

## Parvati and Shiva

Parvati the mother goddess and Shiva the destroyer and are consorts, the duality of life's bounty and life's loss. Parvati graciously offers us many fruitful opportunities, and we take those opportunities or not. If we do not take the opportunity that she offers in the never-to-be-repeated situation that we find ourselves, then that opportunity is gone, that fruit never will be, and that is all. If we do accept what is offered, then we win something that will be our own for a while. If we choose wisely, then we win something valuable. Perhaps it is something especially sweet, or perhaps it is something that promises even more bountiful opportunities. Then Shiva takes it away, and that is all.

Life gives us only three kinds of decisions, and we make these over and over again: how to worship Parvati, which of her gifts to accept, and how to worship Shiva. Our ordinary concern in life is with which of Parvati's gifts to accept. She is so endlessly bountiful that, however much we might like to honor her in this way, we cannot accept all her gifts. This is a great challenge to our wisdom because these choices give our life its form and its feeling.

How to worship Parvati and Shiva is challenging for a very different reason. We have so few choices. The challenge is that our hubris often tempts us to defy them — to worship them improperly. The true way to worship Parvati is with welcoming, with gratitude and with trust. We must welcome her gifts; if we refuse them it is very insulting to her. When she gives us opportunities, and we seize those opportunities to win her gifts, then we must be grateful for the opportunities and for the gifts. We must trust that she will continue to offer us fruitful gifts.

Why must we welcome her gifts, why must we be grateful, and why must we trust her bounty? If we spurn her gifts we insult her because we have impoverished our lives. If we are not grateful and

trusting, then we disrespect her, and in turn make our lives miserable. Our gratitude is our gratification in life. If we do not choose gratitude, then we choose to feel some other way that is much less pleasant. If we do not trust her, then we live always in fear that she will cease to sustain us.

Sometimes we spurn her gifts because we cannot bear the thought of having this sweet gift for only a while, and not forever. This is obviously foolish, because if we do not accept her gifts then we never know any sweetness. The opportunity is gone, and that is all.

Some people neglect Parvati entirely. They trust in her bounty, but they imagine that it is their right. Though this is disrespectful, Parvati still grants them fruitful opportunities, and if they choose wisely they also win sweetness for a while. What they lose by neglecting Parvati is the gratification of the true appreciation of her bounty. What they lose is gratitude.

Sometimes instead of gratefully accepting what Parvati gives us, we demand that she give us some gift that we especially covet. Commanding her in this way is very disrespectful, because it is her wisdom to choose what she offers us. We must apologize for being so rude, and if she gives us what we wanted in spite of our rudeness, then we should be especially grateful. If Parvati does not see fit to give us what we have demanded, then she rewards us with resentment.

Sometimes people worship Parvati with pleading. Each day they plead that she offer them bountiful opportunities that they may weave into their lives. They feel that they must plead, because if they did not then she might offer them nothing of value. This pleading is even more insulting to her than rude commands because it is her very nature to be bountiful. There is a fool who pleads to Parvati every night that she make the sun come up again so that there will be warmth and so that the plants will grow to give him food. He is so sure that he must plead every night; in his arrogance he imagines that his need makes the sun rise. If you plead to Parvati instead of trusting in her bounty, then your only

reward will be fear.

It is Shiva's choice what to take and when to take it. The only choice that he gives us is how to worship him. In the end even he is deprived of choice---because he has taken everything else, the only thing that remains to be taken is our life. Worshiping Shiva properly is the greatest challenge to our wisdom because we cling to our lives and to all of the gifts that Parvati has granted us. But these gifts are ours for only a while, and then Shiva takes them away. Our only choice is in how we respond to this taking away, in how we worship Shiva.

Shiva demands respect. How do we respect Shiva? When he takes something from us, we must acknowledge that it is his to take, and must we give it to him as graciously as Parvati gave it to us. If we respect Shiva, then he rewards us with wistfulness and peace. Yet because we cling to life we are strongly tempted to defy Shiva.

Some defy Shiva by neglecting him. This is a much more willful neglect than the neglect of Parvati, because we all know that everything will be taken from us in the end. We must force our eyes away from his terrible beauty, and we must constantly chant "I have lost nothing, my powers are as great as ever, these things will be mine forever." This form of disrespect is perhaps the most damaging of all. If we refuse his taking-away, then our lives become clogged with things that we no longer need, and we are weighed down. If we cannot bear to see his taking then we cannot see anything clearly because our eyes must constantly swerve away. As well as causing us to constantly stumble over gaping voids of blankness that we could not bear to see, it also deprives us of the sweetness of wistfulness. We must look away from the things that we have lost, so those things fall into blankness, and might as well never have been ours at all. As well as losing wistfulness and gaining blankness, these people know no peace either, because their pretense does not fool even themselves, let alone

Shiva.

Some may at first imagine that they can command Shiva to pass them by. Shiva is not gracious like Parvati, so he rarely satisfies these rude demands. When their desire is frustrated, and they feel the sweetness slipping away, they may pout and petulantly repeat their demand. This also fails, so they quickly pass to resentment. Now they shake their fists and roar with rage, and vow that they will not forget this injustice. And they do not forget. Every day they worship Shiva falsely by recalling the injustice; every day he rewards them with anger and resentment.

Some also worship Shiva with pleading. They hope that if they win Shiva's ear by praising his power, and then tell him of how greatly they need life's sweetness, and how sad loss makes them, then he will cut them a break. Shiva is immune to their flattery because he knows his own power. Their pathetic whining has no effect on Shiva because he is neither kind nor cruel; he only takes away. Shiva rewards these people with terror, crushing loss and helplessness. Their flattery of Shiva only magnifies his power and capriciousness in their eyes, so they terrify themselves. Their exaggeration of their desperate need for life and its rewards only makes their loss more crushing. When they finally know this crushing loss they suspect the futility of their pleading, and this fills them with helplessness.

So we see that a wise person worships Parvati by welcoming her gifts, choosing wisely, and trusting in her continued bountifulness. If we do this she rewards us with sweetness and gratitude. A wise person worships Shiva with respect. When he takes something from us, we must acknowledge that it is his to take, and must we give it to him as graciously as Parvati give it to us. If we respect Shiva, then he rewards us with wistfulness and peace. If in our hubris we defy Parvati and Shiva with neglect, mistrust, demands or pleading, then what we gain is meaninglessness, fear, crushing loss, helplessness, anger, and resentment.

In 2012 the author Robert A. MacLachlan placed this work (written in 2009) in the public domain.