

## Cultivating Shakti Telecourse

### Week 3: Contemplations & Homework for Deepening Your Experience

Please meditate for at least 20 minutes each day. You can meditate at any time of day or before bed. And you can practice with any of the meditation instructions here. Deb pulled out a few of the meditations we did during class, so if you like, you can use the audio of any one of these to guide your meditation; they are available on the Student page.

#### Core Daily Meditation Practice

*The first practice below is the same one we have been practicing, in which we inhale the first four syllables of the mantra through the crown down to the heart, then allow the last two syllables to expand the heart. As we said last week, you might prefer to practice with the first week's meditation, focusing on the mantra in the heart center.*

*Notice that this week we've added another step to the practice, based on the Awareness of Awareness piece that we did at the end of the opening meditation.*

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.

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.

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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.”

#### Breathe in the Seed Syllables of the Mantra through the Crown

Have the sense that your crown center opens like the shutter of a camera. Inhaling, have the feeling that the first four syllables of the mantra are flowing in like living liquid or living light through your crown. *Om hreem shreem dum* flow with the breath through the center of your head, through the throat, and upper chest into the heart.

With the exhalation, sense the words *DURGAYE NAMAHA* filling the heart as the exhalation expands the inner body through the chest.

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.

Feel that the mantra is flowing in through your crown and flowing down to and expanding the heart. Find your own rhythm and feel as you do that the mantra is opening up the inner body, the energetic space beneath your skull, and within the neck and chest. 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.

**NEW:** At the end, turn your attention back on itself, and become present to the awareness that holds your entire experience. One way to do this is to direct your (closed-eyed) gaze ‘backward’ as if you are ‘looking’ towards the back of your head and notice the indescribable yet always present knowingness that is behind your ordinary perceptions. For a moment, identify that knowingness as your true self. Or ask yourself, “What is aware that I’m doing this practice?” and relax into the felt sense that arises in response.

#### **NEW: Meditation on the Space at the End of the Mantra (To try at least once or twice this week)**

Sit with the mantra, repeating it as you normally would for a few minutes. Begin to notice the felt space at the end of ‘namah.’ Focus there, recognizing the dynamic quality of the mind space. Stay in that space until thoughts start to arise. Have the feeling that the mantra arises and subsides from within the space of the mind.

**NEW: Installing the Mantra in Your Body**

*I recommend doing this practice at least twice during the week. You can use the instructions from this week's class, which Deb has made available as separate audio, or do it at your own pace.*

As you take your posture, become aware of the triangle at your base. The two sitz bones and the pubic bone make up the triangle, and you want to sit as though your torso is perpendicular over the center of the triangle. This posture allows the energy in the central channel to move freely.

Inhale down and feel that as you do, the sit bones, hips, and thighs become heavy and grounded and take the support of the seat. Exhale and feel the energy of the breath floating your spinal column upwards through the crown of the head.

Now, take your attention through the body. As you notice places in the body that are tense or holding, breathe into them and as you do, have the thought, Soften. Have the sense that as you do this, you are helping your body become receptive to the Goddess energy. (Also, remember that in the realm of the shakti, gender is not really a factor. Durga is a feminine form, but her shakti will land in your body in the way that is most congruent with your physical and subtle reality.)

If, at any point, the energy feels intense, rather than resisting it, have the feeling of allowing the boundaries of your body to soften and expand. The shakti in the mantra intends to open and expand your body borders so that you have a more powerful connection with your subtle body, which not only interpenetrates the physical body but which also extends about three feet beyond it. So, if you feel pressure or intensity, recognize that this heightened energy is opening past the energetic blocks that keep us stuck in the belief that our body is only what's under the skin. And if it feels like too much, release the mantra and just allow the breath to flow with the feeling "Release, soften, relax."

Bring your attention successively to each of the listed parts of your body. Inhale and exhale the mantra two or three times into each part of the body, really trying to get a felt sense of the breath, mantra, and part of the body.

Crown, forehead, center of brain, brainstem in back of head, eyes, cheeks, ears, chin, entire face, inside of mouth, nasal passages, neck and throat, upper chest (thymus), right lung, left lung, heart, rib cage, spleen, stomach, liver, intestines, lower abdomen, lower back, kidneys and adrenals, spinal column, right shoulder, left shoulder, belly, uterus or prostate, vagina, penis, anus, sacrum, buttocks, right thigh, left thigh, right knee, left knee, right calf, and ankle, left calf and ankle, left foot and toes, right foot and toes

End by focusing on the hara center and then the heart.

Take a few minutes to breathe the mantra through your whole body and sense your body dissolving into the mantra.

## Open-Eyed Practices

*To do at any time throughout the week. Some of those below are new, while others were also in last week's homework*

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. Consider offering your day to her. You can also use the dedication.

**NEW:** From time to time during the day, ask yourself, “Is my mind expanded or contracted?” If you notice that it's contracted, take a moment to breathe and ask yourself, “Can I release contraction?” Often, just asking the question allows an expansion to occur.

**NEW:** When you sense the tension in your body, softly breathe into the area of tension. The sense that the breath is a gentle force of shakti opening and releasing the tightness. If it is habitual tension, you may have to do this several times or come back to it. Try practicing this simply with the breath or fill the breath with mantra and notice whether one of these is more powerful than the other.

Make a point of remembering the mantra through the day, especially when you are walking, doing housework, exercising at the gym, cooking. (Sometimes you might want to sing it or say it out loud, but mostly you'll probably want to repeat it silently) Let your focus on the mantra be soft and slur it slightly since this seems to make the mantra less of an 'object' and more of subtle energy like the breath. Try it with the breath, or just think it. As much as possible, sense the resonance or texture of the mantra as it impacts your energy body.

Find different bhavas (spiritual attitudes) as you say (think) the mantra: for instance, with the feeling that it is being offered into the heart, or with the feeling that the mantra is the Goddess and that you are bringing her presence more and more deeply into your body; asking her through the mantra to be present with you, to protect you, to reveal her power and love within you; with the feeling that you are calling on grace; with the feeling that each repetition of the mantra is giving you strength and energy. You can repeat it like a prayer, offer it for someone else's well-being. Notice any energetic shifts that occur.

From time to time, open fully to the breath with the feeling that you are being breathed. Feel that the breath comes in and out through the pores of your skin. Try this for several breaths with the sense that you are breathing through the front of the body. Then the back of the body. Then begin to feel that the breath is flowing in from all sides and above and below. Notice how the breath can soften the skin boundaries so that you feel less separate from the atmosphere around you.

Begin to feel that the breath is making love to you or that the universe—the Goddess—is making love to you through the breath.

Become very conscious of your words. Notice the effects that the words you use have on your own energy and on the energy in different situations. Become especially conscious of your thinking patterns. When you catch yourself in a negative thinking pattern, a self-

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criticism or criticism of others, notice the effect and, if appropriate, try to change your negative thought to a neutral or positive one.

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,

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

#### 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. The instructions include a specific visual image. However, 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. The meditation will work just as well.

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.

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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.

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.

#### Receiving Guidance

As you sit in meditation, ask a question to the Goddess. If there is a specific issue of concern to you now, ask it in this form: "What wisdom can you give me about this situation?"

Or ask a more general question such as "What can you tell me about my path?"

The best way to do this practice is to write her answers rather than expecting her to "tell" them.

**The Protocol:** Keeping pen and paper handy, sit in meditation and invoke Durga's presence either as energy in your heart or sitting in front of you. Sit with this for a few minutes. Then, ask the question, and IMMEDIATELY pick up your pen and write without thinking. Let the words flow from your hand. Don't censor.

When you are sure it is finished, read over the words, and if necessary, ask for clarification.

**Hint:** If this is a "real" message and not your mind talking, it will be fundamentally loving and positive. If it is critical, then it is probably a "message" from your critical inner voice and not from the Goddess!

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.



### 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 Personal Journaling:

How have I (or do I) experience laya (melting of grosser aspects of my personal embodiment into subtler ones)

Choose some ‘enlightened thoughts’ to experiment with, such as “Everything that arises in my mind and body is Shakti” or “That person is an aspect of my own self” or “Love is present here.” Notice the effect of holding such an enlightened thought.

Try replacing critical thoughts with more positive and accepting thoughts like “Everyone is doing their best, including me,” or “I accept myself just as I am,” or just offer the critical thought to Goddess, asking that she free you from it. Journal about this and discuss it with your partner.

What ‘signals’ from Shakti are you getting this week? What are you doing about them? Contemplate this, journal about it, and discuss with your partner.

#### Topics for Partner Discussion

Do start by meditating together, and then spend some time discussing your experience of the course, what is happening in your life as you do the practices and anything you want to share about the Navaratri practice or goddess Durga.

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How have you been experiencing the mantra this week? That is, do you feel it's bringing up emotions? Purifying you? Settling or calming you? How does it change your state?

**NEW:** Discuss your experience of installing mantra in your body. Are there tweaks you would make in the practice to make it more powerful or accessible for you?

**NEW:** In light of our class discussion of breath and prana, discuss your understanding of how breath is the bridge between the physical body, the mind, and spirit. Do you experience a difference between a 'normal' physical breath and the experience of the subtle breath that arises during meditation or other spiritual practice? Does softening the breath help get you in touch with the prana in the breath? 'light' or 'soft' breathing help you get in touch with the prana in the breath? Does practicing with a bhavana, such as feeling the breath filled with light, help you experience the breath more subtly? How do you practice most comfortably with the breath, and how does it 'shaktify' your experience?

**NEW:** In class, we briefly discussed the Shiva Sutra aphorism that says, "The mind is mantra?" In class, we discussed this statement from two perspectives:

As an explanation of what happens in the mind when you fill it with mantra over a period of time.

A more esoteric or non-dual point of view says that when the mind has been purified to the point where we can look directly into the field of the mind without being caught in the content, what we experience is pure Shakti. Muktananda says that when the Shiva Sutra says that the mind (Sanskrit: Chitta, meaning individual consciousness) is mantra, he is not talking about the mind being identical to the mantra syllables or even about the particular syllables of any particular mantra. He is referring to what Muktananda calls "the throbbing movement of the mind by which a yogi meditates. Syllables uttered aloud do not constitute a mantra. Indeed, mantra is the great Shakti that brings the syllables to life." The implication seems to be that as your mantra practice deepens, the mantra can so infuse your mind that the mind becomes suffused with liberating Shakti, which pulsates behind all the mind's contents.

Practice the meditation on the space at the end of the mantra that we did in class. (The instructions are in the meditation section of this document). Discuss your experience of the 'felt space' at the end of the mantra. Notice the innate dynamism of that space, its tendency to pulsate. Have you been able to find that pulsation? What happens when you use that pulsation as a focal point for meditation? Can you focus there? If you focus on the pulsation with the understanding that this pulsing quality in mind is the direct pulsation of Shakti, what is your experience? What insights arise for you when you consider that the natural dynamism of your mind-stuff is actually the throb of Shakti herself? How does your experience with this meditation help you understand the statement 'The mind is mantra' and Muktananda's comment?