

ACVA Newsletter 2025-09 – Holy Days



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Navaratri, the Nine Nights of Mother Divine

The first night of the Vedic festival of Maha Navaratri, the “Great Nine Nights” of Mother Divine, began on September 22. This blessed festival will extend through October 2 this year around the world, with Vijayadashami or the Victory Day of the Goddess occurring on October 2.

The word Navaratri (or Navratri) literally means “Nine Nights” in Sanskrit — with Nava (or Nav) meaning nine, and ratri meaning night(s). There are actually nine nights and also ten or eleven days included in the celebration of Navaratri.



Navaratri occurs four times a year. Two of these more minor festivals are observed in winter (January or February), and summer (June or July), known as the Gupta Navaratri. These are less celebrated with public festivities and tend to be observed more privately by yogis and tantrics (as gupta means hidden, secret, or private) The other two more significant festivals occur in the fall and spring. They occur relatively near the equinoxes, which are crucial astrophysical turning points when our bodies and minds undergo dramatic energetic and physical readjustment.

The fall festival of Navaratri is known as Shardiya, Sharad, or Ashwin Navaratri. This one is the main or “maha” (great) Navaratri of the year which occurs at the close of monsoon season and immediately after Pitru Paksha, the Fortnight of the Ancestors. It is the most important also because it is celebrated during Dakshinayana, the half of the solar year spanning from the summer to winter solstice in the northern hemisphere, a time that is dedicated to spiritual purification.

In Vedic culture, this is a very joyful and also a profoundly sacred time. During this festival, celebrants fast, pray, and chant. It's also common to meditate, attend a yatra (go on a pilgrimage), offer charitable donations or service, participate in Vedic fire ceremonies (havans, yagyas, and pujas), and to take holy baths (dipping in sacred rivers).



During Navaratri, we celebrate the divine feminine power which is known as Adi Parashakti or Maa Shakti, according to yogic and tantric traditions. Maa Shakti is generally associated with the universal creative power which connects to the Earth and is responsible for the creation and destruction of the universe. She is personified by various goddesses and their archetypes throughout all the world's spiritual traditions.

For a few examples, Maa Shakti is a great warrior, the raw creative power, Mother Earth, youthful maiden, wise old crone, sister, lover, wife, keeper of the family hearth, teacher,

artisan, alchemical granter of worldly boons, daughter of the stars, and, in my favorite aspect, loving mother to her children. Though she is worshiped in a variety of forms, She is ultimately the one supreme dynamic power within all creation.

Navaratri commemorates the allegorical battle between Goddess Durga and the demon Mahishasura. This battle lasted nine days. The tenth day is known as her day of victory, or Vijaya Dashami. The deeper purpose of Navaratri is sadhana (spiritual practice). As the Divine Mother's power is reignited during this special festival, we are given an opportunity to tap into the massive surge of her vital spiritual energy (kundalini) which moves spontaneously within our sublime energy systems.

In fact, the deeper meaning of Navaratri is related to this unprompted energy flow and the subsequent opening of our subtle spiritual centers during this rarefied time. During the Nine Nights of Mother Divine, the entire planet is bathed in divine purifying energy which can help us to rise above the negative power of the world. This purification process not only facilitates spiritual, emotional, and intellectual blessings, but also material ones.

We can do our own personal spiritual practice or attend temples and gatherings to celebrate Navaratri, or both. During Navaratri, many devotees like to read and study the *Devi Bhagavata Purana* (*Devī Bhāgavatapurāṇa*). Also known as the *Devi Bhagavatam*, *Bhagavata Purana*, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, and *Srimad Devi Bhagavatam*, this is an ancient Sanskrit compilation of stories and hymns related to the goddess in her various forms. Another book I like to read is the *Devi Mahatmya* (*Glory of the Goddess*) also known as the *Durga Saptashati* or simply *Saptashati*, *Chandi*, or *Chandi Patha*.

One way to celebrate is by worshiping the Dasa Mahavidya, the ten great tantric/yogic wisdom goddesses, one for each of the ten days of Navaratri. These mysterious goddesses are most often worshiped during the Gupta Navaratris.

More commonly, we celebrate Navaratri through the worship of nine manifestations or forms (swaroops) of Durga Mata. These are known as the Nava Durga or Nav Durga (or Navadurga or Navdurga).

In another scheme, the first three nights of Navaratri are devoted to Durga Mata, the principal aspect of the mother goddess Mahadevi. She is the fierce and valorous aspect of the Supreme Being known as Shakti (goddess power). Her vahana (mount) is a lion or tiger which represents freedom from fear and mastery over the lower nature. We invoke Durga Mata to help us burn up our egoic impurities; remove our internal blocks and external difficulties; and ultimately, to strengthen the power of our connection with Divine Oneness. *Aum Dum Durgayei Namah! Aum Dum Durgayei Namah! Aum Dum Durgayei Namah!*

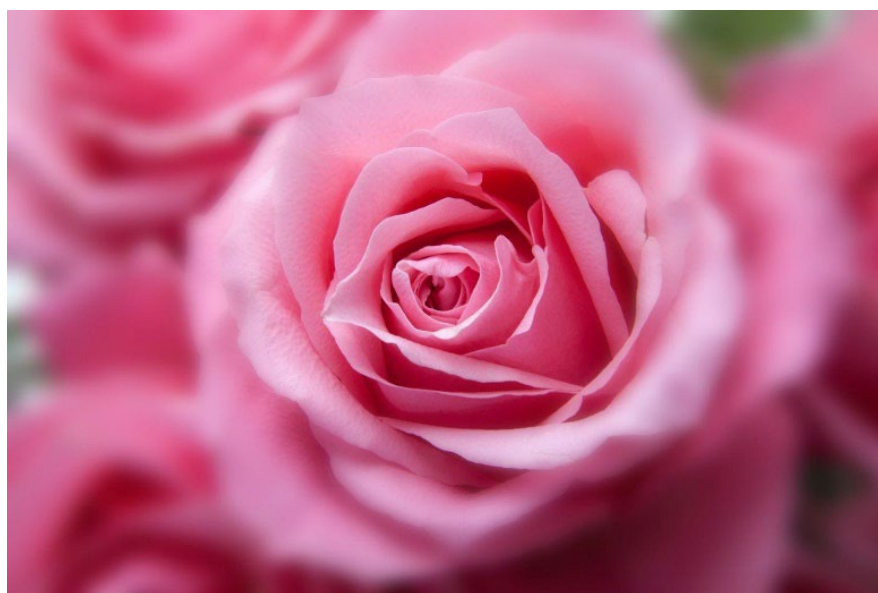
The second three nights of Navaratri are dedicated to the sweet goddess Lakshmi, who represents beauty, abundance, love, kindness, and integrity. She ultimately helps us remember our true nature. *Om Shreem Mahalakshmiyei Namah! Om Shreem Mahalakshmiyei Namah! Om Shreem Mahalakshmiyei Namah!*

During the last three nights of Navratri, we celebrate Saraswati — the healing, cleansing, and illuminating aspect of the Divine Mother who governs sound, music, wisdom, knowledge, and the arts. Saraswati means “She Who Flows,” as she represents Om/Aum, the most sublime

vibration of the Universe flowing through the blissful divine sound current. *Aum Aing Saraswatyei Namah! Aum Aing Saraswatyei Namah! Aum Aing Saraswatyei Namah!*

As you can see, we have a variety of ways to celebrate Navaratri, both in the traditional manner and also in more modern ways. The point is, for me, that the Kundalini Shakti, the Divine Mother's power, is spontaneously rising within each of us and within nature during this time. Therefore, it is a blessed time for all sorts of contemplative practices that can help us attune to these deep transformational energies.

In addition to meditation, fire ceremonies, chanting mantras, charitable giving, healing practices, spending time in nature, and studying sacred texts, this is an important time to honor our devatas, gurus, and of course the Divine Mother, in order to invoke their blessings for the benefit of the whole world.



The Divine Mother is so beautiful! But remember, in Her higher manifestation even that beauty is formless. She is in everything. Her divine, compassionate love is expressed in the raindrops. Her beauty is reflected in the colors of the rainbow. She offers fresh hope to mankind with the rose-tinted clouds at dawn. Above all, be ever conscious of Her presence in your heart.
(Paramahansa Yogananda)