

Hindu Deity Handout – Durga

Image of Durga:



Background:

- Who is Durga?:
 - Also known as Shakti or Devi is the protective mother of the universe
 - Depicted riding a lion or tiger in which she rides to battles the forces of evil
 - Has multiple incarnations, some being Kali, Bhagvati, Bhavani, Ambika, Lalita, Gauri, Kandalini, Java, Meenakshi and Kamakshi, and more
 - Is a multi-limbed and eyed deity, depicted with having anywhere from eight to 18 arms (usually shown with 10 arms)
- Origin Story:
 - Created by Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva as a female ten arm Goddess to combat the evil demon Mahishasura
 - Multiple Hindu gods contributed to making her physical form in terms of the parts of her body, all powerful
 - Born as Goddess Durga or “Mahamaya,” the Great Mother of the Universe, who ensures creation, preservation, and destruction of evil forces in the universe
 - Gods gifted Durga individual blessings and weapons where she killed the demon, brought peace to Heaven and Earth
 - Durga in Sanskrit means a fort, or a secure and protected place. Another name for Durga is Durgatinashini which means “the one who eliminates suffering”
 - Her name asserts her role as the one who protects her devotees and removes evil from the world
- Why do people pray to her?:

- To obtain spiritual knowledge, peace, and prosperity, and to fight evil in the world

Distinctive Characteristics:

When it comes to distinct characteristics Durga possesses, they mainly relate to the weapons and other items she holds in her hands. The symbolism for the most important ones is as follows:

- **Conch Shell** - symbolizes the *Pranava* or the mystic word *Om* and it indicates her holding on to God in the form of sound.
- **Bow and Arrow** – symbolizes energy whereby holding the bow and arrows in one hand, it shows Durga's control over both potential and kinetic energy.
- **Thunderbolt** - symbolizes firmness in one's convictions, serves as a reminder to Hindus to attack a challenge without losing confidence like a lightning bolt that destroys what it strikes.
- **Lotus** - represents the certainty of success but not finality hence why it isn't fully bloomed. In Sanskrit, it is called *Pankaj*, which means "born of mud" and acts as a reminder for the faithful to stay true to their spiritual quest in a world filled with mud of lust and greed.
- **Discus** - spins around Durga's index finger and it signifies that the entire world is subservient to the will of Durga and is at her command. Uses this weapon to destroy evil and produce an environment conducive to the growth of righteousness.
- **Trident (Trishul)** - symbolizes three qualities: *Satwa* (inactivity), *Rajas* (activity), and *Tamas* (nonactivity). Deva (deities) uses these to alleviate physical, mental, and spiritual suffering.
- **Sword** - that Durga holds in one of her hands symbolizes knowledge, which has the sharpness of a sword. Knowledge free from all doubts is symbolized by the shine of the sword.
- **Mace** – the symbol of Hanuman, symbolizes devotion and surrender. Signifies that whatever we do in life, we must do with love and devotion, accepting the outcome as the Almighty's will.

Ritual:

- Durga Puja is a ten-day long festival that celebrates Durga's victory over against the demon Mahishasura as well as celebrates her motherly power being responsible for all of life and creation.
- There are nine rituals that make it special: Bodhon, Nabapatrika Snan, Anjali, **Kumari Puja** (focusing on this one ritual), Sandhi Puja, Dhunuchi Naach, Sindur Khela, Bisarjan, and Bijoya
- Kumari Puja:
 - Occurs on the eighth day of Durga Puja
 - Young girls, before they fully mature, are believed to be manifestations of the goddess Durga.
 - The chosen girl bathes within holy Ganga water, dressed up in either red or yellow sari, and given jewelry.
 - Rituals and offerings made to the Kamari (young unmarried girl) are also made to the goddess.