

DIPAVALI – THE WORSHIP OF MAHALAKSHMI, THE GLORY OF GOD

by

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The worship of Mahalakshmi, which is the theme of all these celebrations on this blessed occasion known as Dipavali, is actually the form religion gives to the adoration of the glory of God. The face of God is beautiful. Inasmuch as no one has beheld the face of God, religious prescriptions give us representations of the various types of glory manifest in the world. The glory of God as such cannot be conceived, of course, as everyone knows, but that which gives satisfaction, that which looks attractive, that which is prosperity in its very nature, that which is magnificence and exuberance, that which is beauty, robust and grand in every manner, these features can be attributed only to the majesty of God.

Mortal, ephemeral things cannot have that beauty in them. Perishable objects have within them the sting of the perishable nature to which they are subject. Even when the perishable objects are born, their death is inscribed in large bold letters on their very face. With birth, death follows, not as a sequence in time but as a manifestation of the process beginning with birth itself. Hence nothing in the world can be regarded as comparable with the majesty of God's beauty.

But religion has applied every means to portray at least a modicum of this masterly majesty of God, which can be deciphered even in this ugly world, because behind this wretchedness of apparently visible physical existence of people, at the core of it, there is a grandeur which has to be brought up to the surface of cognition and aesthetic appreciation. This is the function of religious worship and any kind of adoration that goes by the name of religious performance.

Mahalakshmi, who is adored on this auspicious occasion, is represented as the power and the glory of Bhagavan Sriman Narayana, the Supreme Being. As beaming, scintillating rays jet forth from the great glory of the orb of the sun, so the power of God, known as Shakti in religious parlance, manifests itself in what He appears to have made His creation - this universe. Though there is a distortion in all things in this world which passes understanding at every stage of our trying to grasp its meaning, there is, nevertheless, as we have to accept, the presence of God Himself in what He has created. God also has to be also immanent in order that the creation can be sustained. The world cannot be sustained even for a moment if His presence is not there.

That immanence of God's glory is the beauty of things in the world, and to carry this perception of beauty to the highest point of religious exaltation would be to divinize this form and regard this divinized form of God as Brahma-shakti, Vishnu-shakti, Shiva-shakti, and other such names - that is, the glory associated with every performance of God, generally known as creation, sustenance and transformation. The life-giving, sustaining power of God is supposed to be manifest in the religious worship and adoration and conception of Mahalakshmi who is veritably, in her essential nature, God manifest in the world in its purest form.

Prosperity is Mahalakshmi. She is also oftentimes called Moksha Saubhagya Lakshmi - the prosperity which is Ultimate Liberation itself. That also is often associated with

Mahalakshmi, who is not to be confused with the power of wealth - gold and silver - as many people think. Mahalakshmi is the inner connotation of anything that we can regard as excellent.

We have a verse in the Bhagavadgita where the Lord proclaims His presence in anything which has excellence in it, anything which is uncommon. *Yad yad vibhutimat sattvam srimad urjitam eva va, tat tad evavagaccha tvam mama tejo'rsa-sambhavam* (B.G. 10.41): Wherever you see prosperity of any kind in its exalted form, there you may see God's hand operating abundantly.

The worship of Mahalakshmi is not merely an external, ritual act. It is not just garlanding, and waving a holy light, though that also it can be. There is much more about it. Our heart has to adore the glory of God. Where the heart is not present, worship is also not there. The adoration of God in His aspect of beauty and magnificence is not a performance with hands and feet, but a deep recognition of our profundity of feeling, where we surrender the limitation of our own personality to the perfection which is God Almighty.

So, in a way, we worship God Himself when we worship Bhagavati Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, and principally Lakshmi on an occasion of this kind, the lighting up of the atmosphere on this occasion with a series of illuminating lamps. Beautiful it is that we call this occasion Dipavali - a line, a series of illuminations. That represents the goodness we perceive, the brilliance and excellence in people, which also is present everywhere in spite of the ugliness characteristic of human nature, generally speaking, to bring forth the beauty in human nature above the surface of its ugliness and distorted nature, and see beauty, glory, health, vigor, perfection, completeness and inexpressible satisfaction. Such occasions of the rise of human nature from its deepest bottom, the soul rising in its majesty, we may say, is actually the act of worship of Mahalakshmi, who Herself is the exteriorized conceptualization of the soul of God operating in the universe.

There are beautiful verses, Stotras - Mahalakshmi Ashtaka, etc. - which people recite every day to bring their mind into the focus of an attention on all success in life. Success is not merely material accumulation of physical comforts. It is, truly speaking, the adventure of the spirit within towards its expansion of dimension towards its ultimate glory, which is direct perception of God in His glory supreme where Lakshmi is inseparable from Narayana, where God is one with His creation and his power. It is this deep significance that is behind this religious performance which generally, in an ignorant and innocent manner, people observe with crackers, noise, gifts, cards and many other things, making it merely a kind of outer show of gesture. Rarely do they manifest this beauty that is within themselves, and rarely are they prepared to see the beauty present in the hearts of other people also.

So, briefly to say, this is the worship of the beauty present in all things and the prosperity that is at the core of all things, which gradually rises to the perfection of God realisation. God bless you!