

Saraswati Shaktimayi

MAKING TIME FOR THE GODDESS

How to savour the golden morning
hours for spiritual practice
without compromising the nourishing
power of sleep.



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Anyone wanting to start a daily spiritual practice, in ancient indian sanskrit language called a *Sadhana*, be it a traditional tantric Goddess Sadhana, or any other form of meditation, yoga asanas, breathing exercises, mantra practice or devotional ritual like puja, prayer and chanting, needs to decide what portion of the day to reserve for this special time.

Since we all are living the life of so-called „householders“ and not „recluses“, which means that our days are usually filled with responsibilities pertaining to the outer world – family life, material sustainance, ect....the first challenge at the beginning of the spiritual path for us can be simply „making time“ in our busy schedules.

THE BEST TIME FOR SADHANA

The best time for sadhana is the time when you can be undisturbed, clearminded and focused. Usually this is the early morning time, the time of dawn, when the atmosphere is fresh, clear and peaceful, others might still be sleeping, nature is just starting to wake up, and the predominant energy is *SATTVA*.

Sattva is one of the 3 *gunas*, the 3 qualities that govern all of life's functions. While *Tamo Guna* makes us heavy and dull, *Rajo Guna* makes us overactice and restless. Both states make it difficult to focus our mind on practice. Sattva Guna on the other hand brings a harmonious, clear, light, peaceful energy that calms and uplifts our mind.

In Ayurveda it is said that the time when Sattva pervails is between 2:00 and 6:00 a.m., after 6 o'clock Tamo Guna starts to bring a heaviness that makes it more and more difficult to wake up and feel fresh and energetic.

There is even a very specific sacred timewindow called „*Brahmamuhurta*“, when our mind is in tune with the subtle energies of nature, our intuition is hightened and we have access to that creative energy with which we give our life direction. This is the ideal time for spiritual sadhana.

This exact timeframe shifts from day to day as it depends on the time of sunrise. It is said to last exactly 48 min., starts 1 hour and 36 minutes before and ends 48 min before sunrise.

This works perfectly for India and countries close to the equator, but in places that are further away from the equator sunrise can be very very early in summer or very very late in winter. For this reason it is usually more practical to simply get up any time before 6:00 a.m., depending on how much time you would like to set aside for your Sadhana and what time you need to be done to start your days's activities, to catch the wave of sattvic energy and let it take you into your spiritual practice and into your day.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NOURISHING SLEEP

That said, many of us, especially those with a Vata- or Vata/Pitta Constitution that should ideally get between 7 – 8 hours of sleep every night to function optimally, may run into a conflict between getting enough sleep and getting enough time for sadhana.

Both are forms of nourishment that we need, both are forms of honouring the Divine Feminine, the Goddess. Sleep nourishes our physical body, detoxifies and rejuvenates our tissues, balances our hormones and is important for brain function, focus and clarity of mind. Spiritual practice nourishes our soul, re-connects us to our life's purpose, the reason why we are here in the first place, reminds us of our true limitless nature and oneness with the Divine.

As Daughters of the Goddess, spiritual seekers that honour the Divine Feminine that is embodied in all of creation including our own body, we cannot do without either of them.

SLEEP IS A FORM OF THE GODDESS

Did you know that sleep is regarded as a form of Devī?

She is mentioned in the *Ratri Suktam*, a hymn to the Goddess from the Devi Mahatmyam 500 A.D., as the force that overpowers even Vishnu's eyes (the great sustainer of the universe) with sleep. Only She has the power to make him fall asleep and also to awaken him just in time to pay attention to the demons that have started to create disbalance and havoc in the universe.

*Yaya tvaya jagat-srashta
jagat patyatti yo jagat
soah – api nidra-vasam nitah
khas-tvam stotum-ihesvara*

*By your power even the creator and destroyer of the world who
himself is the world has become overpowered by sleep! What
power do I have then to utter your praises?*

So we too receive the nourishing power of sleep only through the grace of Shakti, the power of nature that creates, nourishes and dissolves. And also our ability to wake up on and in time, ready to keep the inner demons in check, to keep our inner realms free from destructive influences and unconscious patterns, by practicing regular sadhana depends on Her support.

So let us approach our attempt to establish a lifestyle which honours both, nourishment through sleep and through sadhana, with humility and surrender to the Goddess.

Sleep has an overpowering energy that when it comes over us, it makes us go into a deeply restorative and rejuvenating state of consciousness. Anyone who ever had any form of sleeping problems knows that it is not for granted and that we can not control this state of consciousness with willpower.

What we can have conscious control over is our lifestyle. We can create a lifestyle that honours the Divine Feminine, that reserves time and space to invite and welcome the Goddess in her many forms and with Her many gifts, one of which is deep nourishment on a physical and emotional level, in the form of sleep as well as in the form of Sadhana.

THE NEED FOR SADHANA

The most direct invitation into our life and inner space that we can extend to Her is to dedicate daily time to our Sadhana, our spiritual practice.

Sometimes people ask the question why is a daily morning practice needed? Isn't it much more important to treat all of our life as practice?

While it is absolutely true that the aim in Traditional Tantra is to experience the Divine in every person and situation we are surrounded by, be it joyful or challenging, the ability to actually hold that state of consciousness depends on how regularly and how deeply we were able to connect to it in our Sadhana.

We do need that dedicated time without distractions to forge that inner experience of closeness with the Goddess, to be able to continue to feel it even amidst the turbulences and requirements of our daily life.

Is it just like with human relationships. If we want friendship or partnership to feel close and intimate and feel the trust that this person will be there with us through thick and thin, it needs those times spent together, when we give each other undivided attention, experience each others energy and enjoy each others company. Those are the precious bonds that can hold strong during times of turbulences....

But other than a human being, that Supreme Creative Energy and Consciousness we call Shakti, Devi, Ma, or the Goddess.... who is the Eternal Mother of all, is much more reliable, and much more willing to come towards us and to support our efforts however small they may be.

It is said that when we take 10 steps towards Her she takes a 100 steps towards us.

WHO IS THE GODDESS

It is probably not possible to explain to someone who has never experienced this reality who or what the Goddess is.

I will still try to convey to you who She is for me personally, or in which ways or forms She has been becoming manifest for me in my life.

Originally, as a little child, I perceived an incredibly beautiful, loving, charming, powerful, awe-inspiring, intelligent, extremely attractive conscious presence in the form of nature – the wind in the trees, the endless variety of plants, the formations and colours on the sky, the swarms of hundreds and thousands of crows in winter, the fireflies in warm nights, the scent of the forest in summer, the light of the moon..... There was an almost unbearable longing in my heart to merge into Oneness with this unknown and yet so strikingly familiar presence that expressed itself in such breathtaking ways.

Maybe I did feel at that early age that all of this was indeed my own true Self, my own true nature. Yes, I was now confined to a small human body, but maybe it was the remembrance of who I really was and am and will be ?

A little bubble in a pond rising rising rising to merge back into Oneness with the vast sky.....

A little stream of consciousness longing to be one with the mighty ocean of universal consciousness.....

A Daughter of the Goddess wandering alone in the world remembering Her Mothers face and longing for Her embrace....

So yes. Universal consciousness expresses itself through the world of forms as the Goddess.

Shakti becomes that which is seemingly outside of us and that which we long to merge with - the Beloved!

At the same time it is the force that lives and breathes and expresses itself through our very own being! So she is also our own innermost Being, our true Self! Shakti is the power that has formed a body for us inside our biological Mother's womb, the power that caused us to be pushed out of Her body into our own individual existence and the power that longs to express itself in this world through this specific body with it's unique vibrational quality, talents, messages, it's unique light... and maybe its very specific intention for this lifetime. That is what is called swadharma. To live according to our unique nature.

Yoga in its truest sense is the realization of union between the individual soul and the universal soul. And every spiritual practice serves this one goal only.

The Beauty and Grace of a path in the tantric Goddess tradition is that by experiencing the universe as our very own Mother and our inner Self, we can develop a deep faith in life as well as in ourselves. We can feel nurtured, guided and reassured from within and no longer need to be like beggars that look for reassurance from outer sources. We can feel confident in our path and have the courage to share our unique light, to express our true Self freely and generously and to have a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

That is the meaning of being Devi's Daughter.

HOW TO BALANCE SLEEP AND SADHANA

So now that we are aware that we need both, how do we balance sleep and Sadhana? And there is only one simple and logical solution to this question, right? We need to go to bed early enough in order to get our required hours of sleep and still be able to get up early enough to benefit from the sattvic energy of the early morning hours.

But for many of us this is easier said than done, right?

It all comes down to one challenge: How to get ourselves to go to bed early?

Let me share some of my own experiences. As a long-term Sadhika and a Vata-Pitta Constitution that needs 7 – 8 hours of sleep and has a generally very active and creative mind that likes to just keep going and going, I do have a few tricks that I think will benefit you on your journey.

PREPARATORY CONSIDERATIONS



BE GENTLE & LOVING

Whenever you want to get yourself to do something that requires a change of habit, or letting go of momentary comfort, speak to yourself with gentleness like you would to a delicate little child. Do not take a harsh inner attitude and don't judge yourself.

We need reassurance, compassion, patience and sooooo much love! I often tell myself: „Come my love, you can do this.“

FALL IN LOVE WITH SELFCARE

Many of us have not had the kind of emotional nourishment we needed in the early stages of our lives. It might have become a pattern in your adult life to neglect your own physical and emotional needs. Start giving yourself the kind of care you need and treat yourself with the utmost appreciation. You are precious. You are a manifestation of the Goddess, and in order to share your unique beautiful light with the world you need to be well-nourished. Make self-care a priority.

BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT EXACTLY YOU WANT YOUR DAILY PRACTICE TO BE

This is very important. If you are unsure about what to practice and keep changing and trying different things, your mind will remain unstable and distracted, you will not feel the benefits of any practice and are more likely to drop your efforts sooner or later.

Let me suppose that you have been on some form of yogic or eastern spiritual path for a while and have been familiarized with certain practices. If not, please see the footnote*.

There is so much we can do. Breathing Exercises, Prayer, Mantra Recitation, Chanting, Meditation, Kriyas, Asanas, Puja..... But it actually doesn't need much. Consistency is more important than volume! Therefore include only those practices that you know are indispensable for your overall wellbeing.

* You might be interested in the 7-weeks Online Program “INITIATION. Preparing the temple. Inviting the Goddess.” that sets you on the path of Sadhana, gives you the foundations and prepares you for deeper practices.

What is absolutely essential, what is most effective to raise your vibration, uplift your mind and give you energy to carry you through the day? If you had only a minimum amount of time what would you choose? For me personally, if I had minimal time at hand, the most effective and essential would be Pranayama and Mantra Japa.

Have you decided? Good.

TIME IS PRECIOUS. GIVE IT PURPOSE.

Now think about how much time you need for that to get the desired effect without having to rush! Give yourself enough time to be able to feel spaciousness and to relax into the practice. This is your unnegotiable daily investment of time.

Many of us, especially those with a lot of Vata in their constitution, dislike to be confined into a fixed schedule. We like to be free and spontaneous and follow our creative impulses. But irregularity is also what creates the biggest imbalances in our body-mind system. Having this kind of structure and regularity actually gives us security and let's our sensitive, easily excited nervous system relax. It can become a very healing experience.

Let's do a simple consideration and calculation

First

When does your Sadhana need to be finished, for you to start your normal daily activities?

Second

How much time do you need for your essential daily Sadhana?

Third

How many hours of sleep do you need?

Depending on our physical constitution we need between 6 and 8 hours of uninterrupted night-sleep. Vata Constitutions need the most sleep - a minimum of 8 hours would be ideal. Pitta Constitutions do well with 7 hours of sleep. For them it is often most challenging to get themselves to go to bed on time. Kapha Constitutions do best with 6 - 7 hours of sleep. They tend to sleep more than what is actually good for them which can cause heaviness and lethargy. So less might be more.

Remember to treat your practice as the most precious time of the day, where you get to

connect to your true inner self, to nature and to your most beloved form of the Divine (even if that is formless).

So do not see it as a dry duty, another thing on your list that just needs to be done.

Yes, it is a duty, but the most important one for a human being. To remember our Divine nature is what we are here for. More than a duty it is a privilege to be in this physical body and to have the opportunity to engage in Sadhana, awaken the potential of our consciousness and to walk this Earth in recognition of our oneness with the source.

So do not cut it short.

Fourth

How much time you need after waking up before starting your Sadhana?

You will probably want to brush your teeth. Maybe ayurvedic oilpulling is part of your daily oral hygiene.

Maybe you want to use Neti to prepare for breathing exercises if those are part of your routine.

Splashing your face and eyes with cold water helps to cool the eyes and feel fresh.

It is advisable to drink a cup of hot water to rehydrate after the night and kindle digestion.

Ideally we take our daily shower before Sadhana, but if you feel this is already taking your attention away from practice too much, you can shower after you are done and before you have breakfast.

Your morning hygiene should also not be rushed as it is part of your selfcare that makes you feel nurtured, appreciated and well taken care of. It also sets the mood with which you enter your spiritual practice, so decide what is needed and take your time.

Fifth.

From the time you need to be done, subtract your time for Sadhana and your time for selfcare and your hours of sleep.

NOW YOU HAVE YOUR BEDTIME.

Tadaaaa! I know you could have figured this out by yourself, but sometimes it helps to do things together, just to do them at all.

HOW TO ACTUALLY IMPLEMENT IT

1.) REGULATE YOUR EATING RHYTHM THROUGHOUT THE DAY

I have found this step to be crucial for my ability to sleep on time!

Plan the mealtimes throughout your day in a way that you can have an early dinner.

My suggestion from an ayurvedic perspective would be 9:00 – 13:00 – 18:30

To have your stomach almost empty at bedtime is most important.

Eating late is what keeps many people up at night. When the body is busy digesting we usually don't feel like sleeping. It might also be a protective mechanism because sleeping with a full stomach produces Ama (undigested residue that becomes toxic).

When the meals throughout your day are happening at certain times, your dinner is also much more likely to take place on time.

An additional benefit is, that your agni (digestive fire) will also be regulated, which is most important, not only for your longterm health but also for your focus and clarity of mind in Sadhana.

2.) MAKE BEDTIME A RITUAL THAT IS PART OF YOUR SADHANA

The time between dinner and bedtime can easily become the culprit that sabotages our morning sadhana. We tend to be exhausted but not necessarily sleepy. Often the mind still keeps on spinning and looking for pleasurable sedation. Unconscious behaviours seem to take over more easily, like scrolling social media or eating for gratification.

It is naturally a time of Tamo Guna, a heavy energy that is supposed to help us shift into a calm and relaxed state that prepares us for sleep. But because of our modern lifestyle our minds are often still overstimulated from the day, our bodies still hold tension and artificial lights and screens from mobile phones inhibit the proper production of sleeping hormones.

At the same time we feel that all the chores of the day are done and we can finally “do what we want“. Paired with the fact that our mind is in a more dull state, less able to take conscious choices, there is a great risk of giving in to momentary comforts, old habits and unconscious patterns and before we know we have let our sadhana slip away.

Therefore I like to hold the awareness that my sadhana actually starts one hour before my bedtime!

I THINK OF IT AS “THE SACRED HOUR“.

Looking at this one hour before your bedtime as a sacred time, helps you transition from an outwardly oriented to an inwardly oriented state of mind.

Most of us need some kind of transitioning period from our work related activities, social interactions and influences of the outer world to our inner world.

I switch off all screens.

I open the windows to bring in fresh air.

I avoid any artificial lights because they interfere with the natural production of melatonin that precious hormone that not only makes us fall sleep, but is also an extremely potent antioxidant protecting us from breast cancer.

In the dark season I light candles instead and use only dim lights where necessary.

Those lamps made from Himalaya Salt give off a wonderful warm, dim light that doesn't interfere much with our natural biorhythm.

I like lighting a natural incense stick. It clarifies the room energetically, creates a change in mood and atmosphere.

I might turn on some calm classical indian music, for example night time ragas that you can easily find on youtube. Or I listen to recordings of my favorite mantras or any meditative music.

I am creating order in the house where needed and then go to the bathroom early to do my little evening routine.

3.) IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF SLEEP

Immediately before sleeping I might have a small cup of hot goatmilk with ghee, spices and a pinch of jaggery. It promotes deep sleep and is especially beneficial for Vata and Pitta constitutions who need to replenish their level of Ojas. Kapha constitutions need to keep their tendency of mucus accumulation, liquid retention and swelling in check. If you wake up with a puffy face or a white coating on your tongue, it is better to skip the milk. Also if you have the tendency to wake up at night to go to bathroom, skip the milk or reduce the amount because we don't want it to interrupt your sleep.

Ayurveda also recommends to massage the soles of your feet with oil at bedtime. It grounds your energy, reduces Vata Dosha and let's you fall asleep faster.

CONCLUSION

Whenever we want to change behavioural patterns and let go of habitual comforts, it is very helpful to give the mind something equally enjoyable but at the same time uplifting and supportive of our higher goal.

That strategy is to replace the pleasure the mind craves with truly enjoyable, nourishing experiences that give a much deeper satisfaction.

I encourage you to create harmony, peace and beauty around you and be creative. Treat yourself like a queen.

Some of us may have the capacity to firmly discipline ourselves. But most of us tend to meet strong inner resistance against such authoritarian attempts and it might backfire.

A lack of emotional nourishment, freedom of creative expression, fulfillment of our need for love, attention, compassion and emotional support in the early years of our lives might have become our internalized default mode that leads to habitual self-neglect and seeking of pleasure and gratification in ways that aren't supportive of our soul's true desire and dharmic path.

So when we want to get ourselves to sleep early, it is most important to create a very loving, nurturing, uplifting and yes pleasurable environment that the mind will naturally enjoy and willingly adapt to.

Remember to treat yourself with love.

OTHER IMPORTANT THINGS THAT HELP TO KEEP YOUR SADHANA ON TRACK:

1.) CHOOSE THE RIGHT PRACTICES

The right practices are those that you love. They need to keep attracting your mind and your curiosity, so that you will not abandon them and instead keep discovering ever-deepening layers and revelations.

2.) APPRECIATE YOUR PRACTICES

Most, if not all of the traditional yogic, tantric or ayurvedic practices are WAY more powerful than we are aware of. They are wildly underrated!

The more we refine our body and mind through sadhana over the years the more we gain the sensitivity to perceive subtle reality and the more we become aware of how deeply these practices really work in our being.

Many western practitioners do not understand the wider context of the practices they have been given and therefore do not have the capacity to grasp their power and potential. It takes a lot of time, personal dedication and learning from experienced teachers to

Nowadays anyone can have access to (almost) every practice, whereas in ancient times much of spiritual knowledge was secretative and shared only with the deserving student.

As a result of this never before seen accessibility, sadly, traditional knowledge is being mixed up with new age spirituality and much of what is transmitted is based on incomplete, superficial or even false understanding.

This can lead to spiritual confusion, oversaturation, doubts, a never-ending search for something else and lack of appreciation of even authentic practices, due to lack of context and deeper knowledge.

If we are not convinced of the profound effects and benefits a practice has for us, we will lack patience and perseverance and easily let our mind wander to other possible options and even forget why we are doing it in the first place.

It is Divine Grace that leads us to the practices we truly love and that are suitable for our temperament. Keep being curious about what you have been given, experience it from different angles, be open to receive revelations about their ways of working.

And if you haven't yet found your path and feel drawn to the tantric Goddess Tradition, you may be interested in the 7 weeks program "INITIATION. Preparing the Temple. Inviting the Goddess." It provides you with the foundations of living a lifestyle supportive of Sadhana, initiates you into the foundational practices and introduces you to the Goddess in Her many forms.

It provides you with the foundation to establish an intimate inner bond with the Mother of Creation who is your very own inner Self. It gets you started on this path of deep inner nourishment, that will increase your confidence in life and in yourself, your courage to express yourself creatively, follow your dharmic path and shine your unique light.

3.) STAY CONNECTED TO A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

I personally find it extremely supportive of my sadhana to stay connected to sources of inspiration. Most of us live in an environment that does not reflect our spiritual inclinations. In order to be able to hold a high energetic vibration amidst the world, it is very beneficial to be connected to likeminded souls, have exchange with a group of practitioners who are on the same or on a similar path, read authentic scriptures and listen to talks of experienced teachers and guides

It is a necessity for me to keep feeding my Sadhana by including these things into my life on a regular basis. This is what keeps my practice fresh and allows me to engage in it with renewed inspiration and commitment.

4.) WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE LET THE PRACTICE SLIP AWAY

There is a very simple answer to that: Start again.

There is absolutely no benefit in beating yourself up, feeling ashamed, indulging in selfblame or feeling like a failure. It is just another trap of the ego that will make you lose more time and prolong the state of seperation from the source.

Do not expect perfection of yourself. Allowing yourself to be imperfect is a form of humility. Your essence is always flawless, whole and perfect. But the human experience means having to navigate the material world of opposits, light and shadow, highs and lows, varying influences that we can't contoll – seasons, environments, people, astrological transits, karmas from pastlives or our ancestors, childhood conditioning, health issues, hormonal changes, the list is endless.

The Divine Lila, the play of Life is nothing but Lalita Ambika, the Goddess in Her playful form, experiencing and tasting all possible states, shades and flavours of existence. Ultimately Tantra teaches us to not only accept, but welcome and enjoy all experiences of life as manifestations of the Goddess.

Allow yourself to stay playful and curious, and acknowledge that it is Her play and that not everything is in your hands.

Divine Mother doesn't judge. Infact the longing that you feel within yourself to come back home is HER longing.

When Sri Anandamayi Ma was asked about the relationship between our own effort and Divine Grace she used to reply that we need to continue trying to make a conscious effort until we realize that we actually can't do anything out of our own power. The moment we realize that everything that happens or doesnt happen is Divine will and when we become a willing instrument in the hands of the Divine, Grace begins to flow.



Devi's Daughters



SHAKTA TANTRA AYURVEDA YOGA JYOTISH

