

## **Cultivating Shakti Telecourse**

### **Week 1: Contemplations & Homework for Deepening Your Experience**

This document contains:

1. Daily Meditation Instructions
2. Open-eyed Practices
3. Instructions for a Brief Evening Navaratri Practice
4. Contemplations for Journaling and/or Partner Work

Since this week is Navaratri, we'll focus our meditation on Shakti as Goddess Durga. Durga is a form of Ishwari. If you remember our discussion from last night, this means that she exists at the highest level of deity form that it is possible to contact. She is non-dual, meaning that she is not confined to one form, and her experience is that all that exists is a part of her body. We meditate on her with the mantra, which is considered to be the sound form of Durga, meaning that it carries her full Shakti. As you repeat it with the breath, feel that you take it in as a flow of energy into the heart and spreading through your body.

In this practice document, we've included some visual meditations on her form. If you choose to practice with one of these, please remember that you don't have to do an exact visualization of her. Instead, use the description or the picture to get a felt sense of Durga's presence and cultivate the feeling of her presence.

There are a couple of pictures of Durga on the Course Home Page for your enjoyment and as meditation aids.

Please meditate for at least 15 minutes each day. You can meditate at any time of day or before bed. And during the Navaratri celebrations, I encourage you to set aside 15 or 20 minutes in the evening to do mantra japa in her honor. Some of you may have your personal Navaratri protocol, in which case do your own practice.

### **Core Daily Meditation Practice**

Begin by settling into a comfortable upright posture, letting the breath ground you through the sitz bones, and the exhalation help you lengthen your spine up through the crown.

Spend a moment or two scanning the body, noticing any tensions, and softening them with the thought "Soften" or "Let go." If the tension feels strong, tighten that area of the body and then release it.

## Week 1: Meditation & Contemplation Homework

Chant the mantras on your chanting sheet as we did at the beginning of class.

Offer your meditation for the benefit of all beings, asking that your practice be of service to the whole of life or to a particular person or situation for which you would like to offer blessings.

Invoke Shakti in your native language, saying silently or out loud:

*“O goddess Shakti, you whose form is love, wisdom, and invincible strength, please reveal yourself within me. Let me feel your presence, whether in my body, my heart, or my mind. Let me know you as my own self. Let me feel your presence in the world.”*

### Breathe in the Felt Sense of Shakti

For a moment or two, have the feeling of welcoming or allowing the energy of the Goddess to flow into you through the breath.

Let yourself surrender to the feeling of being breathed by the Shakti, whose breath is your breath.

Have the recognition—using these words or your own-- “My skin is made of particles of shakti, subtle divine energy. My bones are solidified Shakti. The goddess has taken form as my flesh. She is the beating of my heart, the blood pouring through my veins. The goddess dances as the thoughts in my mind. She arises as my emotions. The goddess is the energy that lives as me. The air I breathe is the goddess. The ground I sit on is the goddess. My whole being is pervaded by the energy, the Shakti of the goddess. I am being lived by the shakti, the blissful freedom of the goddess herself.”

Have the sense that your heart center—in the middle of your chest—opens like the shutter of a camera. Have the feeling that the subtle presence of the goddess as energy, as resonance, flows in and out through your heart.

### Breathe the Mantra

Now, begin to inhale with the mantra, AUM HREEM SHREEM DUM DURGAYEI NAMAHA. (We offer salutations to the One who Overcomes Difficulties)

(Aum is the seed of the Infinite. Hreem is the seed of creative manifestation (as in Shakti’s manifestation of universes). Shreem is the seed of unparalleled auspiciousness. Dum holds the protective strength of Durga.)

Tune into the energetic sensation of the mantra flowing with the breath, and for a moment, have the understanding that the syllables of the mantra are the sound form of the goddess. Gradually let the mantra mingle with the breath. The intention is to gradually feel the mantra as a flow of grace entering your body.

## Week 1: Meditation & Contemplation Homework

Feel that the mantra flowing into the area behind your breastbone—your heart center—with the inhalation and flowing through your body with the exhalation. Sense the syllables as subtle energies that softly drop into your heart and softly expand through your heart.

As thoughts arise, when you notice the thought, note it as ‘thought.’ Or try looking at thoughts as manifestations of Goddess. Then, return to the mantra.

### Alternative (To try at least once or twice this week)

As you exhale, imagine that feelings of discomfort, fear, negativity, and karmic burden are being lifted from your body by the breath and the mantra, Aum Hreem Shreem Dum Durgayai Namaha

## Open-Eyed Practices

*To do at any time throughout the week.*

Start the day by asking that Shakti, perhaps in the form of Goddess Durga, be present with you today and ask to be able to recognize her presence.

From time to time, stop and notice your heartbeat. Feel the slight muscular tightening that allows you to hold a position. Notice and soften any tensions with the thought, “Everything I am experiencing is a form of the Goddess Shakti. The goddess is manifesting as this conversation, this feeling, this action that I’m doing, this person.”

Take moments throughout the day to silently say the Durga mantra to yourself, asking her to be present with you, to protect you, to reveal her power and love within you.

Become aware of the space behind your heart. Feel that Durga is standing behind you. Breathe in with the feeling that your breath opens the back of your heart. Exhale with the feeling that the Goddess is breathing her power through you. At a certain point, allow the exhalation to fill you with the feeling that the Goddess’s shakti has become your body.

When you feel uncomfortable, tense, confused, stop, and remember that the field of subtle grace offers the contracted or negative feeling to the Goddess, the Shakti. Breathe it out without aversion, feeling that your breath offers the energy of discomfort or tension into the field of grace

## Brief Navaratri Practice

If you don’t have an altar, create a focal point for your practice by setting one up. It can be very simple—a table or shelf. Your altar should be higher than your seat when you sit in front of it.

Place a cloth on the altar. If you have a statue or small picture of the Goddess, or an object that you associate with the Goddess, place it there.

## **Week 1: Meditation & Contemplation Homework**

Place a candle on the altar. If possible, flowers in a vase help to beautify it.

Navaratri practice is done in the evening, after dark.

First, collect the articles you will offer. These can be very simple: a flower, a piece of fruit or chocolate, incense. You will also offer the candle flame, or if you have the materials for it, a ghee lamp.

In this practice, begin by bowing or folding your hands in salutation.

Light the candle

Make a formal Dedication or Salutation, using these words or your own:

Salutations to the divine mother, who is the mother of all

Salutations to you who are the Infinite itself.

Salutations to you, who lives in all beings in the form of consciousness.

Salutations to you who lives in all beings in the form of breath

Salutations to you who lives in all beings in the form of longing

Salutations to you who lives in all beings in the form of love

Salutations to you who lives in all beings in the form of language

Salutations to you who is intent on rescuing the distressed and afflicted who surrender to you.

Salutations to you who removes the suffering of all.

Offer a flower with the thought, "I offer this flower."

Offer a piece of chocolate or fruit with the thought, "I offer this food."

Wave a stick of incense with the thought: "I offer this incense."

Hold the candle in your two hands and have the thought, "I offer this flame."

Now, have the thought, "I offer these mantras."

Begin to repeat, out loud, Om Hreem Shreem Dum Durgayai Namaha

If you like, you can accompany this with a visual contemplation. Perhaps you imagine yourself in front of a sacred fire, offering the mantras into the fire

Perhaps you imagine an altar in the center of your heart and feel that every mantra is being offered onto the inner altar. Allow the mantra to flow with the breath in the heart, cultivating a felt sense of its vibratory resonance with every repetition.

Perhaps you imagine that the Goddess is seated in front of you and offer the mantra to her.

## **Week 1: Meditation & Contemplation Homework**

Even better is to allow the mantra to flow with the breath in your heart, cultivating the felt sense of its vibratory resonance with every repetition.

It is particularly powerful to imagine that Shakti in the form of a Goddess-Presence in front of you, as in the following meditation. Then, at the end, you draw her into yourself, taking in her Shakti and letting it flow through your body.

### **Meditation on the Goddess Durga—A Visual Invocation**

You may use one of the pictures on the Home Page as a focal point for the meditation. Look at it for a while, then close your eyes and practice the following contemplation. Don't feel that you have to do an exact visualization. It's enough to sense the presence of the energy of Durga in your field:

Sitting comfortably upright, close your eyes, and imagine yourself sitting in a mountain grove, surrounded by tall peaks.

See the goddess moving towards you from the depths of the mountain. It is as if she comes from a distance, taking shape as she comes closer. She is dazzlingly beautiful, with dark skin and flowing black hair. She is naked to the waist, wearing jeweled necklaces and bracelets. Around her hips is a red silk cloth. Her eyes are large and dark, and in the middle of her forehead is an open, glowing third eye. She rides a tiger, which moves in sinuous grace until they are sitting in front of you. You feel her power as an enormous, embracing, protective love, which begins to envelop you like a cloak.

You may deepen your experience of her presence by inwardly repeating aum hreem shreem dum durgayei namaha

You gaze into the goddess's eyes. She smiles at you, and a beam of golden light flows from her third eye into your forehead. You breathe it in as particles of golden light that stream through your brain, removing mental fog and delusion. You may also feel that the mantra flows in with the breath, sensing its energy mingling with the particles of light that mingle with the breath. Allow the golden light to stream through your body.

After a while, you notice that there is a deep red light flowing from her heart into yours. You breathe in the light and feel it streaming through your torso. Feel that as you breathe out, you breathe out your own obstacles, obstructions, and hesitations, and feel that the Goddess breathes them into her own heart, transmuting them into light and freedom. Feel that as you take her light into your body, you are taking in the power to protect yourself and others, speak the truth, and wield strength with love.

Allow this red light to flow through you for a few moments, feeling how it fills you with the goddess's vital force.

Now, imagine yourself drawing the goddess's energy into your own body. You might imagine her in your whole body or sense that her presence takes up residence in the center of your chest, in the region of the heart. Ask that she be present in your heart and that her power, love, and strength flow through you. Thank her for her gifts and blessings.

## Week 1: Meditation & Contemplation Homework

Notice any feelings or sensations you experience.

Take a few moments to journal about what occurred during this meditation. And notice how the rest of your day unfolds when you have done this practice.

Durga is the goddess to call on when you need strength to meet your challenges when you doubt yourself and need to have your confidence restored, when you sense the need for an infusion of vital force, or when you want to be able to act powerfully in a non-egoic way. She is also the goddess of protection, so you can invoke her when you are frightened and want to feel protected from fear.

Outside of Navaratri, this meditation is very good to do when you have a problem to solve or a decision to make. Write your problem or your question on a piece of paper and invoke the Goddess through the following practice. Then ask her for help in solving the problem or answering the question.

### Contemplation for Drawing in Divine Strength

*Ask yourself:* How do I experience personal strength and courage? Write down whatever arises.

Then, ask the Goddess Durga to breathe her power, courage, and love into your heart. Begin to breathe in with the feeling that you are breathing in her divine presence and breathe it through your body. Use the mantra to invoke the Goddess, or simply address her directly, “Dear Durga, please fill me with your presence in the form of inner strength, courage, and love.”

Notice how invoking the presence of the Goddess Durga shifts your energy. Is it centering? Strengthening? Does it awaken a sense of energy in you? Write down how your sense of your own strength and courage shifts when you feel yourself drawing in the strength of the Goddess.

### Contemplation and Partner Practice

*Several possible topics are given below. Choose one or several, depending on your time. As you begin the discussion, take a moment to feel into your own heart, to become aware of your partner’s heart. Then imagine the form or energy of Durga behind both of you, ‘feeding’ you wisdom. As you have the discussion, periodically check into your heart and the sense of Durga shakti behind the two of you*

#### Topics for Partner Discussion or Personal Journaling:

How do you define Shakti for yourself? What descriptions of Shakti are particularly meaningful to you?

How do you relate to the tantric understanding that everything is Shakti, including the negative parts of life? Does holding that understanding help you release beliefs and

## **Week 1: Meditation & Contemplation Homework**

prejudices? Does it feel hard to grasp? How could this understanding help you work skillfully with the negative in yourself and other people?

How do you know that you're in touch with Shakti? Are there "signals" you feel? Shifts in your state? Contemplate this, journal about it, and discuss with your partner.

What do you feel are the main obstacles that keep you bound right now? These can be anything from stubbornness, anger, resistance to confusion about your purpose. List the three main obstructions you are aware of.

With your partner, take turns helping each other do the inquiry:

Partner A says: What is this obstacle?

Partner B names it.

Partner A asks a series of questions, giving space for Partner B to respond:

Can you feel any sensations attached to that obstacle? How does it feel when it is present?

Partner B responds

Partner A: Do these feelings have a location in the body? Can you feel tension in any part of the body?

Partner B responds

Partner A: How would you describe the energy of this obstacle?

Partner B responds

Partner A: Create a sense of space around the feeling-energy of the obstruction.

Partner B indicates when they have done so

Partner A: Hold the space while feeling the energy of the obstacle. Notice what happens.

Partner B responds

Partner A: Now, imagine the opposite quality. If your obstacle is stubbornness, imagine flexibility. If it is a lack of confidence, imagine unshakable strength. If it is anger, imagine feeling tenderness or calm.

Partner B indicates when s/he has done so.

Partner A: Create space around that feeling and hold the space around it.

Partner B responds.

Partner A: Can you move back and forth between these two spaces, the space around your obstacle and the space around its opposite?

Partner B responds.



## **Week 1: Meditation & Contemplation Homework**

Briefly discuss what has come up for Partner B during this inquiry.

Then switch roles and repeat the process with the other partner.

### **More Questions for Journaling or Partner Discussion:**

How do you experience the shakti of Durga? Does it feel familiar? Have you felt that energy in particular situations?

Can you describe to each other what it feels like to feel empowered by the Durga Shakti? As you have this conversation, imagine Durga standing behind each of you.