

## **Cultivating Shakti Telecourse**

### **Week 5: Contemplations & Homework for Deepening Your Experience**

This document **does not** repeat the instructions for the past five weeks (By now, I believe you have enough versions of them to continue working with). Instead, it contains only the 'new' suggestions for practice. Included are:

- Instructions for the meditation on the 3 Centers within the Sushumna (the one we did in class) and the Invocation to Lakshmi that we did at the end.
- Instructions for self-inquiry and contemplation based on the eight forms of Lakshmi, including prompts for partner discussion
- Some other questions for contemplation or partner work

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 we have done over the last five weeks.

Deb pulled out the meditation we did in class on the Om Hreem Shreem mantra flowing through the three main centers (Muladhara, heart, and Ajna), and I will include instructions for that one here. It is a variation of the Chakra Meditation we did in Week 4, and I suggest you work with each of them and discover which feels juicier (and more do-able) over the long term. My main personal meditation is the Three Centers version, which in my experience, opens the Sushumna Nadi if you practice it over time and leads to a deep immersion in the inner sacred body.

You can use any mantra for this sequence, and you will find a rhythm for yourself as you do it. Longer mantras can be broken up or divided between the inhalation and the exhalation. A short mantra—a bija or bija sequence—can be coordinated with either the inhalation or exhalation or, if that feels right, with both. As you get deeper into any meditation session, the flow of breath, mantra and your felt sense of the center itself will morph. That means you are penetrating deeper into your subtle system. When that happens, go with it!

**LAST WORDS:** I want to encourage you to make meditation a true priority. Get yourself to the mat every day, no matter what. Over time, your practice will go through many phases, and there will be times when you just don't feel like meditating. Do it anyway. Work with the resistance if you need to, interrogate your various excuses for not meditating, and do whatever you need to do to make it juicy for yourself, but keep prioritizing your practice. Sitting meditation is not the only way to make spiritual progress. But only sitting meditation will let you penetrate the outer layers of your psyche and deepen your inner relationship with the liberating Shakti as she unfolds in your body.

## **Week 5: Meditation & Contemplation Homework**

These are some of the basic components of this path: Sitting meditation. Mantra practice. Cultivated attentiveness to the movements of Shakti within you, especially through the breath. Willingness to interrogate your assumptions and beliefs. Practices like asana and tai chi open the body. Using free moments to do short (one minute is fine) immersions into mantra or open-eyed Shakti practices, such as allowing yourself to be ‘seen’ by the natural world. Any other spiritual practice is great to add, and some of you may be drawn to more elaborate practices of ritual, or puja, to serious asana or movement practices, etc. But those above are the basics.

### **NEW: Meditation on the Three Centers with Om Hreem Shreem Dum**

Find your posture. Become aware of the natural pelvic triangle formed by the pubic bone in front and the two sitz bones that anchor your posture at the back. (Poke around with your fingers until you locate them). Center your torso so that it feels that you are sitting over the ‘center’ of the triangle. This is a naturally aligned position that allows you to begin to feel the vertical flow of breath.

Locate the perineum, the knob of flesh between the anus and the sexual organ, the heart center inside the body behind the breastbone, and the center between the eyebrows. Use these physical ‘spots’ as pointers; the actual centers are in the middle of the inner body.

Gradually become aware of, or imagine, a “tube” or channel that runs vertically through the center of the body, from the perineum through the crown, parallel to the spinal column.

Bring your attention to the area inside the lower pelvis, just above the perineum. Inhale and exhale several times with Om Hreem Shreem Dum. Don’t feel that you have to breathe all the way down there; instead, use the breath to cultivate a felt sense of the mantra in that region. Because that area is unfamiliar to many of us, this may take a little practice, but you’ll find it in time. Once you feel you’ve made an energetic connection, allow the exhalation to flow your attention up to the heart. Breathe several times with the mantra there. With the next exhalation, let attention flow to the center of the head, and practice with the mantra there.

At this point, be very attentive to what feels natural. You might want to reverse the direction, taking the mantra from the Ajna down to the heart and then the Muladhara and then bringing it up again. Or you may want to do your next round of breath/mantra, starting again at the bottom and moving to the top.

It’s also fine to end the meditation by bringing the breath and mantra down to the heart or the Muladhara so that you conclude in a more embodied way.

You can do this meditation with any mantra, including Ham Sa/So Ham. I have found that Shakta mantras which include bijas or consist of bijas, are the most powerful for this practice. But feel free to experiment.

## **Meditation on the Goddess of Abundance—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 garden, sheltered by an ancient oak tree. You lean against the trunk, feeling the protection of the natural world.

The golden goddess Lakshmi is seated in front of you. Have the sense of her as exquisitely beautiful, nourishing, and absolutely ready to bestow grace. If you want to visualize her, imagine her with golden skin, flowing black hair, red silk robes, and jewels in front of you. You feel her shakti as the embodiment of subtle golden light, filled with healing and love.

You may deepen your experience of her presence by inwardly repeating *aum hreem shreem mahalakshmyai namaha*, or simply *Aum Hreem Shreem*.

You gaze into the goddess's eyes. She smiles at you, and a mist of golden light flows from her heart to your heart. You feel that it carries the shakti of total abundance, abundance in every positive form. You allow yourself to receive it, breathing it in, feeling that it is filling your body. As the golden light streams through your body, breathe it back to you until you become aware that there is a constant exchange of giving and receiving flowing between you.

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 qualities of love, harmony, and blessing flow through you. Thank her for her gifts and blessings. Accept the fact that you can be a full container for the blessing of Lakshmi.

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.

## **Contemplation and Partner Practice**

### **Contemplating the Eight Qualities of Lakshmi's Abundance**

Lakshmi's eight forms represent eight facets of abundance, which manifest through the fundamental avenues of success and prosperity in human life, including money but also food, health, children, leadership, courage, success, and wisdom. So, as you read the names of these forms of the goddess, take a moment to look inside, and get a sense of how they manifest in your life right now. Take stock of the things that make you feel connected to abundance, which of course include money, but go far beyond money. Where do you feel in touch with natural abundance, and where do you feel insecure?

I've given some questions here as well as some 'blessings' you can offer in the realm of each of the Eight Lakshmis. Please feel free to think of your own and contemplate this topic in any way that feels personal to you.

**1) Adi Lakshmi** (Original or primordial Lakshmi)

She represents overall good fortune, both for the natural world and for us as individuals. She is a goddess of dharma, meaning that she is the good fortune that arises when we are aligned with our true source. She is self-worth and the sense of values. She is our health, the strength of our physical constitution, the nourishment we get from social ties, our feeling of safety, and most importantly, our feeling of self-love, our ability to nourish ourselves. Adi Lakshmi is also the power that brings health, social stability, and prosperity to a family or society.

**Self-Inquiry Questions:** Do I have a feeling of overall abundance in my life right now? How does it manifest?

In what ways do I value myself? On what do I base my self-worth? For now, just notice what arises in the wake of these questions.

**Offer a Blessing**, in these words or your own: May I and all beings experience true prosperity, and may all beings live by the highest values.

**2) Dhana Lakshmi** who takes the form of money, gold, wealth in all monetary forms, including the wealth that comes from financial responsibility, budgeting, etc.

**Questions:** How do you measure financial stability? Have you been able to budget? Do you feel relatively relaxed about your finances?

**Blessing:** May I and all beings experience financial sufficiency. May we be freed of debt. May all beings have enough for all their needs and some leftover.

**3) Dhanya Lakshmi** is Lakshmi in the form of food, and she also is the shakti who gives us the power to accept nourishment. So, when we have the grace of Lakshmi in this form, our food nourishes us.

**Questions:** Have you felt nourished by food? Are you assimilating the food you take in? Is eating and weight an issue that you are dealing with in a positive way? How can you have a more empowering attitude towards food?

**Blessing:** May all beings receive true nourishment from food. May healthy and abundant food be available to all.

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- 4) **Gaja Lakshmi** is the Shakti who gives us the power to lead. She also governs self-responsibility in all its forms. She also signifies all forms of worldly power and influence.

**Questions:** How do you exercise leadership in your own inner world? How have you led or influenced others this year? In what ways have you exercised a positive influence in your world?

**Blessing:** May I always lead from a position of alignment with the Truth. May our leaders all over the world be motivated to care, protect, and assure the prosperity of the people they lead.

- 5) **Santana Lakshmi** is the goddess of childbearing and fertility, so if you are caring for a child, it is very powerful and skillful to recognize that she can act through you.

**Questions:** Is this a year in which you've felt close and connected to children? Or have you found yourself working you're your own inner child during this course? Are you being called to support a child or children, including but not limited to your own?

**Blessing:** May all the children of the world, including my own family members, be safe. May they be cared for, loved, nourished, educated, and given every opportunity for growth in dharma.

- 6) **Dairya Lakshmi** is the power of courage, the shakti that gives you the inner strength and stamina to take big risks, stand up for something that matters to you, and keep going in times of struggle. Consider the forms in which you've experienced courage and acted courageously this year, especially in relationship to your personal and inner sadhana struggles.

**Questions:** What is real courage for you right now? What situations are you dealing with that require courage, and how do you find courage within them? What do you see when you consider courage to be a gift of Shakti?

**Blessing:** May I and all beings have the courage to do what is necessary for the wellbeing and health of themselves, their families, and our society.

- 7) **Jaya Lakshmi** gives victory and success in all your endeavors and allows you to overcome both external and internal enemies. She is related to Durga, but more as a giver of grace than as a warrior for justice.

**Questions:** What successes, inner and outer, have you had this year? (Remember that real success may be in an area that seems invisible to the world! Or it may be purely related to practice or working with your own mind and emotions.) Did you overcome an obstacle or block? Did you experience some sort of physical or emotional healing? Did you complete a project or feel inspired to start something new?

What does success mean to you at this point in your life?

**Blessing:** May I and all beings have success in every beneficial endeavor. May our personal successes benefit others.

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**8) Vidya Lakshmi** is the wealth of wisdom and skill, both spiritual and worldly, but normally having the context of spiritual wisdom, dharma wisdom, and the ability to develop positive qualities like generosity, kindness, forbearance, perseverance.

**Blessing:** What were your major learnings during this year? How did your spiritual practice transform you, reveal truth to you, or expand your awareness? In what ways have you made progress in spiritual understanding or positive qualities? What skills or wisdom do you want to learn or investigate in the months to come?

**Blessing:** May we have the wisdom to see that all beings are connected and to witness the unity between even the most polarized.

May our technologists, scientists, and educators commit to using their skills to improve the lives of everyone. May our skills be aligned with dharma.

*Some of these topics may have more juice for you than others. Journal about the ones that have energy for you and consider them with your partner. Don't feel like you have to go into depth on each one but realize that contemplations on any of these topics can yield a lot of wisdom.*

### Topics for Personal Journaling

*Any of these can also be part of your partner practice.*

- Discuss how practicing with breath, mantra, and visualization has affected your experience of Shakti.
- How do you experience movements of shakti in your external life or the world? How do you experience movements of Shakti internally?
- What from this class do you want to carry forward? What, if any, major personal revelations have you experienced?

### Topics for Partner Discussion

Do start by meditating together, and then spend some time discussing your experience of the course, how your understanding of Shakti has changed during the course, and what you would like to do to carry it forward.

### Questions on Desire

*If you are not working with a partner, you can do these as a journaling exercise.*

- What beliefs do you have about desire that limit your ability to experience pure desire?
- What are your major desires right now?

## **Week 5: Meditation & Contemplation Homework**

- Feel energetically into the feeling of the desire. See if you can focus on the energy, letting go of the object. Are you able to find the Shakti (fizziness, juiciness, excitement) in the feeling of desire?
- Share your experience with your partner.
- Take turns guiding each other into the following exercise, then discuss your experience.
  - 1) Imagine one of these desires fulfilled. How does it feel?
  - 2) From that place of fulfillment, ask, 'Is there another desire?' Feel that fulfilled. Keep noting the experience of desiring an object and the feeling of having that desire fulfilled.
- Is there a difference in the way you hold another desire when you are in touch with a place of fulfillment?
- Discuss.

### **Open-Eyed Practices from Weeks Past that I Suggest You Carry Forward**

- 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.