice colored yellow with turmeric). The Divine Mother is so unconditional in her Grace and love, that even the bhāvanā of *upacāram* or hospitality with folded hands to Devī will satisfy Her. However, you should offer a namaskāram in your mind: “Oh Mother, I am offering all of these *upacārās* to you; please accept them and bless me.” Remember, even if you don’t have a picture or idol of Her, She is residing right there in your book: the Devī Māhātmyam itself is the Divine Mother, and you may offer your pūjā to the book.

The Divine Mother gives us abundant boons just for the act of listening to or chanting the Devī Māhātmyam with devotion and single-minded focus. Devī’s Grace will ensure that our home and hearth will be blessed with auspicious milestones such as weddings.: “[My devotees] will enjoy well-being; their families will rejoice.” So says the Divine Mother in this verse:

**ripavaḥ saṁkṣayaṁ yānti, kalyāṇaṁ cōpapadyate |
nandate ca kulaṁ puṁsāṁ māhātmyaṁ mamaśṛṅvatām||
(Chapter 12, verse 15)**

You will be blessed with good children and your *gotra* or lineage will grow and prosper.

There are many *śānti-karmās* that are suggested as *prāyascitta* (expiation or atonement) to various problems. You might be bothered by bad dreams, or afflictions caused by the ill effects of the *navagrahās* (the nine celestial bodies set to exert influence on our well-being and existence). However, all that is needed in the way of expiation for all of the aforementioned afflictions, is devout recitation of the Devī Māhātmyam or listening to the Māhātmyam with devotion. If you are unable to chant or do not know to chant the Māhātmyam, then arrange for a knowledgeable person to chant it at your home.

**śānti-karmaṇi sarvatra tathā duḥsvapna-darśane |
graha-pīḍāsu cōgrāsu māhātmyaṁ śṛṅuyānmama||
(Chapter 12, Verse 16)**

You may invite any scholar who is familiar with the procedure to recite the Devī Māhātmyam to come to your home, and to do Devī Māhātmya Pārāyaṇam. However, please be sure to sit down and listen to the recitation with devotion and single-minded focus on Ambā. If you do not listen to the recitation with sincerity or devotion, you may not derive all the benefits of the pārāyaṇam.

**upa-sargāḥ śamaṁ yānti, graha-pīḍāśca dāruṇāḥ |
duḥsvapnaṁ ca nṛbhir-dṛṣṭaṁ, susvapnamupajāyate||
(Chapter 12, Verse 17)**

Dāruṇāḥ means extremely painful afflictions that plague us due to the position and movement of the navagraha devatās in one's birth horoscope. All of these serious afflictions too will be removed by devout pāraṇam of Devi Māhātmyaṁ. The devotee that engages in recitation or listening of the Māhātmyam of the Divine Mother will also be blessed with good dreams [which also implies good sleep].

Looks like the time is up for this week. There is so much more to say and I don't want to miss sharing those details with you. This Twelfth Chapter is filled with solutions for all sorts of problems that could potentially afflict us--the boons are given for the protection of human beings from afflictions that affect mortals, not devatās who are immortal. For instance, who could potentially face problems due to planetary movement or the positions of *navagrahās*? Only human beings!

When you read Chapter 12, you will understand that the Devī Māhātmyaṁ is chanted just so that the sufferings of human being can be eradicated! The Caṇḍī is chanted to help human beings realize the blessings of wealth, as well as achievement of one's personal aspirations. Chapter 12 addresses all possible problems and afflictions that human beings could encounter; it even addresses great calamities felt by communities on a larger scale. Material challenges facing human beings can come in the form of a delay in a wedding of your child; or perhaps a delay in the birth of progeny; or a delay in being able to buy a home for yourself and your family. For thwarting all challenges and problems--and for fulfilling all of one's righteous desires, Ambā herself gives us the great *upāya* of Devī Māhātmya Pāraṇam. [Bear in mind that whether your goals are material or spiritual, reciting the Caṇḍī will help you realize your four-fold aspirations].

In addition to these boons, there is another deeply moving aspect I wish to share with you: I am moved to tears as I contemplate the Divine Mother's Compassion. Even though Ambā repeatedly mentions *nitya-pāraṇam* or daily recitation---because She is our Mother, She makes all sorts of concessions for us! Imagine what your (earthly) mother might say if she sees you reciting the Caṇḍī every day. She may even say, "Child! Why are you troubling yourself by doing this? Why don't you ask your father to do the chanting on your behalf?" Similarly, Ambā, who is full of compassion towards us (her children), says: "Even if you recite my Māhātmyam only once, I will bless you with every one of the blessings above." [You may wonder where She says this.] This verse is coming next, in a rather interesting scene created by Ambā for our understanding.

All of you be blessed. All of you stay happy.

May the Grace and blessings of Ambāḥ stay with you all fully.

I feel extremely happy today to be able to talk about Ambāḥ's greatness. As I spoke about

Ambā's assurances and enumerated the fruits of the Caṇḍī pārāyaṇa sādhana today, even I felt amazed --and continue to feel amazed and overwhelmed--by the amount of Compassion and Grace that Ambā has for all of us. I am thankful to you all for giving me an opportunity to talk about it.

Śrī Mātre Namaḥ ||
Śrī Gurubhyo Namaḥ ||

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