

As September approaches, Hindus all over the world begin to prepare for Sharad NavRatri – nine nights to honour and celebrate Ma Shakti, the Divine Mother in her many forms and to be grateful for her bountiful gifts. Shakti, this Divine Feminine creative power lies within each of us, within Mother Earth and all Her elements. Let's use these nine nights to cultivate and awaken Shakti within so that we can respect and honour Shakti in all.

To cultivate and awaken Shakti, this feminine energy within each of us regardless of gender takes discipline and requires us to live consciously. The journey to discovering our inner Shakti and Her role in destroying that which is preventing us from living as Shakti is active and conscious.

During NavRatri we read the Chandi / Durga Saptshati also known as Devi Mahatmya and sing Durga bhajans depicting the vanquishing of various demons. We need to reflect and understand what these demons represent and the role of the Shakti energy in our lives. It is only when we make a conscious decision and effort to awaken Shakti that we can destroy the demons within, balance our gunas of tamas, rajas and sattva to live from the heart and flow with Shakti and love.

Shakti lives in each breath, each cell and each layer of who we are. With prana, kriya, mantra, mudra, art and dance we can awaken Shakti at each chakra. As MahaKali at our mooladhara chakra, Shakti destroys our tamasic nature of ignorance, attachment, stubbornness, impotence, fear, selfishness, materialism and lethargy represented by the demons Madhu and Kaitabha. When we destroy the 'Madhu' and 'Kaitabha' tendencies, we discover strength, stability, security, belonging and protection.

As Ma Tara Devi in our swadhishtana sacral chakra in our lower belly, Shakti is nurturing and healing for ourselves and others. Ma Tara Devi is the saviour who takes us across any difficult situation to creativity and success. At the manipura chakra at the navel, Ma Chandi or Durga comes to burn all that we no longer need, transform that which we need to transform and purify what needs to be purified. Here is where Shakti encourages us to let go all that is preventing us from living our best selves and take action to move forward.

As we travel to the Anahata Heart chakra we meet Maha Lakshmi who helps us to take action to destroy the demon Mahishasura who represents our rajasic karma of arrogance, anger, anxieties greed, jealousy, etc. With the destruction of Mahishasura, we discover abundance, will power, love, creativity, and compassionate detachment.

We move from the heart to the Vishuddha throat chakra where we meet Maha Saraswati who helps us deal with the many forms of our Sattvik karma of superiority, judgement, disgust, and indifferent detachment. With our creativity in communication, we are able to destroy the demons chanda and munda, the personifications of our argumentative and chattering mind that causes us to act without thinking. At the ajna chakra at the third eye, we connect with the Blue Saraswati as Ma Tarini, the cosmic star that give us the ability to destroy Raktabeej who represents our monkey mind of jumping from one thought to another. The destruction of Raktabeej brings stillness and silence and we are able to destroy Dhumralochana, the foggy deluded mind that brings doubt and a desire to return to our old habits. This is the point where it is attractive to return to the easy way but with Shakti alive within we persevere.

When we persevere, with discerning knowledge of Shakti we arrive at the sahasrara crown chakra and connect with Ma Lalita Tripura Sundari the playful form of Shakti. Now we are able to let go Shumbha and Nishumbha, the personifications of 'me' and 'mine' and sense of identification with our body and

the roles we play. The most difficult is to recognize and accept that the roles we play in this world is not who we truly are. To live as Shakti and discover that we are everything and nothing at the same time takes daily sadhana, regular satsang, the attitude of seva in all that we do, smaran, the remembrance of our divinity and samarpan, doing our best and surrendering the results of our action.

As we awaken Shakti to destroy all our demons we actively and consciously change our inner world. We are then able to live with a sense of abundance, peace, joy and bliss regardless of what the outer world throws at us. When we live as Shakti, we live with compassion, confidence, courage, conviction and collaboration; and, we are able to bring peace into our little piece of the world.

By awakening the Shakti within, we awaken Shakti in our whole world! Jai Maa! Sri Matre Namaha!