

My Extraordinary Experiences With Sri Durga Mata  
By Karen Dardick

BEFORE I MET HER

In my youth, I was a Roman Catholic. Although my parents were, too, they weren't particularly religious and we went to church, as a family, just on Christmas and Easter. But I went every Sunday because even as a child, I loved God and also the Blessed Virgin Mary. When I was 12-years-old, I read a book about the Little Flower, St. Therese of Liseaux. As I read, I felt an overwhelming, powerful hunger in my heart to know such a person. "Oh God, please let me meet a saint," I said aloud.

Then years passed and when I was in college, my intellect took hold and I became an agnostic. But I was troubled by solving the problems inherent in life. What is the meaning of life? What are we supposed to do with our lives? I majored in philosophy and minored in religion while I studied at Vassar College. However, I always wanted some type of career and realized that the studies I enjoyed would not prepare me for any career other than teaching—not something I wanted to do.

I transferred to the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

Still an agnostic, I applied myself to my studies. Like everyone else, I enjoyed dating. And one of the young men I dated was a devout Catholic, with conservative leanings. We had many intense discussions about religion because he was not happy with my

agnostic views. One night, while we were sipping beer at a local bar, he became quiet. I asked what he was doing and replied that he was praying for me.

“Stop that,” I said vehemently. “I don’t want your prayers.”

But that was the start of a remarkable transformation for me. A few days later, I was in my room in my sorority house, and suddenly, an intensely strong feeling of great love, peace and joy flooded my being. I knew, without a doubt, that God IS, that God is Love and I was happier than I had ever experienced.

When I told the young man what had happened, he was overjoyed. I returned to the Catholic Church, attended daily Mass and joined the Legion of Mary. We dated for a year or so, then he returned to his home country (he was a foreign student) and I moved to California.

My parents had moved to Los Angeles while I was still in college, and when I visited them one Christmas, I experienced sunshine and warm temperatures instead of the freezing cold in Chicago. So I moved to Los Angeles, found a job as an assistant editor at Modern Maturity Magazine, and continued with my Catholic faith. But the intense love and peace that I had experienced that transforming day in my sorority room had gradually ebbed away. I was desperately seeking how to regain it, and the Catholic faith did not do it for me.

That changed when I had another remarkable event and met the woman who introduced me to Self-Realization Fellowship. I had always loved horses and riding. Living in New York City, I was unable to own a horse. When I went to college, my father offered me the choice of a car or a horse and I chose the car. Once I had a job and my own income, I remembered how much I loved riding and started taking lessons at a riding academy that offered the riding style I enjoyed, Saddleseat, riding American Saddlebred horses. These elegant horses were not as popular on the West Coast as on the East so the stable was an hour’s drive away. I loved it so much that, over time I spent so much time there, bought a

horse, and wanted to make it my life.

Meanwhile, the owner talked about philosophy and became a very strong influence in my life, so much so that I quit my job, moved into a simple room in the stable, and devoted myself to horses.

Cleaning stalls, teaching riding, cleaning tack, I loved it all.

TL talked a great deal about SRF and encouraged me to go to one of the services. I went to the church in Hollywood, and when I walked in, it seemed strange as it was so different from the Catholic churches with which I was familiar. Instead of a tabernacle, or statues of saints, the altar, decorated with a lovely flower arrangement, consisted of photographs, the only one recognizable to me was Jesus Christ. What made a strong impact on me was the minister conducting the service, which consisted of a bit of meditation, some singing of songs (later I learned they are termed chants) and a lengthy lecture. He smiled so broadly and radiated such happiness that I thought, he has what I want, so there must be something to this teaching. The atmosphere in the small church was one of great peace and silence. People weren't talking. I saw that they were meditating and then when the minister spoke, they seemed to be deeply concentrating. I enrolled in the SRF lessons and tried to meditate. And here is where I hit a big dilemma. When I sat upright in my chair in the recommended meditation posture, closed my eyes and tried to do the basic technique, I felt that I was falling into some kind of a tunnel. I didn't like the sensation at all! Whenever I tried to meditate, the same thing happened, so I went to one of the ministers at the Hollywood Temple for advice. He wasn't able to explain what was happening to me, but urged me to continue to meditate for my own good. I walked away very dissatisfied and stopped meditating and stopped taking the lessons.

Meanwhile, my life on the ranch had turned from happy to extremely upsetting. TL was a very unhappy, controlling woman but I had come to rely on her and I trusted that she had my best

interests at heart. I was very wrong! By 1977, I felt that I was trapped in a situation I couldn't fix. When I first moved into the ranch in 1970, I looked at a picture she had of Paramahansa Yogananda on her desk. As I gazed at it, I thought, "I don't know him, he is not my Guru. TL is my guru." But she was not the spiritual leader she set herself up to be.

One day, September, 1977, I did an errand for her that took me to a nearby health food store. I saw a book, *How to Meditate*, written by Sebastian Temple. I had heard of him because he was a pioneer in writing and singing Catholic folk music used in masses. I had wanted to try meditating again, and I saw that he had inscribed his book to his Guru, Paramahansa Yogananda and to his spiritual counselor, Sri Durga Mata. I got the book, read it and felt it was an answer to my prayers. I went back to the store to tell him how much his book helped me. He was gracious, very pleased and said, "I'll call my spiritual counselor; perhaps she will counsel you." He telephoned her immediately and she agreed that she would meet me. He told me that I had "great good karma", gave me his card with her phone number, and said I was to call and make an appointment. I took the card, but thought it won't do any good to call. TL will never let me go see her as I had so many responsibilities at the ranch.

## I MEET DURGA MA

That night, I had a dream that changed my life. It is as vivid to me now as it was all those years ago, because it was a true superconscious vision. In my dream, I was in front of a tall door but there wasn't a structure. I, along with the door, were in a shimmering blue sky. The door opened, and I looked up into the face of a woman of great beauty. Her skin was like alabaster; her

flowing robes were blue, and I could see the spiritual eye in her forehead pulsating with energy. She smiled at me without saying a word. I said, "I couldn't wait to call you; I had to see you now. "Without saying anything, she smiled even more and from her came wave after wave of divine love. The love permeated my being, similar to the experience I had had in college when I had the experience of God. I woke up, still feeling that great love, and resolved to meet this Durga Ma, for I had been longing for that kind of love all my life.

I did call, made an appointment, and returned to the store to tell Sebastian this extraordinary event. He urged me to write it down and he said he was going to see Durga Ma for his counseling and would show it to her.

I didn't tell the others at the ranch, for I knew they would not like or understand what was happening. I went to the SRF headquarters at Mt. Washington, and was met by a kindly nun named Sister Brinda. She escorted me up the stairs to Durga Ma's apartment on the fourth floor. When she opened the door, I was surprised that Durga Ma didn't resemble the woman in my dream. Instead of being so tall that I had to look up at her, she was short, approximately 5-feet. I could feel her sweetness but I was bewildered. She led me into the room that served as both bedroom and living room. In one corner was a daybed, made to look like a sofa. Two upholstered chairs were in one corner, a desk occupied the center, and several other chairs were on the other side. We sat in the chairs while she asked what she could do for me. I started to tell her that I was having trouble meditating. When she asked if I had the Kriya Yoga technique, I said no, I had not and we discussed why I had stopped the lessons and meditating. Then she looked very sternly at me and asked about the woman, TL, I had mentioned.

She spoke severely and said, "You are following a false guru". I was shocked as I had not told anyone about that decision I had

made in 1970. We talked about my life at the ranch, the inherent problems I faced there, and she said it was time for me to leave. I protested that I had many responsibilities, animals in my care, and the like. She didn't argue. She merely said, "Tell them you want Kriya yoga."

We talked more, and I expressed to her that she didn't look like the woman in my dream. She smiled and said, "You saw my soul". We talked for an hour or more and then I left to return to the ranch. She said she would see me in a week and to make another appointment.

When I returned to the ranch and told TL what I had experienced, as I had expected she became furious. "I didn't tell you that you could meet this woman", she raged. As she continued to fume, I saw pure evil in her eyes. I realized that I had to move out, leaving behind horses and other animals that I loved because my spiritual life meant more.

I had been working as a secretary for several years so when I went to work the following day, I phoned Sebastian to tell him what had happened and he phoned Durga Ma who said that I was to come up to meet with her. I did so (on my lunch break) and she said it was time for me to leave. And so I did that day, only to return to gather a few belongings. My life took a very dramatic turn for the better.

In subsequent months, I had another dream of the woman who had poured out such love. By then, studying the SRF teachings, I realized that my dream was of Divine Mother. For in the second dream, I saw her again and this time, I was a sphere of golden light. We were in the same blue sky location, looking at planet Earth. I said, "Divine Mother, why am I on Earth?"

She replied, "To work on your intensity."

By this time, I understood that my initial dream was of Divine Mother, too, and I was very blessed to meet her in the form of Durga Mata.

## AS MY SPIRITUAL MOTHER

When I left the ranch, Sebastian arranged for me to stay with a woman friend of his who also went to Durga Ma for counseling. Janice was so very kind and I spent several weeks with her while I sorted out my life. I continued with the job I had, found an apartment near the Hollywood Temple, and continued to see Durga Ma for intense counseling. Soon after I met Janice, she explained that Durga Ma was spiritual mother to several of the people she counseled. She suggested that I ask her to be my spiritual mother. I thought what a good idea! If this remarkable, loving, wise woman would be MY spiritual mother, I would be so very happy. So when I went to see her, I did what was suggested and asked “Will you be my spiritual mother for now and all eternity?” She leaned forward in her chair, and intently looked at me with her incredible eyes. I felt that she was seeing all that I had been and would become with the help of her and Master.

When she replied, “yes”, a thrill penetrated to the core of my being.

## OF GOD AND GURU

Because of my unusual introduction to Durga Ma, I trusted her implicitly and knew that she had a direct link with God and Guru. It took me awhile to come to this understanding. In the early days of counseling with her, she would say something important, and then say, “now listen, this is Master speaking.” Soon after meeting her, I told her of the experience of God that I had while in college. I was searching for that again and came to understand that Self-Realization Fellowship would lead me to what I was seeking. I asked her if I could become a nun in the SRF order, but she said, “No, Master needs workers in the world.”

Her guidance was to live the life of a renunciate, while dedicating

one's life to God and Guru. She emphasized that instead of working for money, work to please God, to be "in the world, but not of it".

Every time I went up the stairs at SRF, I felt as though I was going to Heaven. Being in her presence, I was filled with love and joy. I recalled when I was young and had prayed to meet a saint that God answered my prayer by bringing me to Durga Ma. Not that she ever agreed with me when I called her a saint. She said only God knows who are his saints and that they hide behind their naturalness. But over the years, I had additional superconscious dreams that verified my thoughts of her sanctity.

One such dream was when I was in the blue sky area and saw Divine Mother holding the baby Jesus. She smiled at me as I said, "Oh what a beautiful baby! May I hold him? She nodded and as I reached out my arms to him, I said, "Oh but he is not my Guru, Paramahansa Yogananda is!" She laughed with a sweet tinkling laughter and said, "They are one and the same." I awoke to a feeling of great love and joy. Durga Ma telephoned me that day and I started to tell her about my dream. Before I could tell her what Divine Mother said, Ma Durga laughed the exact same laugh as Divine Mother and Ma Durga said, "They are one and the same".

It was extraordinary but by that time, nothing Ma Durga did or said could surprise me because I KNEW that she was one with God.

## SHE MADE MASTER REAL TO ME

From the very beginning of my association with Durga Ma, she directed my efforts to become closer and closer to Paramahansa Yogananda. She often said, don't put him on a pedestal because that puts him out of reach. Make him part of my everyday life—talk to him, visualize holding his hand (he had small, pudgy hands



she added). Set a place at the table for him and visualize him there. Whatever technique works, do it. With her help, he became more and more real to me, so much so that I had some superconscious dreams of him and experienced such divine love that I couldn't absorb it all. When I expressed that to Durga Ma, she explained that we have to expand our consciousness and this we do through meditation and chanting. She was so much in tune with Master that she would often say, "Pay attention now, this is Master talking." Perhaps that was why I felt such strong divine love emanating from her.

One day we talked about bringing Master into our lives in every way. She smiled sweetly and said "He is never apart from me". It was in this context that she was explaining that by killing our egos, we become empty shells for Master. And she had done so.

Another time we were discussing that our essential soul nature is reason and feeling—reason to know that we are feeling. The soul incarnates as male, to develop pure reason, and female, to develop pure feeling. But the negative aspect of that is cold intellectualism in males and emotionalism in females. So the soul comes back again and again until the balance of pure reason and pure feeling is achieved. She explained that the gender in which one attains God, or Self-realization, remains the same for future incarnations. She said "I was a woman before and I will be a woman for incarnations to come." By this, I knew she meant that she had attained Self-realization before this current incarnation. And since she will come again and again when Master incarnates, she will be a woman in those incarnations. She will return voluntarily, unlike those of us whose desires for material and sense things will cause us to incarnate until those desires end.

When I said that I didn't want to come back to this earth because it is such a painful place, she remarked, "As long as you have God, what difference does it make where you are?"

## THE MIRACLE OF MY MOTHER'S DEATH

I had loved my mother deeply and as a child, often told her she was my best friend. But unfortunately, she was deeply unhappy and was an alcoholic. I only realized that when I went to college and discovered that my parents weren't like those of my college friends, My businessman father also drank heavily, but they both considered that three-martini lunches and daily drinks before evening dinner was what was appropriate for sophisticated people. I had followed their example and knew it was destroying me. For years, I stopped associating with them while I tried to straighten out my own life. Durga Ma was instrumental in helping me achieve a better, though still distant, relationship with them. By this time, they had moved back to New York City for my father's business, and I visited them occasionally. Mother was even deeper into alcoholism at that point. During her life, she had developed several types of cancer and finally was dying from bone cancer. When my father phoned me, March, 1988 to say that she was dying, I really didn't want to go see her before she died. Too many painful memories haunted me and I thought I would wait to go to her funeral as she had few friends at that point.

When I asked Durga Ma what I should do, she wouldn't give me an answer and encouraged me to pray and ask Master's help.

I did. I prayed fervently in the chapel at SRF Mother Center just before going to see Durga Ma for a counseling session. To my shock, I heard Master's voice in my head saying "I am giving you a wonderful spiritual opportunity. Take advantage of it."

I asked Durga Ma if this was real, and she said yes, I had asked Master for help and he gave it.

I was on a plane the next day. Mother had been in hospice care for months, but still was living in their mid-town Manhattan apartment. She had always been afraid of dying, so my father did

not tell her that she was very terminal. He had left the apartment and I sat on the bed near my mother and held her hand. She asked me if she was dying. I said, “Yes, Mother, you are. Are you afraid?”

She said that she was not, and ready to go, and asked for a garnet cross that she owned. I placed it around her neck and as we sat, holding hands, the most beautiful divine love poured back and forth between us. It was a holy experience, as promised by Master. She said, “This is just like the old times” and was very happy.

The next morning, she was so sick that she had to go to the hospice facility where nurses took care of her. Shortly after that, she went into a coma. Meanwhile, Durga Ma had asked me to call and keep her informed of my mother’s condition. I explained that she had gone into a coma, doctors didn’t know how long the situation would continue. Durga Ma said, “I will pray for your mother.” Within minutes, with family around her holding her hand and giving her love, she gradually stopped breathing and peacefully died.

When I returned to Los Angeles and went to see Durga Ma, I expressed my gratitude for her help. She told me that my mother really didn’t want to die and that’s why she entered a coma. She also said that Master was with her when she died and ushered her into the astral. I was shocked because my mother was a lapsed Catholic and an alcoholic, so why would Master do that. She replied, “He did it for you because you loved your mother.”

Mixed emotions swirled through me—intense gratitude towards my great Guru, and to my holy Spiritual Mother for her intercession, and regret that I did not feel Master’s presence. I decided to dedicate my life even more to Master and God. I share this story because it shows how God and Guru are always with us, even if we don’t know this, and how they love and guide, not only

us, but those whom we love.

And once again, this remarkable episode showed me that Durga Ma and Master were in divine communion.

That Mother's Day, I had the opportunity be with Durga Ma (I had taken her a gift) and we talked about my mother and her unhappy life. Durga Ma said, "She is happy now." I replied, "I hope so" and she answered in a very emphatic tone, "I KNOW SO."

Once again, I didn't doubt her and knew she spoke truth. It was very consoling to me.

#### DURGA MA'S PASSING.

In the latter years of her life, she was more in seclusion and I was blessed to be able to visit her during the years when she stopped counseling most people and retired from organizational work.

Often our visits were more social than serious. By this time, she had given us so much counseling that we were expected to develop our intuition and attunement with Master. I cherished those visits that became weekly in her last year on this earth. Before she passed, I had asked her to come to me when she passed out of her body so I could experience her before she departed to the high reaches of Heaven where I expected her to go. (In the Autobiography of a Yogi, Sri Yukteswar describes the high astral planets, including Hiranyaloka where he is the savior there. He said that only those who attained nirbikalpa Samadhi while on Earth could go there, and Master and his great disciples would be there. I feel that Durga Ma is included in that exalted group.)

Sister Brinda phoned me to say "Ma Durga has passed". I looked around, sure that I would see her transfigured form. But I did not. I stood before my favorite photograph of her, the one where her eyes intensely gazed, and poured out my heart in sobbing phrases. "You left me! You didn't come! You said you would come!" And then I felt her response—a wonderful divine love flooded my heart, just like that time in college when I knew God is real. That feeling remained with me for weeks. She came to me in the way that she

knew would be best for me and had often told me that “feeling is greater than seeing.”

But I still dreaded attending her Ascension Service, led by the SRF President, Sri Daya Mata. It was held in the chapel at Mother Center, attended by the monks and nuns of the SRF order and lay people who knew Durga Ma. I was glad that I was included, but thought that it would be a very sad occasion for me. But again, things were different than I had expected.

When I entered the chapel, I felt as though I had entered a chamber of stillness—intense stillness that I had never experienced before or since. It was profound. I thought of the biblical quote “Be still and know that I am God.” This is the stillness for which we strive in meditation—the stillness that envelopes us in God.

Durga Ma had given instructions as to the format she wanted at her service, including playing the recording of her chanting “Divine Love Sorrows” which Master had her do at every Christmas meditation. I listened to her voice, I listened to Sri Daya Mata as she talked about Durga Ma and, along with the others, went forward to pronam before her flower-bedecked photo. The sense of stillness never left me. It was so beautiful that I remain in the chapel long after others had left as I didn’t want to lose that essence of stillness. It lasted for several weeks.

## HER LEGACY

I wish I could report that I hear her voice or see her in dreams frequently, but this is not so. I have heard her voice a few times. One was a month or so after her passing when I felt lonely and sad that I could no longer see her or hear her beloved voice, but I did have a vivid dream in which she asked me in a stern tone, “Are you keeping happy?!” In honesty, I had to reply no but that wasn’t the correct response. She always ended counseling sessions with the admonition—‘Be Happy! When you are happy, God is with you. When you are happy all the time, God is with you all the time.’”

And so life continues as I strive to follow her wise and loving counsel, knowing that God and Guru are bringing me what I need to learn and the opportunities for my spiritual growth.

She often told us that life is about winning our spiritual battles.

“God puts us on a battleground and when we win that battle, He puts us on another.”

But she also told us that God created us to be playmates and that we should be playful and joyful in life. It’s really very simple and we complicate life by overthinking. “Forget the past, think not of the future, and thank God for the present”, she said often, echoing Sri Yukteswar’s wisdom.

This recounting of some of the miracles I experienced with her is meant to encourage SRF devotees to follow this sacred path. I used to say to Durga Ma that I admired her so much and wanted to be like her, a beautiful balance of wisdom and divine love. She replied, “You all have the privilege to work as I did.”