

The Lakshmi Lamp - Its Significance.

LIGHT A LAMP - Brighten your life.



Oil lamps have represented spirit and spiritual ideas since ancient times. They have continued to burn in temples, cathedrals, mosques, synagogues, churches, and other locations where the faithful gather for worship, prayer or meditation. The lamp contains an oil and a wick and, when lit, it provides a source of life for several hours or even days. The light produced by the lamp may illustrate the illumination provided by spiritual insight, the presence of divinity or it may symbolize the continuation of life. Regardless of its meaning, the oil lamp has a place in all of the world's major religions.

The Oil Lamp in Hinduism is considered as a female form of God. In India the Oil Lamp represents Mother Lakshmi. The Lakshmi Lamp that's used in most Hindu homes in South Africa is called the **Gaja Lakshmi Lamp** (like the picture above). In Hindu Dharma, Elephants are symbols of wealth. Gaja-Lakshmi, that is the Lakshmi form with elephants, is one of the most significant aspects of Mother Lakshmi. In this aspect, Ma is depicted seated on a lotus, flanked on both side by an elephant (gaja). Ma is shown as seated in Padma-asana (lotus position) yogic posture, and has four arms. In each of Her upper pair of arms, She carries a lotus, and the lower hands are in ABHYA i.e the gesture of reassurance and safety, is a hand pose, which dispels fear and accords divine protection and bliss to Her devotee, and varada-mudra i.e. a gesture by the hand and symbolizes dispensing of boons. For varada-mudra, the left hand is used. It is held out, with Her palm uppermost and the fingers pointing downwards. The elephants flanking Ma are shown as pouring water from their trunk over Ma Lakshmi. This aspect like most other aspects of Mother Lakshmi is representative of prosperity, good luck, and abundance; and the Gaja-Lakshmi motifs are very common in Hindu iconography.

The lamp also signifies light over darkness. So when you are in a prayer room or temple, you are trying to clear your clouded mind, and hence, the lighting of lamp is symbolic. Light symbolizes the absence of darkness and unhappiness and shows us a way out of problems, difficulties and tensions and brings us luck, wealth and happiness. Light a lamp daily **AND** drive out evil and invite different kinds of all conceivable wealth to yourself and your home.

LIGHT is the first and foremost manifestation of God. In India, no function starts without lighting a lamp first. Lighting a lamp is like an invitation to God to come and bless your family and yourself. GOD follows light and light follows GOD. Before you start to say your prayer, light a lamp and then pray. Light a lamp daily to drive away the evil and darkness in you and around you as well as it will drive out your ignorance, fear, misery, and suffering bringing in your life peace, prosperity and well-being. Light will help you realize the truth. For example in darkness, something that comes across your feet may frighten you because that could be a snake but come light you will realize that you have mistaken a rope for a snake and that your fear disappears.

In the Srimad Bhagavatam it's mentioned that Lakshmi Devi who is sought by the Devi's and Devas, brahmanas, Vaishnavas and everyone else always engages in rendering service to the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu. Mother Lakshmi is well known for always massaging the lotus feet of Lord Narayana. (**Do note:-** Lord Vishnu has many other names like Narayan, Nrsimhadeva, Varaha, Venkateshwara etc). She is an ideal wife because she takes care of Lord Narayana in every detail. She takes care not only of His lotus feet but of the household affairs of the Lord as well. She cooks nice food preparations for Him, fans Him while He eats, sets His bed and sitting places in the right order. In this way She is always engaged in the service of the Lord.

Riches come from Mother Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, and the Goddess of fortune is the property of Lord Narayana, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The goddess of fortune cannot stay anywhere but by the side of Lord Narayana; therefore another name for her is Chanchala – restless. She cannot be peaceful unless she is in the company of her husband, Lord Narayana. For example, Lakshmi Devi as Sita Devi was carried away by the materialistic demon Ravana. Ravana kidnapped Sita-devi, the goddess of fortune belonging to Lord Raam. As a result, Ravana's entire family, opulence and kingdom were smashed and destroyed, and Sita-devi, the goddess of fortune, was recovered from his clutches and reunited with Lord Raam. So from this example we can see that if one wants to enjoy Mother Lakshmi the way Ravana did, the laws of nature will vanquish one, and whatever few possessions one has it will be taken away. Finally death will take everything away from him or her.



Shree-Shree Lakshmi-Narayana seated on Shree Garudaji

Mother Lakshmi is the Lord's very precious potency. She is the constant companion of Lord Narayana; They remain together constantly. One cannot keep Mother Lakshmi in one's home without Lord Narayana. To think that one can do so is very dangerous. To keep Mother Lakshmi, or the riches of the Lord, without the service of Lord Narayana is always dangerous, for then she becomes the illusory energy (*Maya*). With Lord Narayana however, she is the spiritual energy (*Yoga-Maya*).

So next to your lamp you must keep a small Murti or a Picture of Lord Vishnu or Narayana – like below.



While you face Shree Lakshmi Narayana,
The Lamp is on the right and Lord Narayana is on the left.

The Hindu way of life accords great significance and importance to DEEPARADHANA or lighting of lamps. It lays down clear procedures to be followed. It is not the electric lamps that are used in the sanctum sanctorum of HINDU temples in India. Oil Lamps must be made of earthen mud, brass or gold. The lamp holders must NOT be made of stainless steel or steel.

There are the natural oils like sesame seed oil, castor oil and cow ghee etc that are used in the receptacle of the lamp. First let's analyse the benefits that's accrued by using different oils for lighting lamps:

Cow's ghee: - Ensures radiance and heavenly bliss, prosperity, health and happiness.

Gingerly oil or sesame (Til) oil: - Ensures removal of obstacles and evil effects that haunt you.

Castor oil: - Ensures fame, happy family life, and to gain a devotional mind set.

So the question will arise, can we combine all three of the above viz. the Castor oil, Til Oil and the Cow Ghee to receive the benefits of all three liquids? Yes you can.

Now let's analyse the effects of lighting lamps in different directions-- North, East, West and South.

North: - You will be blessed with 8 kinds of wealth or Ashta-ishwaryas. Ensures success in everything you do. FYI the 8 Lakshmi forms are as follows: - **Adi Lakshmi** (The main goddess), **Dhanya Lakshmi** (Granary wealth), **Dhairya Lakshmi** (Wealth of patience), **Gaja Lakshmi** (Elephants, symbols of wealth), **Santana Lakshmi** (Wealth of progeny), **Vijaya Lakshmi** (Wealth of victory), **Vidya Lakshmi** (Wealth of knowledge), **Dhana Lakshmi** (Monetary wealth).

East: - It will ensure good health and peace of mind.

West: - It will free you from debts and ensure victory over negative forces.

South: - Never place and light a lamp in the south direction. It will bring about all things inauspicious. A strict NO-NO...

Some may ask can one turn the lamp in the different directions during the day to receive all the benefits? Yes you can, I don't see a problem with that. It's just after a while one may find it rather cumbersome...

So, to make a bit easier to understand, it's always best to keep the lamp and prayer place in the eastern direction. When you face the sun in the morning the lamp's back will be against the sun and you will be facing the lamp... like below...



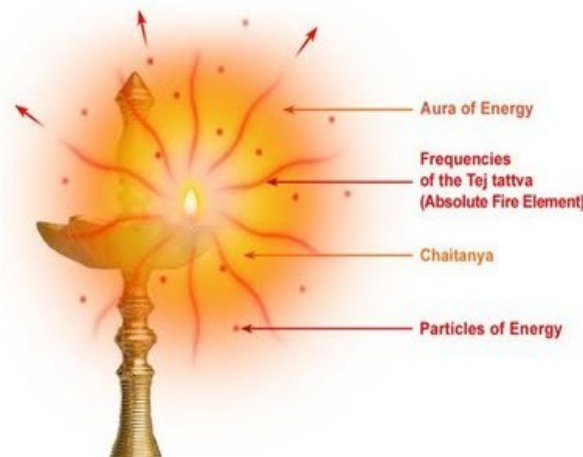
From the above picture let's analyse each article.

Firstly the lamp represents Mother Lakshmi i.e. Srimati Radharani. It's from Srimati Radharani and Lord Krishna that everything emanates. Our website www.dipika.org.za was named after our Supreme Mother Radha from whose Divine lotus feet that lights up the material and spiritual worlds. Mother Lakshmi is an amazing mother who deeply cares about us, loves us, preserves us and sustains us.

Next to Mother Lakshmi (the lamp) is her husband Shree Narayana (Vishnu). Without Lord Narayana next to her, Mother Lakshmi will **NEVER** stay in your house as earlier stated in this article.

Next to the lamp is a small bowl of white rice. Another name for Mother Lakshmi is Annadevi (the Mother in charge of grains). Grains represents prosperity of all sorts, auspiciousness, growth, abundance and progress in the Hindu tradition. Mother Lakshmi is not only the mother of money, rather she is the Mother of abundance of all kinds...

The Wick and the Light:- The wick represents the ego and our negative tendencies and when the wick is lit it expels darkness, removes doubt and the negative tendencies in you slowly gets exhausted and the ego too finally perishes. The flame of a lamp always burns upwards. Similarly we should acquire such knowledge as to take us towards higher ideals.



The Liquid in the Lamp:- Depending on your desire the Cow's ghee: - Ensures radiance and heavenly bliss, prosperity, health and happiness. Gingerly oil or sesame (Til) oil: - Ensures removal of obstacles and evil effects that haunt you. Castor oil: - Ensures fame, happy family life, and to gain a devotional mind set.

The Bell:- The bell produces a very auspicious sound which when sounded keeps the mind controlled. There should be auspiciousness within and without, to gain the vision of the Lord who is all-auspiciousness. An added significance of ringing the bell is that it helps drown any inauspicious or irrelevant noises and comments that might disturb or distract the worshippers in their devotional ardour, concentration and inner peace.

The Water in the Lota:- Represents the breath of life (About 60% of the human body consists of water). The water is for the Divine couple to consume as well and thus that water becomes blessed water (prashad). The water should be changed daily. You can add the water in your kettle or in your breakfast meal or add the water to your plants.

The Lamp marked with Red Sindhoor: - Red is a symbol of Lakshmi Devi. Red is the colour which is considered the symbol of happiness, love and marriage in Hinduism. Most Hindi brides wear a red colour attire at the time of her wedding. So, Sindhoor being red again works as a very symbolic element for power and honour.

(This is optional but this is for those who want to know the mantra while lighting the lamp. As you light the lamp chant this following mantra and pray:

Deepajyothi parabrahma
Deepa sarva tamopahaha
Deepena saadhyate saram
Sandhyaa deepo namostute

I prostrate to the lamp; whose light is the Knowledge Principle (the Supreme Lord), which removes the darkness of ignorance and by which all can be achieved in life.

Questions and Answers on the Lakshmi Oil Lamp

Question: - Can I light my Lakshmi Lamp when a child is born and when a person passes on?

Answer:- IN DEATH:- In Death the offering of Surya jal, lighting of deeyas, performing aartee and other forms of daily poojaa which constitute one's nityakarma (daily worship) should suggestedly be suspended during the 10 days period after the cremation of a person. But I humbly advise to resume worship once the 12/13th day puja has been completed. This excludes, however, the single deeya that is kept lit throughout the 12 day period in the name of the departed. Just a word of thought to ponder over... while one may say that if we can switch on the lights at home then why not light the Lamp at one's home. Good point but we do have the lamp which is lit not just for a few hours rather for 12 continuous days in a room or a designated area in a southerly direction... This lamp is lit because the soul now exists in darkness after death, and the soul is very confused and the Deeya is lit to provide a guiding light for the soul until the completion of the 12/13th days prayers.

BIRTH OF A CHILD:- Yes the family can still light their lamp even if a baby is born in that house. Only the mother cannot perform any puja as such as instructed by Lord Vishnu in the Garuda Purana. But remember, excluding the mother, the father and the family still continue with the daily prayers. This is proof from the Garuda Purana. Preta Kanda Chapter 29 verses 9, 11& 12 Lord Vishnu said "In impurity accruing from birth, the rules are less strict. The mother is purified after 10 days and the father just after taking a bath. In birth the relatives incur no impurity. Impurity attaches to parents alone. Primarily, it is the mother who becomes impure. The Father is purified by the touch of water alone. In birth or death O Garuda, impurity lasts only for 10 days."

Question: - If I have my menstrual cycle can I still light my Lakshmi Lamp?

Answer: - Generally in Hindu customs this is not allowed. This is an unnecessary touchy subject on which most have their own opinions on. Many females feel embarrassed to let anybody know about their unclean period. But why should they. It's a gift from God. It's a cleansing time. On the other hand when a female has her period cycle there are many restrictions. This is not to alienate a woman; rather it is from a health and cleanliness point of view. But this topic has two sides and both sides have reasons and both are correct at the same time. But we, as Hindus must look to evolve like the other religions have, otherwise we shall perish very soon and for this we have to look at each case individually. What happens in the case when a devout Hindu female who is living alone has no one to light the lamp when she is not

available. Then what happens? Some females have their period cycle for over 2 weeks. If one has a problem with this question then answer this. Many weddings and funerals are performed with the female still in her cycle period. Are you going to stop the wedding or funeral – of course not. Let's rise up from these stubborn beliefs and be practical. **My take on this** - have a hurdi bath and then light your lamp.

Question: - Can men, unmarried woman or a widow light the Lakshmi Lamp?

Answer: - Yes this is perfectly fine as lighting of a lamp is not confined to just married women. I advise all families that they should have turns, so everyone has the blessings of lighting the lamp.

Question:- Can I light my Lakshmi Lamp when a person/child has measles?

Answer:- Yes this perfectly fine.

Question:- Do we light the lamp once or twice a day?

Answer:- After sunrise one should light one's lamp. And if you can, light your lamp in the evening as well. But it's not compulsory to light your Lakshmi Lamp twice a day – just once is sufficient.

Question:- How often is one supposed to wash one's Lakshmi Lamp?

Answer:- Traditionally one washes and cleans one Lakshmi Lamp on a Friday. If you can afford the time you can wash and clean your lamp more than once a week, but for many due to the times and circumstances we live in, once a week is generally the norm.

Question:- When you get your Lakshmi lamp what must you do first?

Answer:- Place the new Lamp in a receptacle. Now wash the new lamp with Hurdi (turmeric) water thoroughly, and then with warm milk+water, and finally with warm water. Then wipe your lamp with a new soft cloth (that will in future be used only for this specific purpose). Wipe your lamp and then in a small saucer add some Red Sindhoor, add water to make a moist paste and now decorate the lamp with Sindhoor as we have in the pictures above. Many women use a match stick to decorate the lamp with the Sindhoor.

Question: - What do I do with the old Lakshmi Lamp when it has some hole in it or it starts to leak the liquid?

Answer: - Well this is another controversial subject but if you are not going to use your old lamp you can ask you local temple if they can keep it. There are however two controversial ways of disposing your old lamp that's being followed for years in South Africa. The popular way is disposing of the old lamp in a river and the less favoured one is burying the old lamp in the ground.

Question: - What to do with the old rice next to the Lakshmi Lamp?

Answer: - Generally on a Friday when the lamp is being cleaned and washed you can replace the old rice with fresh rice and the old rice you can keep a few grains in your rice container and the rest offer this to the birds to eat...

Question: - What do I do if I need to go out for a while. Can I put my Lakshmi Lamp off?

Answer: - When the Lamp is lit its not recommended you put the light (fire) off, but

what you can do it with a match stick bring down the wick a little and after a few minutes it will go off by itself.

Question: - When washing ones lamp, the Sindhoor that was on the lamp is now washed off in a receptacle, so what must be done to that water mixed with the Sindhoor?

Answer: - You can wash the lamp first in a receptacle (deep bowl) and then dispose of that water in one's garden.

So, by following these tips, light up your lamp and reap the benefits.

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