

Dear Lovers of Shakti,

Thursday, November 4th, the day of our final class, falls on Diwali, the Festival of Lights, which is sacred to Sri MahaLakshmi. Diwali is often preceded in Indian households by several days of preparation and celebration, during which you clean your house and prepare to welcome Goddess Lakshmi into your home. You want her to feel welcomed, partly as a gesture of gratitude, and also so that abundance and health will remain with you through the year.

In the evenings preceding Diwali, and on Diwali itself, you place lights in your windows (these are the 'diyas', or lights of the festival's name) to draw her to your house and welcome her. Part of the ritual is to light these lights at sundown and keep them burning through the evening. Tealights are perfect. And if you can't practice with flame, electric candles are fine as a substitute.

If you like ritual, a very simple one would be this: light a candle or electric candle in front of a picture or statue of Lakshmi, placed on a surface slightly above eye level. You could also invoke Lakshmi's presence in something that represents her, like a flower, a crystal, or a silver or gold coin. Make a food offering of fruit or sweets, and also place flowers, jewelry, and something sweet smelling on the altar, and as you do, have the feeling that you are offering them to Lakshmi.

It's also traditional to place the symbols of your own wealth—cash, a check book or bank statement—on the altar, with the understanding that they are aspects of Lakshmi. You offer them back to Lakshmi and ask that your sources of wealth be blessed. You could also do this with a musical instrument, a book, a piece of jewelry, a computer, a piece of beautiful art, or another symbol of abundance. You could also write down some of the aspects of your life for which you feel gratitude and offer the paper to the altar. Or simply remember those things you feel grateful for. Gratitude is a very Lakshmi-like feeling!

Then, as the main part of the ritual, fold your hands in Anjali Mudra, bow your head in respect, then recite the mantra *Om shreem hreem maha lakshmyai namaha* 108 times, focusing in your heart. Have the feeling that you are offering the mantras to the Goddess of Abundance in your own heart.

Traditionally, Diwali is a sociable holiday, a time to share food and sweets, loving conversation, and reconnect with friends. It's a time of great optimism, hope, and appreciation. It's a good time to make charitable donations, especially to charities that nourish people, to global health organizations, and organizations dedicated to taking care of women and children at risk.

And, we'll be honoring Lakshmi together in our Thursday night class.

With love,

*Sally*