General Guidelines for Navaratri Sadhana

Nine Nights and Ten Days of Divine Mother

 **Time of Day**The most auspicious time of day for performing sadhana is known as “brahmi muhurta,” which occurs from 3:30 to 4:30 AM. By waking up early, before dawn, one is able to absorb tremendous amounts of cosmic energy available at that time. Also, the atmospheric vibrations are very peaceful, and our meditations will be fruitful. If we sleep late, we miss out on this precious opportunity and we absorb tamasic, or dark, energy. Ideally we should complete meditation by 6 a.m.

If it is not possible to do sadhana at this time, any time before 9 AM is also very good. The evening time starting at dusk is also excellent for practices. However, any time of the day becomes golden and auspicious when we worship Divine Mother, so there’s no need to worry excessively about timing.

**Preparation—Bath and Clothing**It is very important to take a complete bath and wash the hair before commencing any sadhana. Clean clothes in natural fibers, like cotton or silk, can be worn. By taking a complete bath, washing the hair, and wearing freshly washed clothes, we purify our physical bodies and also cleanse our auras of any lingering impurities. If we wear unclean clothes or don’t shower, our aura will become dim and our radiance is lost.

**Silence**If possible, it is very, very auspicious to maintain silence during Navaratri. Even if silence cannot be maintained for the entire nine days, at least try to maintain silence for an hour or two in the early morning or evening. This will enhance one’s energy and increase longevity.

When we do speak, it is important to speak the truth only “Truth is Divine Mother.”

**Diet**Try to eat sattvic vegetarian food, like rice, dal (lentils), fruits, nuts, vegetables, and organic dairy products. This will help the devotee to stay in a peaceful, positive frame of mind. It is very important to take only pure vegetarian food during Navaratri. Do not consume meat, fish, eggs, onions, garlic, or mushrooms. Take only light, sattwic (pure and fresh), and easily digestible food. Sattwic food includes dishes like kicheri, ven pongal, vegetables, cereal with organic milk, vegetable sandwiches made with avocado, tomatoes, etc. If you wish, you can just consume fruits, nuts, and organic milk or buttermilk for the ten days. Please consider the state of your health and your nutritional needs, and decide on a suitable diet. It is best to eat limited portions.

Fasting on liquids every Ekadashi and new and full moon brings the grace, protection of Divine Mother and creates peace in the home.

**Celibacy**During Navaratri it is good to observe brahmacharya (celibacy). Those who worship Mother during Navaratri for the fulfillment of a specific desire must observe celibacy for the duration of the worship. This allows the mind to remain in an elevated state and also preserves one’s subtle energy. India’s holy sages have recommended that those who practice celibacy should sleep on a mat on the floor. So, those who wish to worship Mother in an authentic way should sleep on the floor. In order to restrain the senses and maintain mental purity, one should also avoid movies or television shows. Instead, one can read holy books that inspire the mind.

**Right Activity**We should not strain ourselves with too much activity. Our mind and senses must be under our control.

**Respect Towards Women**Because Navaratri is dedicated to Divine Mother, **it is absolutely vital to treat all women with courtesy and respect**. **Both men and women should strive to see Divine Mother in all beings**. Service to those in need (a phone call to a lonely person, serving food to the hungry etc.) is considered puja to Divine Mother if we see Her in them.

By following these guidelines we will be granted peace, dedication, and atma viswasa—unshakable self-confidence. We need energy to progress in life, and this energy is gained by maintaining discipline, observing sacred vows, and following spiritual guidelines.

**Offering Light**If possible, it is very auspicious to offer light to Divine Mother during Navaratri. Ghee lamps are ideal, as these help to purify the atmosphere and increase sattvic vibrations. Offering light to Divine Mother increases auspiciousness and inner light. A ghee lamp can be placed on one’s shrine during worship or meditation. By offering light, we are requesting inner radiance and the light of wisdom from Divine Mother.

Especially recommended is a wick made of 5 colors (excluding black).

**Offering Food**It is also very good to offer to Mother sattvic food items, like fruits, nuts, Pongal or sugar candy. For those who are accustomed to offering cooked items, rice pudding made with milk and ghee is a wonderful offering. Any food offered to Devi becomes charged with radiant spiritual vibrations, and whoever eats that prasadam will be tremendously blessed.We should share the prasad with family and friends. By offering food, we are giving thanks to Mother Earth as well as asking Mother to provide food to all of Her children. When offering food, make sure to use food containers that are not eaten from directly. (if there are no dishes set aside for the express purpose of prasadam, then never before used paper plates and disposable utensils and napkins may be used.) Whoever distributes the prasadam should use the right hand to offer it to devotees, and devotees should make sure to receive the prasadam only with the right hand.

**Arati**At the conclusion of one’s practices, it is very good to perform arati using 1, 3, 5 or 9 wicks. Any Devi slokas, mantras or stotras can be sung during the arati. Sri Mahishasura Mardini Stotram is especially auspicious during arati, and is sung during every evening arati in Amma’s Ashrams.

Special guidance for ladies: If you are in your menstrual period during Navaratri, you should not do the pujas for the first 4-5 days of the period. In general, during the menstrual period, it is important to refrain from performing puja, visiting temples or attending homas, or touching one’s mala or puja items for the first four days of the period. During this time, many changes take place in the body, mind, and spiritual energy, and the ancient rishis have given some important guidelines regarding this natural process. Rather than do external worship, ladies are advised to do silent meditation at home during the first four days. Mantra is not to be recited even mentally. After taking a shower and washing the hair on the fifth day, one’s normal practices can be resumed.

**Special Devotion to the Guru**

Sri Karunamayi says:You must worship your Guruji more during Navaratri, following the sadhana He gave you. Gurubhakti is the Temple in the heart where Divine Mother loves to come to live.

*If you find it difficult to perform certain pujas or prepare specific food items, just remember that Sri Devi is your Mother; there is no need to worry. Just offer whatever you can, like fruits or milk. The most important elements in the Navaratri puja are your faith and devotion; the love in your heart is the true offering that Mother likes.*