

Fearlessness from the Divine Mother

Foreword

‘*Fearlessness from the Divine Mother*’: Doesn’t this title bring hope to all those who are tormented by fear due to various reasons in their life? Truly, no matter how intelligently we try to live by applying our brains, or no matter how elaborately we plan our various projects and futures, sometimes, achieving the intended success remains a distant dream. When driven to such a corner in life, our only hope is in praying to the Divine Mother and obtaining her grace and protection! Then there are various kinds of diseases and ailments in our lives; even when you live with the greatest care, you may contract them; and then doctors try all their knowledge and medicines on you and finally give up on you; in such situations too, our only hope is to run to the Divine Mother in prayer! The tragedy of untimely death, the unbearable pain of insult and loss of face, getting plunged into abject poverty directly from the heights of prosperity due to bad investments and financial decisions – to avoid these terrible situations, we have no better option than to take refuge in the Divine Mother; her protection is the only option. The Divine Mother herself created this universe; yet there is no dearth of problems and obstacles in our lives. But, if we can obtain her grace and protection, even in the midst of all these problems and obstacles, we can live our life completely untouched by any of them.

The famous ‘*Devi Kavacha*’, a part of the *Durga Sapthashati*, has been named as ‘*Matri-raksha-kavacha*’ here. By chanting this regularly, how we can obtain her protection is very clearly enunciated here. The entire *Durga Sapthashati* was revealed to the Rishis. Hence each verse of this work is indeed a potent *Mantra*. All we need to do is chant this *mantra* with faith and devotion. The impact of the *Mantra-Shakti* automatically envelops us.

The Supreme Being is One and impersonal. Yet, the impersonal Being becomes a person, as it were, and assumes various forms for executing various duties. In order to nurture all living creatures, which have originated from the Supreme Being and are therefore the Supreme Being’s own children, and to give them a taste of divine love and affection, the impersonal Supreme Being assumes the form of the Divine Mother, the Mother of the Universe. The Divine Mother is easily pleased; she confers both material and spiritual blessings on her children. It is the Divine Mother who appears as affection in all the mothers in this world. Therefore, the *Puranas* praise her as follows:

*Yaa devi sarva bhuteshu matri rupena samstita;
Namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namonamaha.*

‘We offer our salutations again and again to that Divine Mother who resides in all living beings in the form of mother.’

That means – the motherhood in all women is the Divine Mother herself. That is the reason mother’s love shines with a wonderful selflessness. How much they strive for the betterment of their children! For the sake of their children, mothers forsake their own comforts, forget their own likes and preferences, and forbear all sorts of discomforts and tribulations. Mothers are known to have even given up their own lives while protecting those of their offspring. This selflessness, found naturally in all mothers, is inspired by the Divine Mother. But these earthly mothers can, at best, take care of the physical well-being of their children. Some mothers may assist their children in establishing themselves in this world. Manifesting the hidden Atman within man, slaking the thirst for knowledge within man, bringing about spiritual progress of man, leading man towards the Supreme Being by holding his hands, - these are possible only by the spiritual mother, the Divine Mother. Realizing this, the Rishis and sages, the

prophets and incarnations visualized the Supreme Being as Mother, and discovered the amazing path of relating to the Divine Mother as a child, a path known as *Santhaana-bhava*. When the child calls out to its mother, will she not respond? Won't the Divine Mother come running when the child cries from its heart?

It was Durga Puja period once; Sri Ramakrishna was sitting with his devotees. It must have been 7-7.30 in the evening. Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna got up, and with a beautiful smile playing on his lips, he went into *Bhava-Samadhi*. Seeing this sudden transformation, devotees started talking amongst themselves, 'This is the moment of the *Sandhi-Puja*; that is why he went into *Bhava-Samadhi*.' The *Sandhi Puja* refers to the puja conducted at most auspicious moment when *Saptami* and *Ashtami* meet. It is generally a small time period of around 45 minutes. The Divine Mother is offered special worship during this most auspicious period.

It was during this auspicious period that Sri Ramakrishna got completely absorbed in the mood of the Divine Mother. About half an hour later, Sri Ramakrishna regained normal consciousness and said, (pointing to himself), "I saw a path of light emanate from here till Surendra's house. Drawn by Surendra's devotion, I saw the Divine Mother manifest there. A light was emanating from her third eye. I saw the row of lamps lit on the portico, in front of the house. All of you please go there today." Surendra was deeply devoted to Sri Ramakrishna. He was a great worshipper of the Divine Mother. The Divine Mother had responded to his fervent devotion.

This is how the Divine Mother comes running to her devotees' fervent appeals. Having manifested, she savors the faith & devotion of her devotees. She fulfils all the prayers of her devotees. She also protects them from all sorts of problems in life. Not only that; in order to awaken faith in her, once in a while, here and there, she reveals her divine form to some blessed souls. By doing this, she ensures that she remains ever fresh in the minds of the people of this world.

Once Swami Brahmananda was sitting on the veranda in Belur Math, facing the Ganges. All of a sudden he saw Mother Durga come in to the Math, walking on the Ganges! She walked under the *Bilva* tree in the garden and disappeared. A few moments after this Swami Vivekananda alighted from a boat. He came straight to Swami Brahmananda and said, "Make arrangements for Mother's worship immediately." Saying this, he explained the vision he had just then seen, "Look here, I vividly saw Mother being worshipped with great pomp and glory in Belur Math!" Swami Brahmananda then told him about the vision that he had had just moments ago. Both the great monks had a vision at the same time! So, without the least delay, preparations for Durga Puja began. That incident was the birth of the tradition of performing Durga Puja every year in Belur Math. Even today, one has to see Belur Math's Durga Puja to experience its pomp and glory.

Innumerable are the books that describe the Divine Mother's glory. Innumerable are the devotees that have attempted to realize her in truth. In the *Devi Sukta* that appears in the Vedas, Mother herself says:

*Ahameva swayam idam vadami justaam devebhirutamaanushebhihi;
Yam kaamaye tam tamugram krinomi tam brahmaanam tam rishim tam sumedhaam.*

'I myself impart the teaching regarding that Divine Truth which is sought after by men and gods. Him that I love, I make him strong, I make him Brahma, I make him a Rishi, I make him enlightened.'

Describing Mother *Durga*, the Vedic Rishis sang as follows:

*Taamagnivarnaam tapasa jwalanteem vairochaneem karmaphaleshu justaam;
Durgaam deveem sharanamaham prapadye sutarasi tarase namaha.*

‘I surrender to Devi *Durga*, who is Brilliant as the fire, dazzling with *Tapas-shakti*, manifesting in infinite forms, the *Shakti* of the Supreme Being, the power behind all activities and the fruits of all actions. O Devi *Bhagawati*, you are an expert in lifting us above all troubles; you carry us safely across the ocean of *samsara*, (transmigratory existence). Salutations to you.’

‘*Tarase*’ – means ‘one who is an expert in lifting us above all troubles’. How amazing it is that the Rishis address the Divine Mother by such a name! We see similar names of the Divine Mother in the *Lalitha Sahasranama*. One such name in that text is ‘*Samsara-panka-nimagna samuddharana pandita*’. It means: this human existence is marked by the inescapable rotation between birth and death; such a transmigratory existence is nothing better than muck! We are stuck in that dirty muck; and the Divine Mother is an expert in lifting us above such a trap.

The Divine Mother is ever ready to come to our assistance. She is ever eager to lift us away from all our troubles. Doesn’t her very name ‘*Durga*’ signify that? The word *Durga* means just that – one who carries us across all problems. But we need to call her; call her with a sincere heart. Only then does she come to us. Isn’t that the same rule in this world too? Only when the child throws away its toys and cries out loudly does the mother come running to her child. Until then, she will be busy with her household chores.

It is impossible for the Divine Mother to resist the sincere call of a devotee. The *Puranas* attest:

*Durge smrita harasi bheetimasheshajantoh
Swasthaihi smritaa matimateeva shubhaam dadaasi;
Daaridryadukhabhayahaarini kaa twadanyaa,
Sarvopakarakaranaaya sadaardrachitta.*

‘O *Durga*, you banish fear from all beings who remember you; when people in comfort remember you, you grant them correct understanding. O Mother, who banishes all poverty, pain and fear; who else but you has the tender mother’s heart for all living beings?’

The soft mother’s heart of the Divine Mother however, is filled with immense power and strength. The compassion shown by ordinary human beings has a shadow of weakness. But the Divine Mother’s compassion is filled through and through with infinite strength. When we recall the scenes of the Divine Mother quelling the *Asuras* who tormented the sages, we realize this point clearly. When punishing the wicked, the Divine Mother assumes the formidable forms of *Chandi*, *Chamundi* and *Bhadrakali*. She kills the uncontrollable *Mahishasura*; she cuts *Chanda & Munda* into pieces; she drinks the blood of *Raktabijasura*; she destroys *Shumbha & Nishumbha*; she systematically, and easily, destroyed innumerable such *Asuras*, who delighted in tormenting the good people of this world. You don’t see her straining in her acts; it is natural to her!

Killing *Mahishasura*: *Asuras* have magical powers; they can assume any form they like. Although *Mahishasura* was originally an immensely large buffalo, he assumes various forms on the battlefield. When he attempts to pounce on the Divine Mother in the form of a buffalo, she binds him with a lasso. Immediately, the *Asura* forsakes his buffalo form and escapes the noose, and assumes the terrible form of a lion. By the time she severs the head of the lion, he resurrects in the form of a terrible warrior, armed with swords. The Divine Mother then destroys his swords and renders him unarmed. But he doesn’t lose focus. From the dying body of the warrior, he now emerges as a huge elephant. That elephant starts shouting and teasing the Divine Mother’s vehicle, the lion. By the time *Chandi* cuts off the trunk of

the elephant, the *Asura* reemerges in his original buffalo form and starts bellowing in his demoniac voice. Addressing the *Asura*, the Divine Mother says:

*Garja garja kshanam mudha madhu yaavatpibaamyaham;
Mayaa twayi hatetraiva garjishyantyashu devataaha.*

‘O fool, bellow as much as you wish; keep bellowing for the little while that I drink honey; as soon as I kill you right here, the gods will then bellow in joy!’

Thereafter, the Divine Mother pounces on the *Asura*, stepping on his fallen body, and drives her spear through his throat. The *Asura* then tries to escape from the body of the buffalo. When he was half through with his escape, the Divine Mother cuts off his head, kills him, and thus establishes peace in all the worlds.

Killing Shumbha & Nishumbha: *Shumbha & Nishumbha* were two terrible *Asuras* who stole the god Indra’s portion of *Yajna*, and also usurped his dominion of the three worlds. Completely at a loss, the gods approached the peerless Mother of the Universe for help. The Divine Mother manifested herself, assuming a bewitchingly beautiful form. *Chanda & Munda* were two assistants of the two *Asuras*. They saw this bewitching form and described her beauty in glowing terms to *Shumbha*, instigating him to woo her and marry her, if need be, even against her wish. Overcome with desire, *Shumbha* sends his emissary to the beautiful lady. Learning of the *Asura*’s desire for her hand, Devi explains her resolve regarding marriage in these words:

*Yo maam jayati sangraame yo me darpam vyapohati;
Yo me pratibalo loke sa me bhartaa bhavishyati.*

‘He who defeats me in combat, he who quells my arrogance, he who is my equal in strength, him only shall I wed.’

Listening to these challenging words from a helpless girl, intense anger started bursting through every vein of the *Asura*. He sent the *Asura* leader *Dhumralochana* to drag that foolish girl to his feet. Mother *Ambika* merely uttered the sound ‘hum’ and the *Asura* leader *Dhumralochana* was reduced to ashes. That is all she did, just utter a sound! Shocked by this news, *Shumbha* dispatched his trusted assistants *Chanda & Munda* along with his entire army. When this formidable army led by *Chanda & Munda* approached Mother *Ambika*, she was sitting on her vehicle, the lion, and smiling sweetly at the developments. From her third eye sprang forth a dark-skinned divine form called *Kali*, armed with sword and a lasso. For *Kali*, beheading *Chanda & Munda* was cake walk! Playing with their severed heads, she rent the skies with her victorious shrieks and danced around in joy. The whole thing was so natural to *Kali*, it almost seemed like the death of *Chanda & Munda* was collateral damage in a small girl’s play! She then placed their heads at Mother *Ambika*’s feet and requested Mother *Ambika* to kill *Shumbha & Nishumbha*. When *Shumbha* heard that the best of his warriors had been killed, and that too so effortlessly, without a fight, he himself entered the battlefield. The powers of all the gods, seated on the vehicles of the respective gods, bearing the same weapons as their respective gods, came together and entered into Mother *Ambika*. Dazzled by the brilliance of the Divine Mother, the *Asura* army ran helter-skelter. One among these *Asuras* was an especially terrible fellow called *Raktabija*. He now stood facing the Divine Mother and challenged her to a one-on-one fight. He had a very special power; from every drop of his blood that would touch the ground, another *Asura*, as powerful as himself, would spring to life! So, during the fight, from every drop of his blood that fell on the ground, innumerable *Asuras*, equal to him in power of action, vitality, and physical strength emerged. The entire region got filled with innumerable such terrible *Raktabijas* very soon. Mother *Ambika* then tells *Kali*:

*Macchastrapaatasambhootaan raktabindoonmahAsuraan;
Raktabindoh praticchatwam vaktrena anena veyginaa.*

‘Come on! Lick every drop of this *Asura*’s blood that gets spilled by the blows of my weapon on his body.’

So, wherever a drop of *Raktabija*’s blood would fall from his wounds, *Kali* licked the blood, and also swallow in whole, any *Asuras* that may have sprung to life from the ground. Very soon, deeply wounded by Mother *Ambika*’s various divine weapons, and by excessive loss of blood, that *Asura* fell to the ground lifeless. Thereafter ensued a most terrible battle between the Divine Mother and the *Asura* pair – *Shumbha* & *Nishumbha*. They too used a vast armory of exotic weapons on the Divine Mother. When *Nishumbha* charged towards her with his spear, the Divine Mother tore him apart with her trident. When the trident tore open his heart, from its recesses came forth another terrible *Asura*. Even as he came forth, he shouted at the Divine Mother ‘Stop!’ His voice could have frozen the blood of a tiger, but the Divine Mother merely smiled at him and effortlessly cut his head off with one blow of her sword. The Divine Mother assumes different forms to perform different actions. Now that some really powerful and terrible *Asuras* had to be killed, she brought forth many powerful forms of herself. Addressing the Divine Mother who was fighting the battle by simultaneously manifesting multiple forms such as *Brahmaani*, *Maaheswari*, *Kaumaari*, *Vaishnavi*, *Vaaraahi*, etc, *Shumbha* says:

*Balaavalepadushte twam Durge garvamaavaha;
Anyaasaam balamaashritya yudhyase cha atimaanini.*

‘O *Durga*, drunk with power as you are, don’t be proud of yourself. You are well-known to be extremely independent-minded. Yet, aren’t you ashamed to use **others**’ powers in this fight?’

The Divine Mother replies:

*Ekaivaaham jagatyatra dviteeyaa kaa mamaaparaa;
Pashyaitaa dushta maiyyeva vishantyo madhvibootayaha.*

‘I alone exist in this universe. Who else exists but me! O wicked one, open your eyes and see how each one of these powers enter into me.’

Right in front of his open eyes, all the goddesses entered into the Divine Mother and became one with her. Then she alone remained on the battlefield. A terrible battle ensued between the Divine Mother and the *Asura Shumbha*. Both used exotic weapons, and the fight seemed evenly balanced. Both of them therefore flew up into the sky and resumed their fight. After a keenly fought battle, the Divine Mother caught hold of the *Asura*, whirled him around like a hammer ball, and flung him on the ground. But he was tough. Springing up as soon as he hit the ground, he rushed headlong towards the Divine Mother. She then drove her spear right into the heart of *Shumbha*, the overlord of all *Asuras*. When his lifeless body fell on the ground, the whole earth shook with its weight. The three worlds became free from the torment of the *Asuras* with his death. All the gods, overwhelmed with the grace of the Divine Mother on them, and filled with joy at being freed from the torture of the *Asuras*, sang her praises freely.

Now, when we look at these terrible fights and bloodshed, we might feel – can a mother, filled with love and grace, do such things?¹ But, the Divine Mother’s destruction is but another form of her love

¹ **God as Mother:** The gentle forms of the deity are very easy to accept. It is much more difficult to stomach the idea of the terrifying gods and goddesses. The fierce-looking *Kali*, holding the severed head of a demon in one hand, and a sword in the other, makes us a little uncomfortable. *Durga* is somewhat benign compared to *Kali*, but she too has swords and arrows. Several

and grace. Killed at the hands of the blessed Divine Mother, those *Asuras* attain the highest. But, slaves to our life in the senses that we are, we ask, ‘But, does compassion have to be shown through destruction?’ If you look closely, you will find that death is indeed a great boon of freedom for all living creatures. Aren’t those *Asuras* really blessed to have faced death at the hands of the Divine Mother herself? In the *Devi Mahatmya*, the Divine Mother has been praised in this way:

*Ebhirhatairjugadupaithi sukham tathaitey,
kurvantu naama narakaaya chiraaya paapam;
sangraamamrityumadhigamya divam prayaantu,
matveti noonamhitaan vinihamsi devi.*

“O Divine Mother, I am certain of this! ‘The three worlds will live in peace if these *Asuras* will cease to exist. Even though their crimes against humanity warrant eternal punishment in hell, let them attain heaven by being killed in battle against me!’ This was certainly your line of thinking in engaging in such gory bloodshed. I am certain of this!”

*Drushtwaiva kim na bhavati prakaroti bhasma,
SarvaAsuraanarishu yatprahinoshi shastram;
Lokaanprayaantu ripavopi hi shastrapootaah,
Ittham matirbhavati teshwapi tetisaadhvi.*

‘Couldn’t you have burnt those *Asuras* to ashes merely by a glance of your eye? Certainly you could have! But there was one reason why you fought protracted battles and killed them. Even though those *Asuras* considered themselves as your enemies, you wished that even they should attain to heaven by being purified by your divine weapons. Such was your wish. How noble is your mother-heart that you show compassion even on the most despicable of creatures!’

Therefore, all the killing and destruction unleashed by the Divine Mother are but another form of her divine grace and compassion. When father beats the child, it runs crying to its mother. But when mother herself beats the child, it cries and falls into its mother’s lap again. Similarly, when the Divine Mother destroys someone, all it means is that she took him back into herself! The Sanskrit word for destruction is ‘*samhara*’; and this word actually means ‘withdrawing something back into its source’. What was projected from within herself, is now being drawn back into herself. That is the meaning.

In the Divine Mother, we see two qualities intermingling effortlessly; she has an exquisitely sweet aspect to her personality which brings peace and happiness to the good people of the world; then there is a terrible aspect to her personality that is ruthless on the wicked ones.² The blessed children of the

people question me about this. My reply is: Whom would you prefer to have for a mother? a feeble woman who goes on weeping helplessly all the time, or a fierce, strong, and bold mother, who can go and fight for you and watch over you? Naturally, we would prefer the stronger mother. And to a child, the beauty of the mother lies not in her physical appearance, but in her power to protect. The child has its own concept of beauty regarding its mother. From this point of view, *Kali* has her own beauty since she has the power to offer the **greatest** protection to her children.

- Swami Swahananda

² Which aspect of Holy Mother do you like? Only her love and affection? Remember that she is *Kali* too. If need be, she will tear open your heart! God is God only when he is the Lord of *Srishti*, *Stithi*, and *Pralaya*, and above all, the God who is also none of these. Pleasant and unpleasant, all pairs of opposites always exist side by side in the unreal phenomenon. Why not accept it? Why cling to the pleasant and be afraid of the unpleasant? Why be afraid of death? Life is always followed by death. It is childish not to recognize it. Accept life as it is, with all its dualities.

- Swami Yatiswarananda

Divine mother on earth, the saints and prophets, too exhibit this dual nature within their personalities. ‘*Vajraadapi kathoraani, mridooni kusumaadapi*’ – the heart of the great ones is harder than diamond, and yet softer than flower petals. Efficiency in any work calls for a balance between a systematic, cold-blooded brain and a soft, feeling heart full of sympathy and compassion. The Divine Mother imparts these two qualities to those of her children whom she leads by the hand to life fulfilment – a feeling heart and a rational brain. When *Mahishasura* was killed, Indra and the gods praise the Divine Mother as follows:

*Chitte kripaa samaranishturathaa cha drishtaa,
Twayyaiva devi varade bhuvanatrayerpi.*

‘O *Devi*, giver of all boons, compassion in the heart and ruthlessness on the battlefield – in all the three worlds, we find these two qualities simultaneously only in you.’

Devotees consider it their good fortune to be able to sing the praises of the Divine Mother in the form of the *Sahasranama* or the various hymns. She is highly pleased by listening to these songs and chants. One of her names is ‘*Stotrapriya*’. In the *Lalitha Sahasranama*, the Divine Mother who creates, sustains and withdraws back this entire creation has been praised as *Sri Maata*, *Sri Mahaaraajni*, *Srimat Simhasaneswari*. The Divine Mother, the sole cause of all creation, has been worshipped and praised by men and gods, and even by the Great gods – *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Maheswara*. Children call on their mothers when they are in trouble, or when they need something. The gods were troubled by the *Asuras*; they ran to the Divine mother for help. Men were tormented by the wicked; the Divine Mother got a call for help. *Sri Rama* once worshipped Mother *Durga* in the Kishkinda Forest. He then worshipped her again in Lanka. He was able to defeat Ravana only after that. Bhagawan Sri Krishna worshipped Mother *Durga* in Goloka. Even the Great Lord *Maheswara* had to worship the Divine Mother before defeating the dreaded *Asura Tripura*. Indra worshipped her to escape from the curse laid upon him by the sage Durvasa. Yudhishtira worshipped her for success during their incognito period. Sri Krishna advised Arjuna to worship Mother *Durga* before the Kurukshetra war.

The Divine Mother is an ocean of compassion. She constantly showers her grace on her children. She constantly pardons her children’s mistakes. When children err, father metes out the logical, commensurate punishments. But, suffering punishments is not as easy as committing the mistakes! But father doesn’t care for those details. Mistakes were committed; punishments will be given; end of story. The mother is nearby, watching all this. She can’t tolerate the suffering that her kids experience. She showers her love on them and reduces the pain of their suffering. A thinker once said, ‘The Divine Mother resides as Mother *Lakshmi* in the heart of Lord *Vishnu* with the express intent of protecting her children; if, for some reason, *Vishnu* gets angry with any of his children, Mother *Lakshmi* soothes his heart. As Mother *Shive*, she shares half the body with her Lord *Shiva*. When *Shiva* raises his right hand to strike down an erring child, Mother, as the motherly left hand, stops his hand. As Mother *Saraswati*, she resides on the tongue of Lord *Brahma*. Out of anger, if *Brahma* curses one of his children, she ensures that the words roll down as a boon, and not as a curse.

The Divine Mother’s glory is unending; her divine activities are eternal. How can we, with our limited brains and myopic minds, understand her in truth? By her own grace can we realize who she really is! Ramprasad sang:

*Who is there that can understand what Mother Kali is?
Even the six darshanas are powerless to reveal her.*

The impersonal Supreme Brahman manifests as the Divine Mother for the sake of the spiritual aspirant. The Divine Mother herself is *Durga*, *Mahasaraswati*, *Mahalakshmi*, *Mahakali*. Sri Ramakrishna says, “He who is Brahman is again Mother *Kali*; the impersonal Brahman is itself the Primal Power

(*Adyashakti*), who creates, preserves and withdraws this creation. There is no difference between Brahman and *Shakti*; just as fire, and its power of burning are non-different. You can't separate fire from its power of burning."

Vedas and *Puranas* have exhausted themselves in describing the Divine Mother's glory. In various ways, they depict the eagerness of the Divine Mother in lifting up man from this worldly morass onto her divine lap. *Markandeya Purana* contains the *Devi Mahatmya* (also known as *Durga Saptashati*). It depicts the glory of the Divine Mother. It revolves around an interesting story. A King named Suratha and a trader named Samadhi meet. Both of them have fallen into great misfortune. A sage named Sumedha expounds to them the unparalleled glory of the Divine Mother and makes them recipients of her divine grace. Enemies had conquered King Suratha's kingdom. He fled to the forest. There he starts thinking – will his ministers administer his kingdom justly in his absence? Will his favorite elephant be taken care of properly? Will wicked people covet and waste all the money that he had so carefully saved? He has had to flee from his kingdom to save his life. There is no chance of his returning and becoming king ever again. Even though he knew this very well, his mind used to think along the above lines. This is indeed the irony of human existence. While he was thinking thus, he saw a dejected trader come along the same path. He asked him the reason for his dejection. The trader said, "My name is Samadhi. I was very rich. But lust for money made my wife and children to drive me away from my own home. Now I am a pauper. But, my mind is still bothered about the well-being of my family members. None of them love me. Yet, I am unable to understand why I can't remove my mind from them." Unable to get out of their dilemma, they approach a renowned sage who too dwelt in the same forest. His name was Sumedha. Approaching him, both the king and the trader explained to him the peculiar state of their minds. The sage then consoled them saying:

*Tannatra vismayah karyo, yoganidraa jagatpateh;
Mahaamaayaa hareshchaishaa, tayaa sammohyate jagat.*

'Don't be surprised by this dilemma you face. This is the *Yoga Maya* of the Lord of the Universe *Sri Hari*. The entire universe is thus in delusion because of her.'

*Jnaaninamapi chetaamsi Devi bhagavateehi saa;
Baladakrishya mohaaya mahaamaayaa prayachhati.*

'She is *Maha-maya*, *Maha-Devi*, *Bhagavati*. She forcefully confounds and entraps even the minds of the great *Jnanis*,' But there is a wonderful thing about her.

Saishaa prasannaa varadaa nrinaam bhavati muktaye.

'If she is pleased, if one can gain her confidence, she grants both worldly prosperity and spiritual enlightenment.'

Having thus heard about the unparalleled glory of the Divine Mother, and have learnt the principles of the Primal Power behind this entire universe, both Suratha and Samadhi took the sage's blessings and performed spiritual practices. In due course, they realized the Divine Mother. Pleased with them, the Divine Mother restored to both of them their lost possessions and granted them lasting peace.

Problems in life, problems of the body and mind, are not confined only to Suratha and Samadhi. We too face these unfortunate and inexplicable problems and situations on a daily basis. We try various means to free ourselves from all those inimical situations. If we are not educated, that is one type of problem. If we lose hard-earned money, that is another type of problem. If we get sick that is yet another

type of problem. We see uneducated people keeping company of the educated ones with a view to getting educated. People who want to make money try to get close to the rich and the famous. Similarly, everyone tries to keep company with those from whom they can get what they want. But, one fine day, we shall realize that mere mortals can never give us enough to satisfy our wants. It is then that we start longing for the company of the Divine Mother. She is capable of giving whatever we wish for. Instead of fawning on people here and there, which is generally in vain, apart from being demeaning to us, it is much better to learn the techniques of pleasing the Divine Mother. She is the origin of all prosperity. If she is pleased with us, she will grant us whatever we want in this world. Therefore she has been praised in this fashion:

*Te sammataa janapadeshu dhanaani teshaaam,
Teshaaam yashaamsi na cha seedati dharmavargaha;
Dhanyaasta eva nibritaatamajabharityadhaaraah,
Yeshaaam saddabhyudaya bhavati prasanna.*

‘You are the only giver of worldly prosperity. If you are pleased on someone, that person is respected and honored in every land. They get wealth, success, and fame. They will face no obstacles in achieving their life-goals. It is only those who have obtained your grace that live happily in this world with wife, kids and servants.’

It should come as no surprise if a person who has obtained the grace of the loving Divine Mother, achieves whatever he wishes for in life. Acharya Shankara, in praising the Divine Mother, says:

*Shwapaako jalpaako bhavati madhupaakopamaagiraa,
Niraatanko rankoviharati chiram kotikanyakaihi;
Tavaaparne karne vishati manuarne phalamidam,
Janah ko jaaneete Janani japaneeyam japavidhau.*

‘O Divine Mother, if you but listen even once that a person has uttered your name, even though he be an uncouth, uncivilized, raw-meat-eater, words of high learning will start pouring out of his mouth and he becomes transformed into a silver-tongued scholar; the poorest wretch will get transformed into a billionaire and enjoy the greatest luxuries of life; such being the case, can anyone imagine what lies in store for a person who sincerely and systematically does the *Nama-Japa* of your divine name?’

If we have to progress in our spiritual life, we need to adopt a specific relationship with God; then, we need to perform *Japa*, *dhyana* and prayer in accordance with that mood. The experts in spiritual life say that success in spiritual practice comes fastest to those who look upon God as Mother.

We need to study the unique way by which Sri Ramakrishna obtained the grace of the Divine Mother. He says, “Looking upon God as Mother is the last stage of spiritual practice.” He reveals some amazing and invaluable secrets of this mother-son relationship between God and the devotee. If we study the period of his life when he performed his spiritual practices, we get many more such secrets. Offering flowers at the feet of the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna prays:

‘O Mother, here is thy ignorance and here is thy knowledge; take them both and give me only pure love for thee. Here is thy holiness and here is thy unholiness; take them both and give me only pure love for thee. Here is thy virtue and here is thy vice; here is thy good and here is thy evil; take them all and give me only pure love for thee. Here is thy dharma and here is thy adharma; take them both and give me only pure love for thee.’

May the ever-loving Divine Mother grant pure love to all of us too.

Matri-Raksha-Kavacha
(Divine Mother's protective armour)

Om namah chandikayai

Om. Salutations to Mother *Chandika*.

Markandeyauvacha:

Om. Yadguhyam paramam loke sarvarakshaakaram nrunaam

Yanna kasyachid aakhyatam tanme broohi pitaamaha

Markandeya asked: O revered Elder, please instruct me in that teaching which has been guarded with utmost secrecy in the world, which can protect man from every sort of trouble, and which hasn't been uttered till date.

Brahmovacha:

Asti guhyatamam vipra sarvabhootopakaarakam

Devyaaastu kavacham punyam tacchrunushva mahaamune

Prathamam shailaputreeti dvitiam brahmachaarini

Truteeyam chandraganteti kushmaandaa iti chaturtakam

Panchamam skandamaateti shashtam kaatyaayaneeti cha

Saptamam kaalaraatrischa mahagaureeti chaashtamam

Navamam siddhidhaatri cha navadurgaah prakeertitaah

Uktaanyetaani namaani brahmanaiva mahaatmanaa

Brahma said: O revered sage, the best among Brahmins, there is indeed a teaching that is most beneficial to all men everywhere, and it has been a closely guarded secret till now. That is the *Devi Kavacha*. Listen to it. The first is *Shailaputri*. The second is *Brahmachaarini*. The third is *Chandraghanta*. The fourth is *Kushmaanda*. The fifth is *Skandamaata*. The sixth is *Kaatyaayani*. The seventh is *Kaalaraatri*. The eighth is *Mahagauri*. The ninth is *Siddhidhaatri*. These are the nine famous *Durgas*. The great Lord Brahma himself uttered these hallowed names.

Agninaa dahyamaanastu shatrumadhye gato rane

Vishame durgame chaiva bhayaartaah sharanam gataah

Na teshaam jayate kinchid ashubham ranasankate

Naapadam tasya pashyaami shokaduhkabhayam na hi

Yaistu bhaktyaa smrutaa nityam tesham vruddhih prajaayate

Ye tvaam smaranti deveshi rakshasi taan na samshayah

Those getting burned in fire, those caught in a terrible battle where the odds are completely against them, those lost in the densest forest – all such people are utterly terrified by their situation. But if they take refuge in Mother *Durga*, even in those horrible situations, nothing untoward will happen to them. Neither will any calamity befall them, nor will they feel any grief or pain. I see this clearly. Those who will remember her with devotion will enjoy enormous prosperity. O Mother of all gods, there is no doubt that you will protect everyone who but remembers you, under whatever condition.

Preta samstha tu chaamunda vaaraahi mahishaasana

*Aindree gaja samaarudaa vaishnavi garudaasanaa
Maaheshwari vrushaaroodaa kaumaari shikhivaahana
Lakshmeeh padmaasanaa devi padmahasthaa haripriyaa
Shvetaroopadharaa devi ishwari vrushavaahanaa
Braahmi hamsa samaarudaa sarvaabharana bhooshithaah
Ityetaa maatarah sarvaah sarvayogasamanvitaa
Nanaabharanashobhaadyaa nanaratnopashobhitaah
Drushyante rathamaarudaa devyah krodhasamaakulaah*

A corpse is the seat of Mother *Chaamundi*. *Vaaraahi* is seated on a buffalo. *Aindree* is seated on an elephant. *Vaishnavi* has an eagle for her seat. *Maaheshwari* is seated in a bull. *Kaumaari* has a peacock for her vehicle. *Lakshmi*, the beloved of *Sri Hari*, holds a lotus in her hand and is seated on a lotus. *Ishwari*, with her silver ornaments, has a bull for her vehicle. *Braahmi*, the power of *Brahma*, bedecked in the best of jewellery, is seated on a swan. All these Divine Mothers, bedecked in the choicest jewellery, possessed of all kinds of divine powers (Yogas), are seen mounted on their respective chariots, seething with anger.

*Shankham chakram gadhaam shaktim halam cha musalaayudham
Khetakam tomaram chaiva parashum paashameva cha
Kunthaayudham trishoolam cha shaarngamaayudhamutthamam
Daityaanaam dehanaashaaya bhaktaanaam abhayaaya cha
Dhaarayanti aayudaaneetham devaanaam cha hitaaya vai
Namasthe tu mahaaraudre mahaaghoraparaakrame
Mahaabale mahotsahe mahaabhayavinaashini
Traahi maam devi dushprekhsye shatroonam bhayavardhini*

My salutations to the Divine Mother, who dispels the greatest fears of her devotees, who has a form that instils terror in the hearts of the *Asuras*, who is enthusiasm incarnate, who is most powerful, who kills the *Asuras* in order to bestow fearlessness and protection on her devotees, and for which purpose, has the following incredibly powerful weapons in her armoury – *Shankha*, *Chakra*, *Gadha*, *Shaktyayudha*, *halayudha*, *musalayudha*, *khetaka*, *tomara*, *parashu*, *paasu*, *kuntaayudha*, *trishoola*, and the awesome *shaarngamayudha*. O Divine Mother! It is impossible to see you properly due to your brilliance; your form strikes terror in the hearts of the enemies; please protect me.

*Praachyaam rakshatu maamaidree aagneyaamagnidevataa
Dakshinevathu vaaraahi nairuthyaam khadgadhaarini
Prateechaam vaarunee rakshet vaayavyaam mrugavaahini
Udeechaam paathu kauberee eeshaanyaam shooldadhaarini
Oordhvam brahmaani me raksheth adhasthaat vaishnavee tathaa
Evam dasa disho rakshet chamunda shava vaahanaa*

May *Aindree* protect me from the East; may *Vaaruni* protect me from the West; may *Kauberee* protect me from the North; may *Vaaraahi* protect me from the South; may *Shooldadharini* protect me from the North-East; may *Mrugavaahini* protect me from the North-West; may *Agnidevataa* protect me from the South-East; may *Khadgadhaarini* protect me from the South-West; may *Brahmaani* protect me from the top; and may *Vaishnavee* protect me from the bottom. In this manner, may Mother *Chamundi*, seated on a corpse, protect me from all the ten directions.

*Jaya me cha agrathah paatu vijaya paatu prushtathah
Ajitaa vaamapaarshve tu dakshine cha aparaajitaa*

May *Jaya* protect me from the front. May *Vijaya* protect me from behind. May *Ajitaa* protect me from the left side, and *Aparaajita* protect me from the right side.

*Shikhaam udyotini me rakshet umaa moordhni vyavasthita
Maalaadhari lalaate cha bhruvau rakshet yashasvini
Trinetraa cha bhruvormadhye yamaghantaa cha naasike
Shankhinee chakshushor madhye shrotrayoh dvaaravaasini
Kapolau kaalika rakshet karnamoole tu shaankaree
Naasikaayaam sugandhaa cha uttaroshte cha chaarchikaa*

May *Udyotini* Devi protect my tuft. May *Uma* protect me by residing on my head. May *Maladhari* protect me by residing on my forehead. May *Yashasvini* protect my eyebrows. May *Trineta* protect me by residing between my brows; May *Yamaghanta* protect me by residing in my nose; May *Shankhini* protect me by residing in between my eyes; May *Dvaaravasini* protect me by residing in my ears. May *Kalika* Devi protect both my cheeks. May *Shaankari* protect the base of my ears. May *Sugandha* protect my nose. May *Chaarchika* Devi protect my upper lips.

*Adhare chaamrutakalaa jihvaayaam cha saraswathi
Dantaan rakshtu kaumaaree kantadeshe tu chandikaa
Ghantikaam chitraghantaa cha mahaamaayaa cha taaluke
Kaamaakshee chibukam rakshet vaacham me sarvamangalaa
Greevaayaam bhadraakaalee cha prushtavamshe dhanurdharee
Neelagreevaa bahih kante nalikaam nalakoobaree*

May *Amrutakalaa* protect me by residing on my lower lips. May *Saraswati* protect me by residing on my tongue. May *Kaumaari* protect me by residing in my teeth. May *Chandikaa* protect me by residing in my throat. May *Chitraghanta* protect me by residing in the back of my throat. May *Mahamaya* protect my palate. May *Kamakshi* protect my jaws. May my organ of speech be protected by *Sarvamangala*. May *Bhadrakali* protect me by residing in my neck. May *Dhanurdhari* protect my back. May *Neelagreeva* protect the outer throat. And May *Nalakoobaree* protect my windpipe.

*Skandhayoh khadginee rakshet bahoo me vajradhaarini
Hasthayordandinee rakshet ambikaa chaangulishthaa
Nakhaamshooleshwari rakshet kukshau rakshet kuleshwari*

May *Khadgini*, *Vajradharini*, *Dandini*, *Ambika*, *Shooleshwari* and *Kuleshwari*, respectively protect my shoulders, forearms, hands, fingers, fingernails and stomach.

*Stanau rakshen mahadevi manah shokavinashini
Hrudaye lalithadevi udare shooladharini
Naabhau cha kamini rakset guhyam guhyeshwari tatha
Putana kamika medram gude mahishavaahini*

May my breasts be protect by *Mahadevi*. May my mind be protected by *Shokavinasini*. May *Lalitadevi* reside in my heart and protect me, just as *Shooladharini* in my stomach. May *Kamini* protect my navel, and *Guhyeshwari* protect my private parts. May *Kamika*, the great purifier, protect my organ of reproduction, while *Mahishavahini* protects my organ of evacuation.

*Katyaam bhagavati rakshet jaanunee vindhyavaasini
Janghe mahabalaa rakshet sarvakamapradayini
Gulphayor naarasimhi cha paadaprushte tu taijasi
Paadangulishu sri rakshet padadasthalavaasini
Nakhaam damshtraakaraali cha kessaam chaivordhwakeshini
Romakupeshu kaumari tvacham vaagishwari tatha*

*Raktamajjaavaasaamamsaam nyasthimedhaamsi paarvati
Antraani kaalaratrishcha piththam cha mukuteshwari*

May *Bhagavati* protect my hips, while *Vindhyavasini* protects my knees. May *Mahabalaa*, who is capable of fulfilling all our desires, protect my calf muscles. May *Narasimhi* protect my ankles and *Taijasi* my heels. May *Sri*, who resides in the sole of my feet, protect my toes, just as *Damshtraakaraali* protects my toe-nails. May *Urdhvakeshini* protect the hair on my head. May *Maumari* protect my sweat-pores. And *Vageeshwari* protect my skin. May *Parvati* protect my blood, marrow, subcutaneous fat, muscles, bones and lymph. May *Kalaratri* protect my nerves and *Mukuteshwari* protect my bile.

*Padmaavati padmakoshe kaphe choodamanisthathaa
Jvaalamukhi nakhajvaalaam abhedyaa sarvasandhishu
Shukram brahmaani me rakshet chaayaam chatreshwari thathaa*

May *Padmavati* protect my lungs, and *Choodamani* protect my *Kapha* (phlegmatic) elements. May *Jvaalamukhi* protect the sheen of my nails. May *Abhedya* protect all my joints. May *Brahmaani* protect my semen, while *Chatreshwari* protects my shadow.

*Ahamkaaram mano buddhim rakshem me dharmachaarini
Praanaapaanau tatha vyaanam samaanodaanameva cha
Vajrahashta cha me rakshet praanakalpancha shobhanaa
Rase rupe cha gandhe cha shabde sparshe cha yogini
Sattvam rajastamaschaiva rakshennaaraayani sadaa
Aayoo rakshatu vaaraahi dharmam rakshatu vaishnavi
Yashah keerthim cha lakshminim cha dhanam vidyaam cha chakrini
Gotramindrani me rakshet pashoonme raksha chandike
Putraan rakshet mahaalakshmi bhaaryaam rakshtu bhairavi
Panthaanam supathaa rakshet maargam kshemakari tathaa
Raaajadware mahaalakshmi vijaya sarvathasthithaa*

May *Dharmacharini* protect my Ego-Mind-Intellect (the *Antahkarana* or inner organ). May my *prana*, *apana*, *vyana*, *samana* and *udana* life-forces be protected by *Shobhanaa*. May *Yogini* protect my organs of sense (taste, sight, smell, sound, and touch). May *Narayani* always protect my *Gunas* (*Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*). May *Vaaraahi* protect my longevity, and *Vaishnavi* my *Dharma*. May *Chakrini* protect my fame, glory, prosperity & grace, wealth, and education. May *Indraani* protect my lineage, and *Chandike* protect my livestock. May *Mahaalakshmi* protect my children, while *Bhairavi* protects my wife. May *Supatha* protect my path, while *Kshemakari* remove all obstacles in my journey. May the ever-victorious *Mahaalakshmi* protect the main door of my house from all directions.

*Rakshaahinam tu yat sthaanam varjitam kavachena tu
Tatsarvam raksha me devi jayanti paapanaashini*

O Mother *Jayanti*, destroyer of all sins! Protect any place within me that may have been missed to be protected by this Divine *Kavacha* (protective cover).

*Paadamekam na gachchet tu yadichchet shubhamaatmanaha
Kavachenaavruto nityam yatra yatraiva gachhati
Tatra tatraartha laabhascha vijayah saarvakaamikah
Yam yam chintayate kaamam tam tam praapnoti nischitam
Paramaishvaryamatulam praapsyate bhootale pumaan
Nirbhayo jaayate martyah sangraameshvapaarajitah
Trailokye tu bhavet pujyah kavachenaavrutah pumaan*

If one desires one's own wellbeing, one should not take a single step without this Divine protective cover. Wherever he goes, he ought to cover himself with this Divine *Kavacha*. Covered in this Divine *Kavacha*, wherever he goes, he shall get success, he shall see profit, in every endeavour. Whatever he desires in his mind, invariably he shall get them all fulfilled. Such a person will gain the greatest and the best that this world has to offer. He will become fearless, never having to face defeat in any battle. He that is covered by the Divine *Kavacha* will be worshipped in all the three worlds.

*Idam tu devyaah kavacham devaanaam api durlabham
Yah pateth prayato nityam trisandhyam shraddhayaanvitaah
Daivikalaa bhavet tasya trailokyeshu apaaraajitah
Jived varshashatam saagram apamrutyuvivarjitah
Nashyanti vyaadhayah sarve loothavispotakadayah
Sthaavaram jangamam sarvam kritrimam chaiva yadvisham
Abhichaarani sarvaani mantrayantraani bhootale
Bhooshaaraah kechaaah chaiva kulajaaschopadeshikaah
Sahaajaah kulajaah maalaah shaakinee daakinee tathaa
Antarikshacharaah ghoraah daakinyascha mahabalaah
Grahabhootapishaascha yakshagandharva raakshasaaha
Brahmarakshasa vetaalaah kooshmaandaa bhairavaadayaha
Nashyanti darshanaat tasya kavache hrudi samsthitah*

Even the gods find it difficult to access this Devi *Kavacha*. He that chants this Devi *Kavacha* with devotion and with a concentrated mind, three times a day, obtains all the divine arts (*kalas*); he remains undefeated in all the three worlds; escaping untimely death, he lives for a hundred years; he remains free from dangerous contagious diseases such as smallpox, etc; he is protected from poisons made from trees and plants, poisons from snakes and scorpions, from all voodoo and black-magic; he is protected from all predatory animals, birds and aquatic creatures; he is protected from all genies and goblins that are controlled by *mantras* and from demigods that have accompanied him from birth; he is protected from powerful *Shakinis* and *Dakinis*; he is protected from ghosts, *yakshas*, *gandharvas*, demons, *Brahmarakshasa*, *Vetaalas*, *Kooshmaandas*, *bhairavas* and similar creatures that reside in dark places. All the negative influences from all these agencies are instantly destroyed when faced with a person who wears the Devi *Kavacha*.

*Maanonnatir bhaved raajnaah tejo vruddhih karam param
Yashasaa vardhate so au api keertimandita bhootale
Japet saptashatim chandeem krutvaa tu kavacham puraa
Yaavadbhoomandalam dhatthe sashailavanakaananam
Taavatthishthati medhinyaam santathih putrapautrikee
Dehaante paramam sthaanam yatsurairapi durlabham
Praapnoti purusho nityam mahaamaayaaprasadatah
Labhate param sthaanam shivena saha modate.*

A person who wears this Devi *Kavacha* will get recognised by the King; the Devi *Kavacha* amplifies all the good that a person has, and brings great fame and fortune in this world for the wearer. One should first of all wear the Devi *Kavacha* and then chant the *Durga Saptashati*. For as long as this world, with its mountains, forests and tress, survives, for so long will such a person's lineage thrive. After death, he will get the highest status, as a gift from the Divine Mother. Obtaining a divine form, he will sport with the Lord *Shiva*.

Iti vaaraahapuraane hariharabrahmavirachitam devyaah kavacham sampoornam.

Thus ends the Devi *Kavacha*, which was revealed to the Great gods *Hari-Hara-Brahma*, and which is now incorporated in the *Varaha Purana*.

Durga, Durga, Durga

One of Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples, Swami Shivananda used to say, "Before starting on a journey, if you take the name '*Durga, Durga, Durga*' with a sincere heart, Mother *Durga*'s better half, the great Lord *Shiva* himself clears up all obstacles on your path with his trident." These words bring great joy when contemplated upon! Based on these words of Swami Shivananda, today, we have a tradition in our Ramakrishna movement. Before embarking on a journey, be it themselves or seeing off somebody, the monks, Brahmacharins and devotees of the Ramakrishna Movement chant:

Jai Sri Guru Maharaj ji ki jai
Jai Sri Maha Mayi ji ki jai
Jai Swamiji Maharaj ji ki jai

And end it with Jai Sri Durga Mayi ki jai. They then utter the name of *Durga* thrice – Durga, Durga, Durga.

Long distance or a jaunt to the next colony – a journey is a journey, fraught with all kinds of dangers. '*Prayaanam praanasankatam*' is an old Sanskrit phrase. It means 'a journey is a headache'. The wretched condition of our roads, combined with the irresponsibility and idiocy of our drivers makes any journey a nightmare! But, when we have the words of saints and sages assuring us that taking the blessed name of Mother *Durga*, the source of all power and fearlessness, protects us from all dangers, what fear can we have!

Translated from the Kannada booklet 'Abhayadaate Durga-maate' by Revered Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj