

excerpted from

awakening
Shakti

The
Transformative
Power of
the Goddesses
of Yoga

sallykempton



sounds true
BOULDER, COLORADO

CHAPTER 3

Durga

Warrior Goddess of Protection and Inner Strength

Dawn and dusk became her eyebrows, the wind god's splendor shaped her ears,
and all else born of the other gods' light shone too as the auspicious Devi.

DEVI MAHATMYA

We bow to her who is auspicious beauty. We make salutations again
and again to her who is prosperity and attainment. Salutations again
and again to her who is the fortune and misfortune of kings.

Salutations always to Durga who takes us through difficulties, who is the
creator and indwelling essence of all . . . who is right knowledge. . . .

We bow down to her who is at once most gentle and most fierce.

DEVI MAHATMYA

The Devi laughed thunderously and defiantly, again and again.

She filled the entire sky with her terrible roar, and from the immeasurable din
a great echo resounded. All the worlds shook, and the oceans churned.

(The demon) beheld the Devi, who pervaded the three worlds with her radiance,
bending the earth under her tread, scraping the sky with her diadem.

DEVI MAHATMYA

In Mahabalipuram, in South India, there is a stone bas-relief of the Goddess Durga. The goddess is captured in the act of pulling her bow. Round-breasted, she rides a roaring lion whose mane foams like ocean waves. Every sinew, every line of the sculpture carries the purposeful strength of a goddess who embodies the active power of the feminine. Even the stone seems to pulsate with energy.

Durga is both an Amazonian warrior and a mother goddess. One of the most popular goddesses in India, she has become, for young Indian women especially, an icon of contemporary liberation and power. One contemporary Mumbai artist painted Durga's body with the artist's own face, sitting in meditation and surrounded by flames. When you bring Durga into your inner world, the painting seems to say, she can empower your most radical aspirations and guide you through your most conflict-ridden life dramas.

Myths about Durga usually start with a demon slaying. But while Durga was the deity invoked by kings for victory in battle, she is not just a battle goddess. She is also the power behind spiritual awakening, the inner force that unleashes spiritual power within the human body in the form of kundalini. And she is a guardian: beautiful, queenly, and fierce. Paintings of Durga show her with flowing hair, a red sari, bangles, necklaces, a crown—and eight arms bristling with weapons.

Durga carries a spear, a mace, a discus, a bow, and a sword—as well as a conch (representing creative sound), a lotus (symbolizing fertility), and a rosary (symbolizing prayer). In one version of her origin, she appears as a divine female warrior, brought into manifestation by the male gods to save them from the buffalo demon, Mahisha. The assembled gods, furious and powerless over a demon who couldn't be conquered, sent forth their anger as a mass of light and power. Their combined strength coalesced into the form of a radiantly beautiful woman who filled every direction with her light. Her face was formed by Shiva; her hair came from Yama, the god of death; her arms were given by Vishnu. Shiva gave her his trident, Vishnu his discus, Vayu—the wind god—offered his bow and arrow. The mountain god, Himalaya, gave her the lion for her mount. Durga set forth to battle the demon for the sake of the world, armed and protected by all the powers of the divine masculine.¹

As a world protector, Durga's fierceness arises out of her uniquely potent compassion. She is the deity to call on when you're in deep trouble. In the *Devi Mahatmya* (Triumph of the Goddess), a medieval song-cycle about Durga that is still recited all over India, we are reminded again and again that the goddess will always appear when we need her to protect our world. She invites us to turn to her in crisis, and she promises to move mountains to rescue us from every form of evil—including the evil we ourselves create!

SOME BACKGROUND ABOUT GODS AND DEMONS

The *Devi Mahatmya* revolves around three encounters—including two battles—with demonic forces. The most interesting of all is the tale of Durga's encounter with two demon brothers, *asuras*, named Shumbha and Nishumbha.

Before we explore the tale of Durga's encounter with these demons, a bit of background on the mythology will be helpful. In Indian mythology, the battle between the light force and the dark side is personified as an eternal struggle between two races of elemental beings. The forces of light are known as devas (shining ones) or power gods. Their ancient enemies are the asuras (anti-gods), sometimes translated as "titans" in a bow to the Greek pantheon. Both sides wear bodies made of light and thought. They use weapons powered by the force of their secret mantras, invocations that can turn a blade of grass into a deadly missile. The devas live in pleasure realms with jeweled streets and houses that they can renovate with just a flick of desire. Their women-folk are dancers and singers, whose gift for changing form is legion and whose beauty has infinite varieties.

The devas show up in your life in three ways. First, they arise as elemental presences in the universe—powers within the wind, the ocean, and the earth. Second, they represent inner qualities of consciousness—the powers and qualities of your higher self. Your generosity, your humility, your capacity for patience, your fearlessness, your vigor, your compassion, and your inner steadiness are all qualities of your inner devic energy. Finally, individual devas represent specific aspects of the mind. For example, Indra, king of the gods, represents the mind's executive function. He is your power of discernment, the one who can weigh the subtle balance of things, find the right course of action, and judge the implications and ethics at play in the situations of your life. In brain science terms, Indra is your neocortex. Even when he gets confused, or flooded with desires, Indra knows how to subject himself to the guiding power of higher authority.

He and the other devas regard themselves as keepers of the dharma, the rules of law that maintain balance in the cosmos. Above them in the cosmic hierarchy is the Trinity of great gods, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Unlike the devas, the deities of the Trinity are the three faces of what Judeo-Christian traditions would call the Godhead, and Indian tradition calls Ishwara. They have the power to step beyond law and custom and inject saving grace into even the direst situation. The devas, at their best, recognize that they are subject to these higher powers.

Dark Force Warriors

The *asuras* are the robber barons, tyrants, and corporate raiders of the cosmos. Gifted fighters with magical powers, they have subtle bodies like the devas, but very different characters. The asuras are obsessed with accumulation and conquest; they are exemplars of ego inflated beyond any reasonable bounds. Their

offspring rule our contemporary global culture as kleptocratic dictators, corrupt corporate actors, terrorists, financial manipulators with armies of lobbyists and big checks.

Just as we carry devic energy in the higher Self, we also hold our own asuric energy. The inner asura is our power-shadow—our egoic pride, arrogance, cut-throat ambition, loveless lust, selfishness, and hard-heartedness. As the devas use power for the protection of the good, the asuras are obsessed with power for its own sake. They know as many spells and mantras for worshipping the Trinity as the gods do, and they also have the strength and patience for hard-core practice, especially when it benefits their aims.

THE FATAL BOON

Shumbha and Nishumbha, the story goes, have amassed an army of fighters with magical superpowers. Before undertaking their campaign of world conquest, they begin a long, intense course of yogic austerities, practices designed to impel the creator god, Brahma, to reward their efforts by giving them a boon.² Standing on one leg between five fires, arms raised heavenward, holding their breath for a thousand years at a time, the brothers petition Brahma for the power to be invincible in battle. By the cosmic laws of karma, so much effort has to be rewarded. (Besides, the heat generated by the demon brothers is starting to affect the weather in the higher worlds.) Brahma agrees to grant the brothers a guarantee from above that no man or god can defeat them in battle.

The boon, however, contains a loophole: no mention has been made of women or goddesses. That hardly seems to matter. There are no women warriors on the earth, and the Goddess has chosen to channel her skills at war and kingship through male bodies, right up and down the great chain of being. Taking form as the consorts to the male gods, she lends them her powers, ruling from behind the curtain (as they used to say of powerful concubines in Asian royal courts), never showing her hand.

Now that they are more or less invincible, the demon brothers conquer the earth. They declare themselves rulers of the upper and lower worlds, and in one final putsch, expel the devas from their abodes. Now the heaven of Indra is filled with the palaces and pleasure gardens of Shumbha and Nishumbha and their minions, which sprawl like small cities over jeweled lawns. The brothers, having conquered everything worth conquering, devote themselves to collecting art and women, to building houses, and to commissioning songs of praise. Over several thousand years, they pursue the refined pleasures of upper-world aristocrats,

study the arts of astrology and lovemaking, capture scholars and spiritual teachers to supervise their meditation and to perfect their knowledge of esoteric texts.

Meanwhile, the gods wander the sub-celestial worlds, plotting revenge without success.

Then one day, a friendly sage visits Indra to point out the loophole in the brothers' protection guarantee. No man or god can defeat the asura brothers, he tells the desperate king of the devas. But nobody said anything about a goddess.

APPROACH THE GODDESS

"Go to the abode of Durga, the Mahadevi, the supreme goddess," the sage advises Indra. "Beg her to appear in the world. She is waiting for you to ask."

So Indra and the other gods travel to the Vindhya Mountains, where the Mahadevi resides. It is not an easy trip. To find her abode they have to rely on intuition and guesswork. For a celestial century—twenty thousand years in human time—the gods petition her. They sing her praises. "O goddess, shining one, who lives within everything in the form of power, praise to you, praise to you, praise to you. O goddess, who lives within everything in the form of consciousness, praise to you, praise to you." Between prayers, the gods contemplate their own hubris, their forgetfulness. "Why did we think we were in charge?" they ask themselves ruefully. They invent new hymns, addressing her as sovereign, as queen, as mother. Especially as mother. "Bad sons we may be," they sing, with jeweled tears glistening in their eyes, "but there could never be a bad mother. Help us, help us. We are your children."

ASK FOR HELP

This part of the myth tells us something crucial about the goddess, something that is going to make a difference in the way we see our relationship to the force of grace in our life.

Because she is hidden, in order to act in the world, the great goddess needs us to ask for help. The grace of the goddess is a two-way stream. There's the movement from the subtle—the movement of grace descending into the human world. But it can't land unless there is a calling from below. That calling can take different forms: mantra repetition, meditation, petitionary prayer—but the calling has to be there.

Aurobindo Ghose, one of the great spiritual visionaries of the twentieth century, wrote passionately about his vision of a radical transformation in humanity. He believed that the crises of his time—the rise of totalitarian movements as well

as the freedom movements that ended colonialism—were the external forms of an upheaval in consciousness that would eventually give birth to a new order. When demonic forces are unleashed in the world, the forces of evolution become highly accessible, and not just in human minds and hearts. Aurobindo believed that the force of the Shakti is yearning to evolve our awareness, to help us create a world in which we live in balance with each other and the earth, and with our own sacred masculine and feminine natures. His teaching, contained in his book *The Mother*, articulates one of the underlying meanings of the Durga myth: to access her transformative power, we have to call it, ask for it, pray for it.³

It's as if the protective, transformative power of the divine waits, just out of reach, unable to intervene until we summon the courage or the desperation to throw ourselves at her feet, literally or metaphorically, and ask for her help. In asking for her, we bring her forth.

This is true not only in our battles against external enemies or desperate illness. Our spiritual journey and the evolution of consciousness in society as a whole are impossible without help from the subtle realms. Inner awakening, as we saw in chapter 2, is not under our control. It arises spontaneously, through grace. Moreover, we need enormous grace behind us in the struggle with our own limitations and egocentric delusions. To see through the illusions that trap us, the genetic patterning, the imbalances of intellect and emotion, the warring desires, the fears, the cultural biases, and the sheer weight of our physical senses is impossible without help of the Shakti. Ramakrishna, the nineteenth-century sage whose disciples helped bring Vedanta to the West, was a priest in a Kali temple and adored the Shakti, constantly praying to her for a vision of truth. He felt such longing that he once seized the ritual sword from the Kali statue and threatened to stab himself with it if she didn't reveal herself to him. Perhaps we don't need that level of passionate desperation, but we do need to admit our neediness.

THE GODDESS REVEALED

Back to the story.

At last, the air shimmers with an unmistakable force, sweet and fierce, tender and diamond hard. Durga appears out of the air, glistening and dark, with blue-black skin and flowing, lustrous hair, her form of light clothed in robes whose colors shift and slip, revealing and concealing the beauty of her breasts, the curve of her belly. An erotic perfume surrounds her, and yet her aura of untouchability keeps the gods on their knees. She rides a lion.

“What brings you here, Indra,” she says, as if she did not know what havoc the asuras had wreaked in their world.

“O Durga, O Ma,” says Indra, “Our world is in ruins and no male god can save us.”

“So, only in extremis do you come to me for help?” she asks.

Indra knows enough to let that pass. He knows that she can do no less than save her world. A moment later, she agrees. “Yes,” she says, “I will intervene to restore the balance of the world.”

Enchantress that she is, the goddess has no sooner spoken than she has taken herself to the scene of the coming battle. (Imagine her as Angelina Jolie in the movie *Tomb Raider*: lithe, exotic, and deceptively innocent.) As she sits carelessly on the back of her lion, her silken skirts brush the grass. Flowers drip from her fingers, and clouds form and dissolve in her hair. Her body emanates rays of sensual bliss, and her eyes—well, no one has ever looked into her eyes without falling in love. She is beauty personified, sexuality clothed in form, enchantment itself. Riveted, enchanted by her beauty, by her graceful poise, by the gentle power of her divine self-confidence, the palace guards send messengers to the inner chambers, and within moments the demon kings have come to their windows to look at her. They are connoisseurs of feminine beauty. They have never seen a woman like this before. Some celestial maiden, they agree. Perhaps one of the devas has sent his wife or daughter as tribute. Of course, they want her. Why wouldn't they?

The palace majordomo saunters out to the garden and salutes Durga with only the slightest hint of menace. “Since you are in the garden of their majesties,” he says, “I must assume that you have some interest in my lords. And, fortunate one, they have seen your beauty and are delighted to invite you to join the legions of their wives.”

The goddess looks demurely at the ground. “Indeed,” she says, “I have longed to know the asura kings. But there is one difficulty. I am the daughter of a warrior race, and must marry an equal. In my girlhood, I took a silly vow that I would only marry a man strong enough to defeat me in battle. You know how girls are—full of fantasy and romantic notions. But a vow is a vow. If your masters really want me, they'll have to fight with me.”

“Lady, you are either mad or suicidal,” says the majordomo. “No one has ever defeated my masters. It would break my heart to see such a delicate maiden die.”

“Nonetheless, that is my condition,” says Durga, giving him such a languorous glance that the majordomo feels stirrings of lust in every part of his body.

“And if your masters are afraid to do battle with me themselves, I am happy to take on their army.”

“Very well, I will convey your message,” he says, and hurries back to the palace.

The demon kings are intrigued. The lady has spirit, they agree, almost equal to her allure. They send messengers of increasingly higher rank and persuasive powers, but she will not back down.

Finally, Shumbha gets impatient. He tells the captain of his guard, “Go out and drag her in here by the hair.”

The captain marches forth, accompanied by a small platoon. As he approaches, the goddess says, “Why are you here? I have challenged your masters.”

“Madam, they do not fight women. We are here on their behalf.”

“So be it,” she says. A sword appears in her hand. She points it in their direction and, swifter than light, the captain and his men dissolve on the ground into puddles of disjointed matter.

At this point, wisdom might suggest to the demon kings that there is more going on here than meets the eye. But the ego, especially in its inflated state, is not necessarily wise. The demons send a larger company. The goddess, with the same languorous smile on her face, bids her lion open his mouth. The soldiers are drawn inexorably into the lion’s huge jaws.

Now, the demons realize what they are facing. They remember the loophole and realize that they must defeat her or die. Their magical host, under the command of the generals Chanda and Munda, springs forth from every corner of the kingdom, converging on the slender figure in the garden. Fierce demon warriors with bared teeth and buffalo heads; creatures with teeth and fangs; lion-bodied, many-armed creatures of flesh and illusion attack the goddess. At this, the terrifying goddess Kali emerges from Durga’s third eye. Emaciated, wearing a garland of skulls, roaring, she falls upon the army. As she cuts off the heads of the generals, she offers them to Durga.

But the battle doesn’t stop. Now, comes the army of the demon general Raktabija, whose name means “drop of blood.” Every drop of his blood has the power to turn into a clone of this magic warrior. To wound him is to give birth to a host of other Raktabijas—each with the same magical power. Raktabija represents the different faces of the self-seeking mind, which pops up every time you think you’ve knocked it down, always with a new disguise.

Suddenly, Durga lets out a roar that shakes the heavens. From her body emerges a host of beautiful light-forms: goddesses who each hold the full Shakti of the gods themselves.

They ride celestial vehicles and carry innocent-looking implements that hold deadly powers. Indrani, the Shakti associated with Indra, rides an elephant that tramples the demons underfoot. Saraswati, astride a celestial swan, sprinkles water from a monk's bowl, and as the drops fall on the soldiers, their bodies dissolve. Vaishnavi, the beautiful Shakti of Vishnu, carries a mace that she whirls with deadly accuracy and extraordinary effect. And finally, from out of Durga's body fly more terrible goddesses: Tara, Chinnamasta (the headless one), Bhairavi (the fierce). Along with them, Kali challenges the host of Raktabija, her tongue licking up the blood of the soldiers so that they can no longer be reborn from the spilled blood. Within half an hour, shockingly, the army is vanquished.

Now, Shumbha and Nishumbha have no choice. They have to fight the goddess themselves. By now they know who she is. It is the ego's last stand, and they approach the battle with full pride in their strength. Nishumbha is the first to die. Now roaring and as large as the palace itself, Shumbha advances upon the goddess.

"You challenged my army saying that you would fight single-handed," shouts Shumbha, in a voice so loud that it shakes the nearby hills to powder. "But look, you have helpers. Your challenge is forfeit."

"Not so," roars the goddess, vibrating the sky with rumbles of celestial thunder. "These goddesses are parts of myself. I alone exist in the world; what second, other than me, is there? O wicked one, behold these my powers entering back into me." With that, the other goddesses melt back into her form, leaving just Durga, shining with an almost blinding light.

"When I showed myself here in many forms, it was by means of my extraordinary power. Now I've withdrawn them. I stand utterly alone." And she calls out the warrior's blessing: "May you be resolute in combat."

The goddess's eight-armed form swells until it fills the sky. Twirling with one hand her great sword like a baton—and with axes, maces, spears, and crossbows in the others—she flies through the air, dancing between the demon kings, rising with them into the heavens, sinking below the earth, until finally, they lie on the ground, wounded, bleeding.

"Ma," says Shumbha with his dying breath, and then a smile comes over his face as the ecstasy of the goddess fills his being. In that instant, both the demons are transfigured, dissolving into Durga's body, dying into the mystery. When the ego dissolves, even the most demonic soul comes home, back to the heart of the mother.

TRANSFORMING THE EGO

Why would a battle story be the root myth of the goddess? Is it simply one of those stories, found in every tradition, about how in humanity's darkest hours the divine comes to save us? (Is the fact that, in normal times, the Goddess Durga remains inaccessible intended to reassure the masculine that feminine power, though potentially dangerous, remains under wraps unless summoned by the masculine himself?) Is the Devi Mahatmya, as so many spiritual teachers have pointed out over the centuries, a story about the battle of essence against the forces of ego?⁴

Like all powerful mythic stories, it makes sense on all of these levels. From the point of view of the environment, the goddess is the power of nature overwhelming human hubris. Her roar is the tsunami, the lightning strike, and the earthquake. From another point of view, it's a story about how we are supported and protected when we admit we are powerless over the forces of darkness and take refuge in the higher power. It's a commentary on the danger of underestimating the feminine. And of course, it's a story of rescue, the promise of protection in a world where we are so often victims of warring powers.

At yet another level, the Durga story is about the transformation of the ego. The mighty battle between Durga and the demons is the inner struggle that invariably begins when we undertake real transformative practice. Like the demon kings with their austerities, the ego enters into spiritual practice with its own agenda. Ego seeks control—control over circumstances, control over the body, control over the people around us. Power and mastery are what matter to the ego. So naturally, the ego will resist surrendering to higher powers, letting go of its agendas, or giving up control on any level. But the evolutionary Shakti has a different agenda. She wants to move us away from egocentric consciousness to the recognition of our nondifference from each other and the cosmos. To do this, she must put the ego in its place and ultimately dissolve it. The ego, however, will fight her to the death.

The demons personify the most primitive and intransigent forces of ego. They are the part of us that unabashedly craves power over others. The demonic part of the self sees everything and everyone, including the higher powers of the universe, as tools in its personal agendas. The gods, as we've mentioned, also represent aspects of the self, but they represent the higher self, the unique personal qualities of essence. The devas are our love, our dedication, our good intentions, the forgiveness and compassion we display when we're aligned with spirit. Durga arrives in our inner world to strengthen those higher qualities, whether for the

sake of accomplishing good in the world, for progress on the spiritual path, or for the evolution of collective consciousness.

As postmodern practitioners, we may prefer to take a gentler attitude toward our own dark side than the myth describes. Most of us long ago rejected authoritarian religion, with its talk of sin and insistence on eliminating the darker forces in the self. If we practice one of the new thought paths that emphasize our innate goodness, we might prefer to ignore the negative qualities in the self, on the principle that fighting the ego only strengthens it. If we're psychodynamically oriented, we might be interested in bringing our shadow qualities into the light so we can integrate the power tied up in anger or greed or pride. If we aspire to be modern-day Tantrikas, we might practice diving into the feeling within our passionate impulses and discovering the primordial Shakti at the heart of anger and fear and greed.

All these approaches are useful, some on the level of personality, others as practices for enlightenment. Later, we'll look at these approaches more deeply. We'll meet goddess energies that cradle the ego in a gentle, transformative embrace. We'll also learn to invoke the Tantric goddesses who can show us how to enter the heart of passion for the sake of transformation.

Before we can access them, we need to bow to Durga—without reembracing authoritarian ideas of submission. For there are moments when the only way to put our narcissism in its place is with a sword—the sword of wisdom wielded by a warrior who takes no prisoners. This is Durga's role, whether she is operating in the outer world or the inner world.

In my life, the energy of the warrior goddess with her upraised sword shows up to remind me to get my striving, performance-oriented ego out of the way so that the deeper power can unfold my life according to her evolutionary imperative. Durga, in my inner world, is the unstoppable energy of spiritual growth. When I resist that, I often encounter an unexpected setback. She might get in my face as a kind of cosmic “No!” to my egoic illusions—and then manifest as the deeper awakening that follows when I let them go. Over the years, I've been through this cycle often. At times, egoic agendas pile up, balloon out, and take over my world—until, like cataracts, they ripen and become so swollen that they are ready to come apart of their own weight. Then nearly always, I hear the roar of the goddess's lion sounding through my dreams.

Just as often, Durga's battle cry is “Yes!” She manifests as a surge of courage, a “Yes, you can!” that forces me to stop and inspires me to take a new path. Maybe she shows up to guide me through a maze of my own making or speaks

through a friend's word of encouragement. Sometimes I'll make some horrific mistake and hear her laugh as she points out that even mistakes can be teachers. More and more, I've learned in those moments to bow to her, to follow her lead, to recognize the Shakti's agenda for my growth.

When you feel caught in one of those moments—when your personal will seems blocked by immovable obstacles or when you want to move in a new direction but don't know how—consider that it might be a signal from the Shakti. Then, consider sitting for a few minutes in meditation and using your imagination to bring yourself into the presence of Durga.

Accessing Durga

For this exercise, you will need a quiet place to sit, a journal, and something to write with.

Become aware of the Durga Shakti as a shimmering presence around you. You can visualize her seated on her lion (though sometimes she rides a tiger—see which animal feels right to you!). Her dark hair streams over her shoulders. She wears a golden crown; a scarlet, silk sari; and golden necklaces, rings, and bracelets.

See Durga's magnificent arms, strong and bristling with weapons: the bow, the sword, the trident, the mace, the discus. See also the lotus she carries.

She is watching you with an intent gaze. Her eyes are large and dark.

Offer your salutations to her.

Ask her: "What is the major inner obstacle I have to face now? What do I need to let go of? What should I be paying more attention to?"

Close your eyes and turn to your heart. Ask the question in your heart.

Begin to write. Let the writing come naturally, without thought. Keep writing until you feel that there is no more to say.

Look over what you have written.

Now take the radical step of turning this over to the universal power of grace. Offer the obstacles to Durga, saying, "I offer all this to the Durga Shakti, asking that your grace dissolve all obstacles, inner and outer."



FIGURE 3: THE GODDESS DURGA

WHO IS DURGA IN YOUR LIFE?

Durga Shakti doesn't cradle you or coddle you. Instead, she lends you strength to do what you have to do. The seventeenth-century freedom fighter Shivaji, whose bands of Maratha warriors drove the Moghuls out of their home territory in Western India, claimed to have received his sword from Durga. Famously partial to warriors and leaders, Durga is especially available when you're struggling to right a wrong.

This is true up and down the chain of being. If Durga the cosmic queen is a world-protectress, the Durga woman is the protectress of her world.

Sasha, a lawyer and mother of two girls, first discovered the Durga Shakti when her daughter Lee began failing in school. It turned out that Sasha's husband, Lee's father, was engaging his daughter sexually. Sasha vowed that, whatever it took, she would protect her daughters. She filed for divorce, insisting that her husband not be allowed unsupervised visits with their girls. He fought hard for joint custody, deploying a high-powered legal team. As a lawyer, Sasha's field is wills and trusts, and she had never litigated. But she decided to be her own lawyer.

In the midst of this, Sasha took a class I was teaching on the goddesses. She felt an immediate affinity for Durga and created a meditation in which she imagined Durga's strength inside her own body. She would visualize each of Durga's eight arms holding a particular power. In one hand, she imagined the power to use words skillfully. In another, the power to read financial statements with care. In another, the skill to face down her husband's lawyers. She imagined all of Durga's weapons as energies empowering her to protect her daughters. She won the case, and soon afterward she realized that an enormous weight had lifted from her daughter. The fact that Sasha had fought on her daughter's behalf seemed to give the teenager her own sense of purpose and a new understanding of her own feminine strength. Lee's grades improved, and she went on to a good college.

THE DURGA PERSONALITY

Sasha's experience was a classic example of a Durga-style intervention. Like Sasha, we can tune into our own Durga energy by invoking the figure of the goddess. When you feel drawn to this goddess, it usually indicates one of two things: either you need an infusion of Durga-like strength, or you carry the Durga archetype as part of your personality. A woman tuned to the Durga archetype has a natural capacity for warrior-style leadership. She will naturally create zones of protection around the people in her life. (She's also an effortless multitasker, like a

mother who manages three children while cooking a five-course meal, or like an executive running a team of diverse employees). The Durga woman makes space for people to flourish, fighting their battles when needed—as Sasha did for her daughter—but she is just as likely to push them into fighting for themselves.

My friend Ruth is an environmental activist and seasoned political operative who runs a family, cooks creatively and brilliantly, buys and sells houses, and has an almost limitless ability to make friends. She came into my life when I was just beginning to teach publicly, and she enlisted herself to help me create a teaching world. For two years she ran retreats for me, helped me plan programs, and used her formidable social skills to bring people into my life.

Durga women have a natural generosity, combined with a no-nonsense, “pull up your socks” sensibility that can be abrasive when the Durga shadow is in force. “Pull up your socks” *is* a Durga mantra. She herself gives no quarter to her own weaknesses and has little patience for anyone who stays stuck in theirs. Come to her with a problem, and she will immediately suggest a solution—but may lose patience if you don’t act on it. Durga women are formidable. Hillary Rodham Clinton is the quintessential Durga woman—beloved by her friends, worshipped by her staff, regarded with suspicion by people who are uncomfortable with the kind of feminine power that won’t disguise itself.

Hillary doesn’t ask for sympathy, and as a result, she may not get it. Durga women don’t cry easily. In fact, they often don’t show emotion, especially not negative emotion. A Durga woman may believe that her job is to hold up the world—one of my more Durgaesque friends calls it her Mighty Mouse syndrome. She believes she can take care of anyone, solve anyone’s problems. Helen Mirren’s TV show character, Inspector Jane Tennison, epitomizes Durga energy. So did Queen Elizabeth I, who gave her name to the era of Shakespeare and the first British explorers of the New World. Angelina Jolie holds the Durga personal archetype in many of her films, as well as in her activist personal life.

In Indian mythology, Durga is sometimes described as a cosmic queen, and the Durga woman is definitely queenly. In ancient times, royalty felt themselves directly linked both to the land they ruled, to its people, and also to the subtle realms of gods. True royalty acted as a kind of channel between earth and heaven. An evolved Durga woman has that sense of global connection and global responsibility—whether her sphere is a family, an organization, or a project. At the same time, she intuits that the power that moves her is not her own. A true Durga woman will at some point in her life feel the transpersonal source of her own guardian energy.

“I was meditating at a shrine in Mexico,” a student of a shamanic activist told me recently. “At one point, I had a vision of myself sitting on a throne. My back was open and energy was rushing into it from a kind of sun behind me. But the front of my body was in a formal, upright pose, very authoritative. I felt that I was seeing my soul. I saw that my authority comes from this stream of energy that was entering me from behind.”

This woman had sensed the presence of the Durga archetype in her larger, transpersonal form. She felt that energy as the force that empowered her call to social action. An evolved Durga woman holds a big, often radical vision, and she has both the energy and the strategic skill to actualize it.

Invoking Durga as the Protectress

Find a comfortable seated position in a quiet location, and begin to focus on your breath.

With eyes closed, imagine yourself in a mountain grove. You are high in the wild mountains, in Durga’s secret abode. As you look around, you see tall, snow-covered peaks on all sides. In the grove, the grass is soft and the air is sweet.

Know that you have come to ask Durga’s protection. You may want to ask for her help in a personal battle or for some action for the benefit of humanity. Perhaps you want to request her help in protecting the environment or in righting some social inequity. Perhaps there is an illness in your body, or a friend is in trouble.

You call Durga in by reciting the following mantra (“I bow to Durga”) nine times:

Aum dum durgaye namaha
ohm doom door-gai-yey nuh-mah-hah

You ask, using the following words or your own, “Goddess Durga, great warrior, protector, and mother of the world, please be with me.”

Now you see the goddess forming out of the mountain peaks. She moves toward you, riding on her lion, moving over the mountains until she is only a few feet from you.

You gaze at her raptly, seeing her beautiful face under a golden diadem; her fierce, loving eyes; her long hair and firm mouth. She wears scarlet silk,

gathered around her waist by a golden girdle, so that her legs can sit astride the lion.

She says, "Speak to me."

Folding your hands, you tell her your situation and ask for her help. You wait to hear her answer, which may come as words, as an inner feeling, or as a sense of her energy moving through you.

Now, imagine that a red light flows from Durga's heart to yours. As you inhale, you draw that light into your heart. You feel it filling you with strength and certainty, the qualities of Durga's Shakti.

Repeating the mantra "Aum dum durgaye namaha," breathe with the feeling that you are drawing the goddess into your body. Let your pores open to receive the powerful, protective energy of Goddess Durga. Realize that you are taking in the power that can fight your battles, speak your truth, and in every sense fight for the preservation of the world.

Let go of the mantra. Rest in meditation. Meditate with the feeling that you are filled with the Durga Shakti.

SHADOW DURGA

As you uncover the Durga Shakti in yourself, it's important to be alert to the ways her shadow manifests when she is invoked in the service of egoic aims. Durga's shadow is harshness and the need for control. In her relationships, she needs to be in charge, and when Durga is manifesting her shadow, her control extends to a level of micromanagement that can disempower anyone who lives in her shade. She needs to shine, even to outshine, and her pride can verge on haughtiness. In the film *The Devil Wears Prada*, Meryl Streep's character embodies the essence of the Durga shadow, using her power to reduce the women around her to menial status. When a woman carries her Durga qualities in shadow, her protectiveness can become a protection racket, and every gesture of help carries an unspoken price tag.

As an employer, she expects perfection, and she can be capricious. Like the Red Queen in *Alice in Wonderland*, negative Durga is likely to command you to paint the roses red, in one breath, and an hour later insist the roses be painted white. (Never mind that the roses don't need painting!) One Durguesque boss authorized a complex renovation project in her office, then when it was done, announced that it was both ugly and way too expensive; that if the people who requested the renovation

had told her exactly what they had intended, she would never have approved it. This is Durga's shadow in action. Her shadow qualities are the negative aspect of her power to protect and transform.

Negative Durga can be self-righteous and critical. In your inner world, the negative Durga voice can show up as a relentless inner critic. She knows every one of your faults and failings, and she is likely to recite them to you at the slightest sign of a mistake. Durga is sure of her rightness, her moral high ground, her political correctness. She has a tendency to stake out ethical territory and allows no deviation from her standards. The 1970s model of the angry feminist, an Andrea Dworkin ("Heterosexual sex is rape") or a Catharine MacKinnon, incarnates the hard-ass side of Durga. Ripping through obstacles, she can also rip apart the fabric of things. Fighting injustice, she visits her sword on anyone or anything that stands in her way. If you earn Durga's disapproval, she is likely to stick you in her box marked "demon" and keep you there for a long time.

THE HEROINE: RIGHTING WRONGS

Durga is heroic in the old-fashioned sense. Like Wonder Woman, Durga is ready to leap into action at a moment's notice—and mobilize armies of helpers, usually female.

In the 1980s, psychotherapist Ruth Berlin noticed that her son's asthma got activated during the times when local crops were being sprayed for pests. She organized a group of mothers to protest aerial spraying in her area; after several years she was able not only to have it banned in Los Angeles, but to have the pesticide removed from circulation entirely. Now, besides her day job as a psychotherapist, she runs an environmental group focused on lobbying against airborne pesticides.

As this anecdote shows, the Durga energy can give a woman an acute social or political consciousness. Many of Durga's fiercer forms, like Bhadrakali and Chamundi, are famously goddesses of the margins, which means that they protect people who live at the edge of society. Durga energy is often behind a woman's instincts to champion the underdog or to organize for change. Dorothy Day was a bohemian rebel, a journalist who flourished in the Greenwich Village counterculture of the 1920s and 1930s. In her thirties, she converted to Catholicism and, in a move that was deeply radical for her time, recognized that it was possible to marry her socialist politics with her Catholic theology and mystical intuitions. Along with another mystical activist, Peter Maurin, she held the Durgaesque vision that Catholicism could become a force for living Jesus's original ministry to the poor. She and Maurin founded the Catholic Worker movement, which ran hospitality houses for homeless workers and served generations of desperately poor people

in New York's Lower East Side. Her work helped inspire the liberation theology movement in South America, and it continues to inspire Christian activists.

On a more universal level, Durga's energy is often the fuel for popular uprisings and the will to fight social and political injustice. The early agitators for women's voting rights were filled with the Durga energy. So were the "rebel girls" of the labor and civil rights movements. So were my contemporaries in the second-wave feminist movement of the 1970s. The quiet "Enough!" of Rosa Parks keeping her seat in a segregated bus; the lunch counter sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and voter registration efforts in the 1960s; the wave of democratic feeling that created the Velvet and Orange revolutions in Eastern Europe; and the winds of popular protest that swept through the world in 2011—bringing down dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt. All are expressions of the Durga Shakti. Durga energy is beyond political partisanship, of course; her energy flowed through Sarah Palin's famous acceptance speech at the 2008 Republican National Convention as much as it flows through Nancy Pelosi or through Leymah Gbowee, the Liberian peace activist.

One way to get a felt sense of the Durga Shakti is to remember a moment when you recognized, from the deepest place inside you, that something was wrong; that it *had* to change. If that recognition comes from the Durga Shakti, it goes beyond mere frustration. It goes beyond cognitive awareness of a social problem. Durga's transformative power carries a conviction that comes from deep inside the body, and with it often comes a sense of "Now!"—meaning *the time is now*. When that knowing is strong enough, it is followed by action. You will willingly put your body and your speech on the line to change the situation—whether it is an internal or an external one.

When the Durga energy is moving in society, it will naturally bring people together, raise up leaders, give impetus to a cause. Before the Durga Shakti is activated, we often feel powerless, confused, unable to act. Our forces are scattered and our will vacillates. If our will is strong, it may be powered by egoic agendas, anxiety, or fear. It's self-aggrandizing and manipulative—and limited in its power, which is why movements for change burn out or devolve into internal power struggles. Once Durga rises within us and descends through us (for the process of being activated by the Goddess involves both the calling from above and the ascent from below) there is purpose, will, direction, and a sense of inevitability. Of course, the ego can distort the pure instinct of the Shakti, and when the Shakti in her radical form has been unleashed, it requires great discernment to keep hold of the thread of the pure evolutionary impulse and not let

the ego come in to claim it. Even when human confusion distorts the impulses of the Shakti, once Durga has sounded her battle cry—blown her great conch and clanged the bell of transformation—the movement of evolution cannot be stopped. When Durga’s revolutionary energy sweeps through the world, there is no going back to the way things were before.

The phrase “winds of change” actually describes the way Durga energy moves, both in the world and in our bodies. Anyone who has ever been caught up in such a moment will recognize the feeling of heightened pranic energy—the dopamine surge that fills you, impelling purposeful action and seeming to carry you beyond anything that you could have done under ordinary conditions.

DURGA AS THE FORCE OF INNER REVOLUTION

The same quality of purposeful action can be invoked when what we need is the will to change a deep-seated habit or addiction. Anyone who has ever done personal transformative work knows that the desire to change a self-destructive or addictive habit has to mature into an intense will to transform before it galvanizes into action. In my experience, tuning into the Durga Shakti is like tuning into an almost cosmic sense of purpose. W. H. Murray, the Scottish polar explorer, wrote, “When there is a definite commitment, providence moves too.”⁵ Durga is that providence.

As a force in the transformative process, Durga Shakti gives you the power to face the parts of yourself that are in the way of your evolution, in every sense of the word.

Contemplation: Invoking Durga to Transform Yourself

For this exercise you will need a pen, a journal, and a quiet place to sit in contemplation.

Consider one quality in yourself that you know needs to change. Perhaps it’s an aspect of your personality that others have pointed out to you, or that you know causes suffering to yourself and others. Or perhaps you notice a regressive trait in yourself like indecisiveness, deceitfulness, or lack of discipline. Perhaps it is an addictive behavior or a psychological pattern that seems to be keeping you from stepping into your best self.

Write a paragraph about how this trait manifests in you.

Now imagine yourself in a garden. See before you the form of the Goddess Durga. She sits astride a lion, draped in red silk. Her hair is black, lustrous, and covers her shoulders. She wears bracelets, rings, and other ornaments. Her dark eyes blaze with kindness.

As you are seated before her, gaze into her eyes. Imagine that with each exhalation you offer this negative trait into her radiant presence. With each inhalation, you breathe in her strength and purity, her power to transform.

Finally, sit with the feeling of Durga's presence, allowing her dynamic, loving, awakening energy to fill you. Imagine that you are filling yourself with Durga Shakti.

In her most secret and inward manifestation, Durga is the power behind radical spiritual awakening. She's the Shakti that descends into us and ignites the subtle body, beginning a process that can eventually change the way we think, feel, and see ourselves and the world. In the Tantric traditions, this awakening is called *shaktipat*, the descent (*pat*) of Shakti. It's an extraordinary mystical process in which Shakti from above meets Shakti from below and sets in motion the kundalini—the so-called coiled inner energy that orchestrates the dance of internal revolution. The Tantric traditions tell us that kundalini is the inner form of the goddess and that when the human body forms, it holds both the divine dynamism of the goddess and the transcendent spirit of the divine masculine principle. The awakening of kundalini is actually the awakening of the Goddess's powers within the human body, and it may be the most radically transformative event in one's life. It can set in motion a complete reordering of your priorities, opening up the gates of the inner body, giving you the capacity to perceive the inner meaning of events, unlocking creative gifts, kindling love in the heart, setting in motion the process of self-questioning that can change the way you live every aspect of your life. In the goddess traditions, what we call the awakening of kundalini is the moment when the goddess decides to show you her liberating face.⁶

Until that moment, all the energy in the system is outgoing, spent in powering the senses and the heartbeat, drawn outward to complete immersion in the external. When kundalini awakens, all of that changes. You get the capacity to turn your attention inward, to see beneath the surface of things, to sense the deep connections between yourself and others and yourself and the world. The awakening of kundalini is something like a dynamite blast that cracks a rock—in this case, the rock that cements us into the

feeling of separation and duality. I once watched workers dynamite a huge boulder in the midst of a field where they were building a house. When the dynamite exploded, the boulder rose a foot in the air, then settled back, cracked in a hundred places. The shape of the boulder remained, but it no longer held together. In the same way, the edifice of dualistic understanding is cracked during a kundalini awakening. You may not immediately realize that this has happened. The old structures of your mind and body and heart may stay in place for some time after the initial upheaval, but the cement that holds them together has been dissolved.

Only a mighty force like the Durga energy can crack the embedded rocks of our deep karmic habits. As kundalini, Durga Shakti can dissolve the neuronal patterns that keep us stuck in our woundedness and constrict our responses to the world. More than that, the awakened Durga Shakti has the power to turn around the ship of your consciousness. She can literally reverse the polarities of your awareness so that you can begin to see into the inner world. Kundalini awakening is soul stirring. A subtle kundalini awakening will give you a deeper access to meditative states. A dramatic kundalini awakening can dissolve the forms around you so that for a few moments you experience your body, mind, and external surroundings evanesce into emptiness. It can send light and energy shooting up your spine, waves of bliss coursing through your body. It can pluck out your sense of alienation, your feelings of darkness and low-grade anxiety, and give you an effortless feeling of connection to all that is. It can overwhelm you with feelings of love that come from the depths of the earth and reach up to the sky. It can also draw out your shadows and show you the rage, fear, and grief you've hidden from yourself in your addiction to the light side of your existence. But kundalini will also release them out of your system, layer by layer, so that you are no longer ruled by "demonic" emotions.

When the Goddess Durga awakens in you as the kundalini Shakti, she awakens as all her divine aspects. In the root myth of Durga, there is that moment when different Shaktis emerge from her body in the form of goddesses like Lakshmi and Saraswati. That scene could be a metaphor for the emergence of different energies after a kundalini awakening. Once activated, the inner evolutionary energy acts in the psyche in three distinct ways, each personified by one of the goddesses. These stages often occur simultaneously, but they can feel very different. In the first stage, our system is gradually cleared of obstructions and karmic blocks, the residue of old wounds, genetic predispositions, and

traumas—any resentment, grief, and fear that darkens our energy body and prevents the free flow of our natural life-force. This purification stage is associated with Kali, the fierce energy of the Goddess.

The second stage is often experienced as the awakening of your sense of inner abundance. Sensations of bliss might pour through your body, or you might feel spontaneous impulses of kindness and gratitude. You feel joyful for no particular reason. Problems resolve themselves. You may see lovely visions in meditation or experience inner and outer gifts showering on you. Your life begins to feel graced. You get a job offer or an inheritance. You have a breakthrough in a creative project. You become pregnant after years of trying unsuccessfully. Your relationships with people you've been estranged from become friendly again. You feel loved, loving, fortunate. Your inner life seems to unfold almost effortlessly, as if guided.

These inner and outer gifts are manifestations of Lakshmi, the energy of good luck, love, and delight. The expansion of Lakshmi's energy can happen early in the process, but the experience of inner harmony and abundance becomes stronger each time another limiting pattern or negative emotion is released from your system. Dammed energies are freed and begin to flow through channels that you might not have known were there.

When Lakshmi energy is moving in the body, your desires begin to be fulfilled, both the inner ones and the outer ones. As a young woman, I'd always had a secret desire to be irresistible. At one stage of my awakening process it seemed as though this was being fulfilled: I became so magnetic that men were constantly flirting with me—to the point where it became uncomfortable. Both women and men have shared similar experiences with me. When the Lakshmi energy is operating in you, your body becomes particularly radiant.

The danger here is that you might become intoxicated with your own good fortune—attached to the sweets of life. You might find yourself living in your own version of the god realm, the domain of infinite pleasure, where desires are more or less instantly fulfilled and your worst problem is having to make choices between one great experience or another. The problem with the god realm is that it's easy to get stuck there—but of that, more later!

SARASWATI RISING

In the third stage of kundalini awakening, you begin to experience the gifts of Saraswati, the power of knowledge. In the external world, Saraswati Shakti might manifest as a new eloquence, the gift of verbal expression, or the power

to make delicious music. In the inner realm, however, the mark of Saraswati's presence is the opening of your capacity for insight. You're able, effortlessly, to recognize divine presence in the world. The enveloping consciousness of the witness arises in you. You understand subtle energy, and you can express it. Your intellect becomes powerful and refined. You can read philosophy or physics or mystical texts, understand them, and make connections between disciplines. Richard Sclove had a spontaneous kundalini awakening as a student at MIT. One result was that he began to know what the professor was going to say before saying it, and he also could discern when the professor was wrong. In one stunning emergence of Saraswati Shakti, Sclove guessed the answers on a calculus exam for an advanced course he hadn't expected to pass. Instead, he received the highest grade in the class.⁷

The difficulty here is that your understanding and eloquence—the expression of Saraswati's gifts—will often outstrip your realization.

In my early years of kundalini awakening, my insights about spiritual life arrived so compellingly that I felt as if I understood all sorts of subtleties I'd never realized before. Texts came alive. When other people would be confused by spiritual paradoxes, I could almost instantly understand the unity behind apparent contradictions. I could speak intelligently about all this, and yet my inner embodiment, my assimilation of the knowledge that flowed through me, was unbaked and superficial. I had grown up in a family of writers, and I already tended to overidentify with my intellectual prowess, such as it was. Whenever Saraswati unfolded a new insight, my ego would identify with it, and I would feel as if I had “succeeded” in my spiritual life. Often, at that point there would be a setback, a moment of humiliation. I'd forget something, or misstate something I should have known, and I'd realize that I wasn't intellectually omnipotent at all. It was as if the Goddess were reminding me that worldly and spiritual gifts are just that—gifts, leant to us for a purpose.

FULLNESS, INFLATION, AND DURGA'S SWORD

The process of assimilating the gifts of the goddess swings naturally through phases of expansion and contraction. The goddess expands in you. You experience the fullness of her gifts. You fall in love with the energy moving in you. Often, you experience profound humility and gratitude. Then the ego seizes the gift, identifies with it, and begins, subtly or less subtly, to overreach itself. At that point, Durga's sword might appear in the form of a smack from the universe or a sudden and precipitate feeling of having fallen from grace. Or the boons and meditation

experiences might seem to evaporate, leaving you with the feeling that you've lost touch with love, or that Saraswati's graceful gifts of speech have deserted you. Sometimes, it can seem as if your vision is once again clouded, the world once again opaque and flat.

The path of the goddess is all about learning to ride the expansion and contraction until you can recognize her different faces in the ups and downs of your inner journey. You become familiar with her subtle hints, the signs that a path is opening for you, the warnings to back off, back down, go deeper inside, or turn more attention to a part of your personal self that needs development. Little by little, Shakti partners with your own efforts and practice to subtly reshape your character and nature. The more you understand the process as the natural expression of the goddess's acts of revelation and concealment, the more easily you can partner with her unfolding inside you.

Durga

door-gah—Warrior Goddess of Strength and Protection

Other Names for Durga:

Ambika (*uhm-bi-kah*)—Lotus Lady

Katyayani (*kuh-tyah-yah-nee*)—Maiden

Aparajita (*uh-pahr-ah-ji-tah*)—Unconquerable One

Mahishasuramardini (*mah-hish-uh-soor-uh-mahr-di-nee*)—Slayer of the Demon Mahisha

Mahamaya (*mah-hah-mah-yah*)—Great Illusion, referring to her power of creating the worlds

Vrindavyasini (*vrin-duh-vyah-si-nee*)—Dweller in the Mountains

Sheranvali (*sheyr-uhn-vah-lee*)—Lion Rider

Bhagavati (*bhub-guh-vah-tee*)—Possessor of Auspicious Qualities

Mahadevi (*muh-hah-dey-vee*)—Great Goddess; the Great Goddess is often identified with Durga

Recognize Durga in:

- strong winds
- crashing waves and high surf
- the season of autumn, when the leaves turn colors

- bonfires
- all forms of bravery in the service of truth
- the will to battle
- powerful leaders who take groups of people through a crisis or a war
- feelings of triumph and satisfaction after doing something difficult
- strong foundations, whether physical or cultural
- mountains
- upheavals that lead to new forms of culture or government
- courage that comes from the heart
- the impulse to protect
- truth-telling
- measured risk-taking

Invoke Durga for:

- physical, mental, and emotional strength
- personal empowerment
- standing up for yourself in an argument
- starting a project and getting down to work
- completing a project
- willpower to create positive habits, such as eating healthy foods, getting exercise, or sitting for meditation
- help in challenging situations, such as getting your kids to do their homework, chairing a meeting, facing a difficult boss or coworker, litigating, keeping your integrity under challenging circumstances, calling someone out, controlling unruly emotions
- taking care of you in bad neighborhoods or negative situations
- rescuing someone in trouble
- protecting other people
- ending relationships
- political power and savvy
- fighting for justice
- facing up to (and facing down!) the negative side of your own ego

Bija Mantra

Dum (*doom*)

Seed mantra for Shakti as pure strength

Invocational Mantra

Aum dum durgaye namaha
ohm doom door-gai-yey nuh-mu-huh

Om, I bow to the one who overcomes all difficulties

Gayatri Mantra

(Called “Mother of the Vedas,” the Gayatri mantra is foundational in Hinduism, second only to the mantra “Ohm” in its importance. The Gayatri mantra is used as praise, as petition, and simply to connect your consciousness to the deity or energy invoked. Most deities have a Gayatri specially dedicated to them.)

Aum katyahyanahya vidmahey
 Kanyakumaryai dhimahi
 Tanno durgih prachodahyaht

ohm kaht-yah-yuh-nah-yuh vid-muh-bey
kahn-yah-koom-ahr-yai dhe-muh-bi
tuh-no door-gah prah-cho-dah-yaht

Om, May I receive the wisdom of the maiden Katyayani
 May I meditate on the maiden goddess Kanyakumari
 May the light of the one who overcomes all difficulties (Durga)
 illumine my intellect

Durga’s colors: red, gold, yellow, orange
 Durga’s festival: Dasara, in the Hindu month of Kartika
 (September–October)
 Durga’s mount: lion, tiger
 Durga’s consort: Shiva