

Durga Mata
The Second Star
in Yogananda's Heaven

Durga Mata (Florina Darling) is one of the “giant stars” among Yogananda’s constellation of disciples and is actually the “second female star” in his Heaven despite being comparatively undiscovered. The truth is, however, that her spiritual light outshone that of most of her peers, and she was closer to Yogananda (in terms of attunement to his consciousness) than almost anyone else, as we can see from his letter to her below, sent from Bombay (Mumbai) and dated June 24, 1936:



“Among my men disciples
Mr. Lynn [Rajasi Janakananda]
has the first seat in Heaven
and in my heart
and among my lady disciples
you will have the first seat with Sister [Gyanamata]
in Heaven and in my consciousness.”

Physically Durga Mata was tiny, “a little under five feet (1.50 m),” whilst her spiritual stature was that of a giant. We might, therefore, affectionately call her “Yogananda’s little giant star.”

Who was Durga Mata, nicknamed “Duj” by the Master, who also lovingly called her “my pal”? Who was that tiny lady who had “the first seat with Sister [Gyanamata] in Heaven” among all women disciples? And why did the public hear so relatively little about her if she really had attained such an exalted stature? Let’s begin telling her story by looking into the past.

Earlier incarnations

“Giant stars” like Durga Mata shine their light not only in this lifetime but repeatedly throughout many lifetimes. Yogananda revealed to Durga Mata three of her earlier incarnations (see her book, *Trilogy of Divine Love*):

- She lived with him in India, in a hermitage, where she was a temple dancer. Even then she was called “Ma Durga”. For Yogananda, the present life they shared together, as she writes, was simply a continuation of that previous one. In fact, Yogananda told others: “When I met her, I said to her, ‘You have come.’”
- In a past life she was “guillotined for the sake of religion,” placing her possibly in 18th-century France, perhaps as one of the *Martyrs of Compiègne*. At any rate, she felt that becoming a Sister was completely natural to her. She writes: “When I was a very young child, I was asked by one of my relatives what I wanted to be when I grew up. Without hesitation I answered, ‘I’m going to be a Sister.’”
- Yogananda told his disciples that he was Arjuna, Krishna’s foremost disciple. In that lifetime, Rajasi was his brother, Nakula. Durga Mata was with them too, as Yogananda revealed to her: “You were a woman. You have been a woman for a long time and you will continue to be, for a long time to come.”

As a linguistic aside: Durga Mata writes that at first Yogananda spelled Mr. Lynn's title *Rajarsi*. "Later he removed the 'r' (to make it *Rajasi*)." Therefore, in this article, in her honor, we shall use the spelling *Rajasi*, while otherwise we would maintain *Rajarsi*, since *Rajasi* is in fact a female name. In addition, Swami Kriyananda mentions that he heard how Yogananda pronounced the name, and it was clearly "Rajarsi".

Parents and family

In this lifetime, Durga Mata was born to parents who came from Canada and were of French descent. In fact, they hardly spoke any English. Her father was Joseph Adolphe Dufour (Oct. 15, 1864 - Feb. 20, 1957). Her mother was Lesieur Elizabeth Nault (Aug. 26, 1874 [some records say 1869] - Jan. 26, 1928), a strict and devout Catholic who went to mass every morning.



On Sunday Nov. 8, 1903, Durga Mata was born in Iron Mountain, Michigan (USA). During her childhood her family moved four times: in 1905 to Escanaba, Michigan (USA); in 1912 to St. Sault Marie, Ontario (Canada); in 1913 to Limoilue, Quebec (Canada); and in 1916 to Detroit (USA).



Moving to another city must have been a major undertaking, as the family was bigger than a soccer team: Durga Mata was the youngest of 10 children, having five older brothers and four older sisters: Ida, Arthur, Alcide, Frank, Victoria, Alice, Felix, Cecilia (she died aged 16), and Ernest.

When she was 15, she quit school after the 8th grade, which is why Yogananda wrote her: "Your behavior and work has pleased me most, and how could an uneducated one like you become so educated in everything. I have been the same way in life, reading very little, but writing much."

At the age of 19 she married Orta I. Darling, "a very fine man." The couple, however, stayed with Durga's parents, "and my greatest love continued to be for my mother." These words reveal the outstanding feature of her early life: an immensely strong bond with her mother, whom she called "my best friend," "my greatest love," and "my greatest attachment." Durga Mata writes: "My mother was my constant and only companion. She was all I needed and wanted as a friend, hence I never had a girlfriend."

Her constant fear was that her mother might die, even when she was in good health. That fear turned into bitter truth: her "greatest love" passed away when Durga Mata was only 24. One can imagine her emotional upheaval. But through that shock to the heart she finally found the "Great Universal Mother."

Her experience seems strikingly similar to that of Yogananda as a young boy, who likewise lost his beloved mother: a tragic but spiritually critical event which he describes in his *Autobiography of a Yogi*. "I loved Mother as my dearest friend on earth. Her solacing black eyes had been my surest refuge in the trifling tragedies of childhood." Following her death Yogananda "collapsed into an almost lifeless state." He recounts, "Years passed before any reconciliation entered my heart. Storming the very gates of heaven, my cries at last summoned the Divine Mother. Her words brought final healing to my suppurating wounds: 'It is I who have watched over thee, life after life, in the tenderness of many mothers! See in My gaze the two black eyes, the lost beautiful eyes, thou seekest!'"

In Yogananda's East-West magazine, Durga Mata, using her family name Florina Darling, describes her great loss, and final gain, in an article called *My Mother*, which, again, resembles Yogananda's poem, *Mother's Eyes*:

My Mother

I was greatly blessed in this life with an angelic earthly mother, whose charity helped many when in distress, whose sincerity won the hearts of all who knew her, whose cheerful nature gladdened the hearts of those who chanced to contact her, whose understanding cleared away sorrow from human minds, and whose wisdom dispelled darkness from many souls. Deep was her devotion to God.

Thankful am I to feel and know that no matter who came into my life, she was the only one who fully occupied the hive of my heart. Many seek truth for various reasons, but I heard that through certain definite technique for gaining Self-Realization one could in time learn to leave this body willingly and consciously, so my fear of losing my earthly mother drove me to seek this truth, not for my health nor for prosperity, but for the sole purpose that mother and I could go beyond the gates of this life together.



Two weeks after receiving this truth, God gave my mother the long-deserved rest, but He was gracious in His mercy and permitted me to see her joy in going to His Infinite Home. Shortly after her going, the great desire I had planned in my consciousness, that we should go together, came very near manifesting itself, but it wasn't to be.

In course of time, I met someone who reminded me of her. She too helped to wax this little hive, then bit by bit the old life slipped away, and I gave my life to the service of God. In the course of my service, I came in contact with many mothers. One would have hair like my earthly mother, another would have her eyes, still others her loving ways. The many reminded me of the one. But one day this realization came, to my great joy, that my earthly mother and all mothers had melted into one Great Universal Mother.

My earthly mother came to make this hive, others have helped to wax it in preparation for the Great Queen Mother. Now my heart cries: "Take full possession of this hive, o Divine Mother: fill Thou my mind with Thy wisdom, sit Thou on the throne of my soul with Thy luminous Presence. All that I have I give unto Thee. But, Mother, I ask you to leave a little nook in my heart unoccupied, just large enough for me to lay my offering of ever-increasing love at Thy Blue Lotus Feet.

- By Florina Darling

Meeting Yogananda (1927)

Durga Mata met Yogananda in December 19, 1927, just one month before her mother died. The Master, aged 34, had come to lecture at the auditorium of the City College, in Detroit. She was mesmerized: "We sat spellbound gazing upon the most beautiful man I had ever seen, in his orange robe and long black flowing hair on his shoulders, and his large lotus, dark,

expressive eyes.” It was a deep soul recognition: to that yogi she would dedicate her heart, her soul, and her entire being, as she had done in earlier lifetimes. She was, as we said, destined to become the second star in the Heaven of Yogananda’s female disciples.

It took her, however, two more years before she would join Yogananda in Los Angeles. Being a married woman, she still felt bound to her family. (Similarly, Sister Gyanamata, Yogananda’s “first female star”, had met her Master in 1924 but moved to Mount Washington in 1931).

At that time Brahmachari Nerode was the resident teacher of the Detroit Yogoda center. On January 5, 1928 – Yogananda’s birthday – he taught Durga Mata and her husband the Yogoda exercises and meditation techniques. She, the yogini of yore, assumed the lotus posture “as if I had known it all my life.” Her meditations took her right away into a deep state: “I felt a tremendous stillness come over me. I actually felt that my body was not made of flesh but of stone and I felt like a statue.” Durga Mata’s spiritual awakening had started.

On April 24, 1928, she saw Yogananda again in Detroit, and a third time in October 1929. This turned out to be the moment her starlight would begin to emerge: “After that lecture, he shook hands with the audience. When I shook hands with him, I told him that I was going to Los Angeles soon and he said, ‘When you go, you must come up to Mt. Washington to see us.’” This was exactly what she had been planning to do.

On her 26th birthday, on Nov. 8, 1929, Durga boarded a Greyhound bus to begin a long and meaningful journey: for five days and five nights she traveled without stopping, leaving her old life farther and farther behind. Finally, she reached Los Angeles.

For the first month her home was a YWCA, from where she visited Yogananda at Mount Washington. Brahmachari Nerode was living there now as well, having replaced Swami Dhirananda who had recently left.

On December 17, 1929 Durga Mata finally moved into what she describes as “my natural home, our blessed headquarters.” She had arrived at her glorious life destiny. Interestingly, that spacious building was far from crowded: only 15 or 16 people were living there at the time.

Durga Mata’s husband willingly let her go. Having realized the saintly soul of Durga Mata, he told Yogananda: “I knew that she could not stay in a worldly life, and if you will heal her body, I will willingly give her up, to dedicate her life to yours and God’s service.” It seems from her account that they never legally divorced. In fact, in official documents she continued to sign with his family name, “Darling”. Technically speaking, then, she became a married Sister. Whatever the case, “Mr. Darling remained the good, generous, and kind person he was, as he proved later to be.”

Life with Yogananda (1929-1952)

Moving into her new home marked the beginning of 22 blessed years of life with her Master, serving him and his mission with body, mind, and soul.

Perhaps one expression which best characterizes Durga Mata is “divine intensity”. She was a devotee with an extraordinary level of energy, resulting from her utter faith and devotion. Whatever she did, she did it with the greatest vigor. She is said to have had a “will of steel.” Her intensity came from the focus of her life, which was 100% dedicated to God and Guru, and to nothing else. Swami Kriyananda described her as “heroic.”



Her eyes were perhaps her most outstanding feature: they were blazing, magnetizing, piercing.

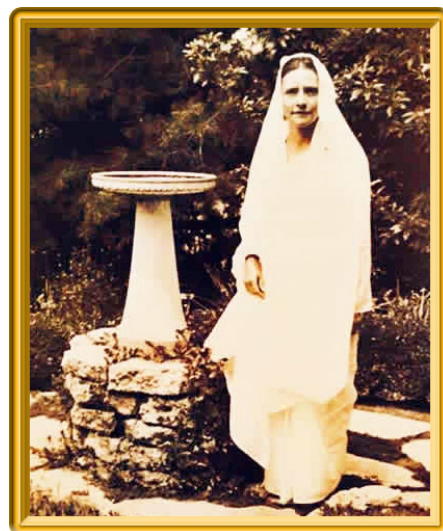
In addition, she had what Daya Mata described as a “can-do” spirit. Being highly practical, she served in various capacities. Her very first duty was to cook for Yogananda (just as in a previous lifetime). One may infer that she must have had the French gourmet touch, from his letter to her in 1936: “Of course, who could cook for me better than you, how I miss your services, but of course, you can't give up the helm you have undertaken.” (“Helm” signifying her role of responsibility during his 18-month trip to India.)

Sometimes she was assigned the oddest jobs. The most notable one was to “transplant” the body of the Master’s motorhome onto a new chassis; another time she gold-leaved the windows of the Hollywood Church, and when Yogananda asked her to paint Mount Washington she “fairly attacked” the walls. In addition, there were many other chores to be done, both great and small. Nothing could stop Durga Mata. Once she even ingeniously constructed a special mattress-extension for Yogananda, with “springs and all.”

Life at Mount Washington

These were still the SRF pioneering days, which means that it was a Spartan life. It was not monastic, however. The monastic order started only in 1931, and even then only a few members took vows. During 1930 and 1931 (the Depression years) nobody received any salary. Durga Mata and the others were, in other words, penniless. Following this period, everyone received just one dollar a week. In later years it became 5 dollars a month. By 1959 the “pocket money” had increased to a monthly allowance of 20 dollars.

In July 20, 1931, Yogananda initiated Gyanamata as a “Sister”, giving her publicly the vows of renunciation. This date may be considered the official birth of Yogananda’s monastic order. However, even before that date, Durga Mata and Karla Schramm (a film actress who had played the role of Jane in *Tarzan*) had privately taken the Sister vows from the Guru. Four months after Gyanamata’s vows, Daya Mata came to live at Mount Washington; they were joined the following year by Ananda Mata. All of these names can be considered to be the original members of Yogananda’s monastic order.



In 1930 Durga Mata’s brother, Ernest Dufour, and his wife came to live at Mount Washington. During the Detroit days it had actually been Ernest who had “discovered” Yogananda. Together they had met the Master and had begun to study the Yogoda teachings. Unfortunately, however, in 1932 after two years at the headquarters, Ernest, who had even become the manager, working “day and night”, “fell hard” into evil thoughts. He first physically attacked his sister, throwing her violently against a wall. When Yogananda returned and called him for an interview, Ernest attacked Yogananda too, intending to hit him. But suddenly he fell to the ground, as though on fire. Durga Mata writes: “The burning sensation was so forceful that Dufour ran out of the room, down the steps, and rolled on the cool lawn, hoping to relieve the burning sensation.” This story can also be found in Swami Kriyananda’s book, *The New Path*.

Fortunately, a year later that karma had dissolved. Yogananda wrote in a letter in May 1933: “Dear Durga. I had an interesting reunion with Dufour; he came to the hotel. I called him to come, the old feud is gone. I told him you would write to him. Please do write him after I see you.” Isn’t it encouraging that a devotee can “fall hard”, even attacking the Master, but then can rise again? Divine mercy is fortunately endless, if we are open to receive it.

In 1933, Yogananda’s East-West magazine announced Durga Mata as a minister.



In 1935 Yogananda incorporated SRF as a Church. The memorable founding members of SRF, and the original Board of Directors, consisted of:

- **Yogananda**, President
- **Gyanamata**, Vice-President
- **Durga Mata**, Treasurer
- **Richard Wright**, Secretary
- **Karla Schramm**

Yogananda in India (1935-36)

When Yogananda left for his 18-month trip to India (1935-1936), he put Sister Gyanamata and Durga Mata (hugging on the photo) in charge of Mount Washington. Daya Mata, Ananda Mata, and the rest were under their loving care. They were “at the helm” (as Yogananda put it) not only organizationally, but also spiritually. An issue of *Inner Culture magazine* published in March 1937 announced: “Sister Gyanamata, St. Lynn [Rajasi Janakananda] and Sister Durga kept the Self-Realization Fellowship Headquarters breathing highest spiritual vibrations while Swami Yogananda was in India.”

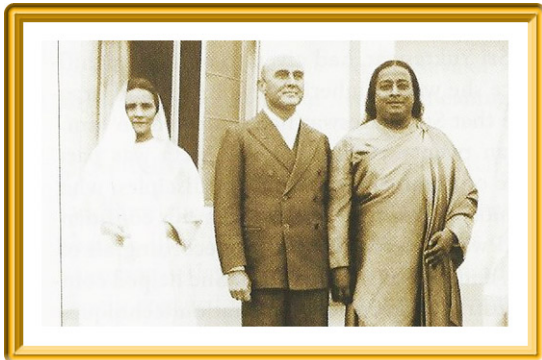


Durga Mata never talked about her high spiritual state. It can only be inferred, for example by these words: “Master has also told me that I too take on the karma of others.” In truth, this is possible only for very saintly souls, as Yogananda makes clear in his *Autobiography of a Yogi*: “The metaphysical method of physical transfer of disease is known to highly advanced yogis.” Amazingly, Durga Mata could even differentiate between her own karmic load and that of others: “I know to what degree and how much I take on of others' suffering, but I also know when the suffering is my own.”

Yogananda had told her that she was close to Self-realization: “After my death, Duj, just make a little effort, and you will be there.” (see Johann Templehoff, *Who Was Durga Mata?*)

Much later, in 1962, Devi Mukherjee accompanied Durga Mata to meet the great saint Anandamayi Ma and reports: “I had asked her earlier what she thought of Durga Mata. With a blissful smile she replied, ‘She is floating in bliss! Her heart is full of love for God and Guru.’” (See *Shaped By Saints*)

After Yogananda’s return: taking care of Rajasi (1936-1952)



In December 1936, right after Yogananda had returned from India, he asked Durga Mata to look after Rajasi's personal comforts and welfare whenever he came to visit Encinitas or Mt. Washington. It became a major part of her duty.

In early January 1937, the Master sent Sr. Gyanamata and Durga Mata to live at the Encinitas hermitage where Durga stayed for seven years. During that time she also helped with building the SRF Hollywood Church in

1942 (building and gold-leafing) and to establish the SRF San Diego Church in 1943.

As a sweet aside: Durga Mata, as a true “*pitta*”, grew grey hair early on. In 1941, when she was only 38, she recounts that Yogananda “suddenly realized how grey my hair was.” For two hours he pulled one grey hair after the other. A very endearing scene to visualize.

From 1944 to 1948 she was asked to head up the Mount Washington office. At that time Daya Mata took over and Durga returned to Encinitas, to be able to take better care of Rajarsi.

In 1948 Durga Mata was one of the blessed few devotees who witnessed Yogananda’s *great samadhi*: “He talked aloud to Divine Mother, and She would use his voice to answer him back aloud, so we could hear it all. Divine Mother took each one by our names and would tell us what each one’s faults were, and Master’s tender heart would come to our defense.”

She frequently battled with ill health, and Yogananda said: “At least you are helping others.”

Durga Mata was not present when Yogananda passed away. She had wanted to go and see him but Rajarsi had told her to wait until the Ambassador had gone (Yogananda passed away during a banquet in honor of the Indian Ambassador, Mr. Binay Ranjan Sen).

During Rajarsi Janakananda’s presidency (1952-1955)

Rajarsi developed a brain tumor, which was discovered in August 1952. Durga Mata took care of him as he fell increasingly ill. Although outwardly his body suffered, inwardly he soared. Durga witnessed his visions, ecstasies, and his experiences of Yogananda living in his own body. On February 20, 1955 he finally passed on.

During Daya Mata’s presidency (1955-2003)

Durga Mata writes in her book: “Master had written in SRF by-laws that the Board of Directors would elect the third SRF President.” Yogananda hadn’t actually selected anyone and neither had Rajarsi. After his passing Durga Mata was asked to become President, as she was, together with Tara Mata, the senior nun. She declined because of her ill health and because she thought she might actually leave her body soon, as Yogananda had told her in January 1952: “...all three of our lives, [Rajarsi’s], yours, and mine, are equally in the same danger.” This being said, from what numerous disciples said it was clear that Yogananda had wanted Daya Mata to lead SRF.



SRF rooms.

A completely new lifestyle now began for Durga Mata. In 1953 she herself had had the idea to transform the open “tower” (see photo) on the top floor of Mt. Washington into a beautiful apartment for Rajarsi Janakananda. He later graciously willed it to her. These special quarters now became her new home: “And how happy I am, although I was not planning this new apartment for myself. I sincerely appreciate living in its scenic tower and quietness, until such time that Master will deem me go to his Infinite home, or wherever he bids me go on this earth planet.” Reportedly she decorated her apartment quite differently from the general style of

A cat called “Darling” lived in her apartment; it was an animal that she loved dearly. A cat at Mount Washington... that too probably was somewhat rare and unusual.

Her belief was that God is both beauty and appreciates beauty, so she also expressed her artistic side: she wrote her own devotional chants; she loved to paint, using watercolor, oil, and acrylics, and she created beautiful sculptures.

Durga Mata was able to visit India three times.

Yogananda had told her: “Your path is individual teachings, and through chanting.” His words turned into her *dharma* for the remainder of her life on this planet. Devotees called her on the phone, or came to visit her for counseling. Durga Mata explained that she was “an empty shell for Yogananda”. She was humble, but also *knew* that she knew, telling people whom she counseled: “These are Masters’ instructions!” Indeed, she was uncannily insightful, knowing things she *couldn’t* possibly know. At times Durga was tough in her counseling, and “could be very, very cutting.” Her philosophy was: “It takes a thorn to remove a thorn.” To intellectual devotees she said: “Don’t overthink the teachings, it is all very simple.” Concerning meditation, she taught: “Feeling is greater than seeing.” Always she ended her counseling session with these beautiful and inspiring words: “Be happy! When you are inwardly happy you have inner attunement with God. And when you are happy all the time, you are with God all the time.”

An important part of her service was chanting with groups of devotees. In the following description about how it was to chant with Yogananda, one can sense her characteristic intensity, which she also applied to chanting: “When we chanted with him, if we *really threw ourselves into the chanting*, his spiritualized perceptions overflowed from his consciousness into our own, giving us a glimpse of the wondrous blissful communion he was experiencing.”

Some dark clouds

However, life within SRF for Durga Mata was not merely a bright “starlit” sky but also became peppered with gray clouds. Such clouds, of course, are a good thing for sincere devotees as they are the Divine prod to overcome, to evolve, and to rise. Tests make saints. They also help us to evaluate the strength of our inner light.



In her book, *Trilogy of Divine Love*, a letter from Brother Sarolananda hints at the tests which Durga Mata was facing: “Beloved and revered Sister Durga... My heart has gone out to you, for I know you have not had an easy time of it. But you may take comfort from the fact that out of those few pure and true souls who are willing to suffer misunderstandings and persecution, does God make His saints, and enfold in His Love... May you receive the strength to endure, and may your heart be filled to overflowing with His matchless love and compassion.... – Bro. Sarolananda”

He adds that for a long time he had wanted to give her that letter of gratitude, “but heretofore I had not known quite how to reach you without causing embarrassment or more trouble to you.”

What was the “persecution” all about? Why was she having “not an easy time of it”? What was the “trouble”?

The following analysis is based on a limited amount of facts, and of course may be mistaken, or only partially correct, but here is what appears to have happened:

Daya Mata, in her book *Only Love*, describes a disagreement within the Board of Directors during her very first day as the SRF President, concerning the future development of Yogananda’s work. She writes:

“Questions arose during discussion of the work on the morning after I became the leader. Should the guidance of the work be in the hands of the householders or monastics? Guruji had told us it was to be with single-hearted renunciants like himself; but that directive was being challenged by some of the members. True, Guruji’s love for all devotees was the same. I also felt no distinction; why be bound by externals? A devotee is a devotee because he loves God, not because he wears an ocher cloth. But my mind was troubled.” That night she had a vision of Yogananda, and clarity came: SRF would be guided and represented exclusively by monastics. She continues: “The next morning, I met with the directors of the society [Tara Mata, Ananda Mata, Durga Mata, Dr. Lewis, Shraddha Mata, Sahaja Mata, Uma Mata], and gave the answer Guruji had conveyed to me.”

An SRF monastic revealed who the disagreeing directors were: Durga Mata and Dr. Lewis.

The truth is that Durga Mata wasn’t a “yes-woman.” She was simple, frank, candid, and always spoke the truth as she understood it. Very likely, the above controversy was not the only one. In her book, in fact, she writes that she disagreed with SRF’s changing of “Rajasi” to “Rajarsi”. It’s similar to saying, “Daya established X, but I stay with Y, for that is what our Master said.”

Almost certainly Durga Mata was similarly opposed – outspokenly so – to the changing in books and publications to Yogananda’s signature and the spelling thereof, from “Paramhansa” to “Paramahansa”, which was made in 1959. In fact, she used “Paramhansa” in her own book. In other words, she simply wasn’t disposed to adjust to Daya’s directive if she deemed it wrong.

In the same vein, we can infer that she may have also disagreed to the change made in 1960 to the SRF altar, when the picture of Krishna was added. It was not what Yogananda had done. At any rate, in her book we see an altar of the Masters sculpted by her in 1965, featuring five Masters, not six.

SRF put out the word that Yogananda himself had appointed Daya Mata as the third President: “Gurudeva expressly spoke of his trust in Sri Daya Mata, whom he was training for the role of future President.” Durga unashamedly wrote that this was simply not true: Yogananda had written in his by-laws that the third SRF President would be elected. And that is exactly what happened.

Did Daya Mata, Tara Mata, or other Board-members sometimes impose their will on monks and nuns? If so, again it would have met Durga Mata’s vigorous disapproval, as she said: “It is a sin to force our will on another person. *Don’t* do it.”

She apparently also disagreed about hiding bold statements Yogananda had made, for example that he had been Arjuna in a past life, and also William the Conqueror. SRF cautiously has never published such disclosures, while Durga Ma simply went ahead and told the world about it.



But most importantly, she seems not to have agreed with the new direction of development which SRF was taking, as she didn’t think that Yogananda had come to establish a monastery where only monastics have a say, as we can see from the above difference of opinion. Now SRF became a home only for monastics. Monastics alone were now allowed to teach. Everyone at SRF had to take a spiritual name, while Yogananda had given only six Indian names. (Even Daya Mata had been called Faye until 1955.)

Under Daya, plenty of rules were added to the SRF lifestyle. Everything was structured to resemble a Western monastery and was being organized neatly and tightly. Was Durga happy about it?

Throughout all this, Durga Mata was not a shy personality, but rather was described as being intense and sometimes quite “sharp-tongued”. In addition, she had an amazing amount of energy which may have been difficult for some people to deal with. Furthermore, she felt a natural authority: she had been on Yogananda’s original Board of Directors: “I am the only one left of the original officers and directors.” She was also Daya Mata’s senior, and her former “boss”.

We must add to that picture Daya Mata’s character and situation. She was a saintly soul, of course. Anandamayī Ma told Mohini Chakravarty, an SRF/YSS devotee who translated for Daya Mata, Ananda Mata, Sister Revati, and Swami Kriyananda in 1959: “Your American brother and sisters are highly advanced in the spiritual path. Daya Ma, especially, enjoys perfect calm, both inside and outside.” She added about Daya Mata: “Her meditative state is beautiful.”

But all saints, however deep they may be on the inside, still have their character to deal with in the outward world. It can at times express itself in quite unusual ways. What, then, was Daya Mata’s personality makeup?

“Daya was by nature a peacemaker, a trait for which Master praised her,” Swami Kriyananda writes. He adds that in those early years, being the President “was a post in which she never felt secure. It seemed too exalted for her; she didn’t feel worthy of it.” This inner situation seems to have continued for quite a long time. She herself recounts that during a visit to India (Oct. 1963 – May 1964), meaning *eight years* after being named President, she cried to Mahavatar Babaji, whom she saw in a vision in meditation: “They chose me. I am so unworthy. How could it be?” (see *Only Love*). She was sobbing. (One can understand why SRF writes that “Daya Mata found the position of leadership that was being thrust upon her a tremendous test.”) Babaji reassured her: “My child, you must not doubt your Guru. He spoke the truth. What he told you is true.” Only at that moment (1963), it seems, Daya Mata finally felt justified in her role. Her inner authority was established, by Babaji’s grace.

But during the years before that, from 1955-1963, any firm disagreement from Durga Mata’s side might easily have had a destabilizing effect on Daya Mata, who still didn’t feel altogether stable in the saddle. Such a situation can easily result in tensions.

Now let’s add to this picture of Daya Mata and Durga Mata a third colorful personality on the Board of Directors: Tara Mata.

She too was Daya’s senior, was highly intelligent, (even a “genius” as Yogananda put it), and had a forceful and domineering character, from all accounts.

In other words, the peacemaker Daya Mata found herself between these two fiery ladies. Dr. Lewis and the other board members were present, but none of them, it seems, was quite as dominant. Tara and Daya formed a team: they codirected SRF, as Tara Mata herself stated. Daya Mata had found the strong support she needed. All the other board members, except for Durga Mata and Dr. Lewis, sided with their directions and decisions. (In addition, Dr. Lewis lived in Encinitas, far from it all.)

What was the consequence for Durga Mata when she disagreed with them? Figuratively speaking she painted



herself into a corner and seems to have suffered some “persecution”, at least for some time, and “had not an easy time of it.” (See Brother Sarolananda’s letter above.)

The entire situation was significant. Whilst he was Vice-President, Daya Mata told Swami Kriyananda about the “resolution of the problem with Durga” using very strong terms. She was determined to teach Durga an exceptionally tough lesson.

Around 1965 Durga Mata told Swami Kriyananda on the telephone about an incident which may have been the culmination of these tensions: “Tara came charging up the stairs to my apartment one day, determined to force a confrontation with me. I knew intuitively the reason for her visit, and as she entered the room I glared at her so fiercely, inspired by Master’s power, that she began to shake all over. She turned abruptly, then fled back downstairs again. Since that day, she has never dared to speak to me again!”

Her book

In 1958-59 Durga wrote her book *Trilogy of Divine Love*. It remained unpublished by SRF for 34 years. Durga Mata finally asked her assistant, Joan Wight, to arrange for it to be published outside the organization of SRF. Her book saw the light of day in 1993 just a few days after her passing. In her final days, on looking at the design and layout of the book “a big, beautiful smile came over her face.”

SRF, however, wasn’t very enthusiastic about it and tried to stop the publication legally, but Durga had given Joan a “Confirmation of Gift”, thereby ensuring the copyrights remained firmly in her hands. (In 1991, Brenda Lewis, the daughter of Dr. Lewis, also published a book *Treasures against Time* outside of SRF. Later she gave the rights to SRF, which ended its publication.)



As a result, Durga Mata, who was definitively a shining “giant star” in Yogananda’s firmament, remained quite hidden from the public eye. Throughout the decades her picture was hardly ever shown in the SRF magazine. No article written by her ever appeared (judging from available material); she who had so much to share. Did she speak at the SRF Convocations throughout the decades? Others may answer that question. She did share in 1975, for the 50-year celebration of SRF. At any rate she possessed an inclination for it, writing: “[Master] told me that I would make a good lecturer.”

Although she wasn’t included in the SRF magazine in the listings of those who are authorized to bestow the sacred Kriya initiation, Durga Mata did give the initiation to selected individuals (those who came for counseling) from time to time.

It would be interesting to hear how Joan Wight (her assistant and secretary) describes Durga’s life in SRF. Judging from the reports of some devotees who were in contact with her, it was tougher than what is described here. Joan Wight dropped a clear hint through an introductory quote in Durga’s book (it stands alone on a whole page): “All too often we praise dead saints and persecute living ones”. Brother Sarolananda’s letter to Durga Mata immediately follows, in which he says: “But you may take comfort from the fact that out of those few pure and true souls who are willing to suffer misunderstandings and persecution, does God make His saints, and enfold in His Love.”

And so, it happened. These “gray clouds” (if she considered them to be so), only helped Durga Mata to reach even greater heights inwardly. She rose above it all and was known to be filled with contagious joy and love. She can be heard saying in a talk: “If you want to see yourself as light, you have to sit in silence. Then you know that you are an electrical current. And you are no longer afraid of anything. Then you know that *nothing* can hurt or destroy you.”

In short, Durga Mata was an incredible inspiration to all who knew her. She spoke with rare spiritual authority. One devotee described her as “extremely powerful”.

“Ma’s kids” (her followers), formed an intense loyalty to her, had a profound love for her, and served her in every possible way.

Yogananda, as Daya Mata explains, had made Durga Mata a member of the Board of Directors “for a lifetime term”. That alone is a major statement from the Master about who she was. It also indicates that he wanted her voice to be heard for as long as possible. At any rate, in 1986 she retired from the Board of Directors for health reasons. Daya Mata explains that the Board told her that they would continue to appreciate her contributions to their discussions regarding Yogananda’s work.

Moral for devotees

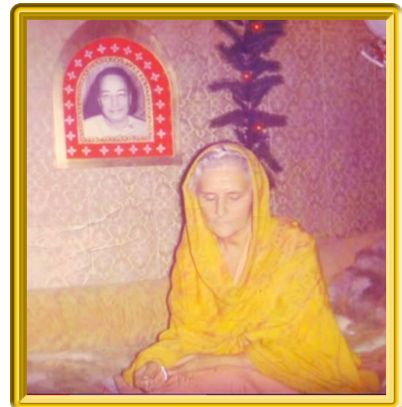
It is important to realize that a Master can have two disciples, both equally dedicated and sincere, and both highly advanced, who perceive his mission in a completely different way. Such a situation teaches the disciples (and us) to relate to realities other than one’s own in an elevated way. Dogmatism of course is an easier route to follow - (“My way is the only right one, yours is *wrong*.”) - but such an attitude is never the road to wisdom.

Durga Mata and Daya Mata in time certainly dissolved any disagreements or tensions into a sincere flow of divine love. The lesson for us is that if we, (being most of us, who are spiritually smaller than both of them, it is safe to say,) allow ourselves to become caught in any kind of negativity, judgment, or hardness, we will be the losers. If, on the other, hand we learn to love those who think and act differently, we will be the spiritual victors.

Durga’s passing

On January 16, 1993, aged 89, Durga Mata, Yogananda’s “second giant star”, peacefully passed away. It happened just shortly after his 100th birthday. She hadn’t talked for three days, her followers reported. Daya Mata on her last day sat at her bed, witnessing her in a high state of consciousness. Her ashes were interned in an unmarked crypt in Forest Lawn in Glendale, with other nuns, in the Slumber Room near the final resting place of Yogananda.

Altogether she had given 63 years of service to Yogananda and had been on the Board of Directors for half a century.



In her eulogy Daya Mata expressed only the sweetest words about her friendship with Durga. It was obvious that previous misunderstandings had long melted in the sunlight of God’s love. What remained was an old and precious soul-friendship. Daya Mata recounts: “Guruji once told me: ‘If you touch her heart, you will feel the great love that flows from Durga Mata.’” What a beautiful tribute.

Conflictingly, however, during the days Durga Mata passed away and her book came out, SRF wrote to Joan Wight threatening a lawsuit if she published it. It appeared to be her “goodbye gift” to the world. But clearly, Daya Mata wasn’t pleased at all. (One hopes that the situation wasn’t like the hostess at a dinner party who smiles at the guests whilst giving her husband a well-aimed kick under the table.)

At any rate, several years before she herself left her body (in 2010), Daya Mata requested the publication of the booklet *Chanting For Deep Meditation*, which talks about Durga Mata's inspiring life. It appeared in 2013, 20 years after Durga's passing.

Slowly, Durga Mata is becoming a little better known. On a devotional website created by her followers, one may listen to her short talks and tune in to her deeply inspired chanting: <http://www.yoganandadurga.com> Her star is rising again, and deservedly so. In fact, it seems important for Yogananda's future work that her independent, creative, devoted spirit lives on, becoming a strong example and inspiration for younger generations to inherit.

Durga Mata's legacy will probably continue to grow, as we remember her as one whose spiritual stature was, although unknown to most, of the highest order: she was the second highest woman disciple of an avatar. "Duj," Yogananda's "little giant star."

