

*Dark Sisters:  
Kali and the Black Madonna*

Marlene A. Schiwy, Ph.D.

.....The kingdom of Kali is within us deep.  
The built-in destroyer, the savage goddess,

.....  
How then to set her free or come to terms  
With the volcano itself, the fierce power  
Erupting injuries, shrieking alarms?  
Kali among her skulls must have her hour.

It is time for the invocation, to atone  
For what we fear most and have not dared to face:  
Kali, the destroyer, cannot be overthrown;  
We must stay, open-eyed, in the terrible place.

Every creation is born out of the dark.  
Every birth is bloody. Something gets torn.  
Kali is there to do her sovereign work  
Or else the living child will be stillborn.....

May Sarton, "Invocation to Kali"

The Black Madonna is the patron saint of abandoned daughters  
who rejoice in their outcast state and can use it to renew the world.  
Marion Woodman, *The Pregnant Virgin*

The secret is that only that which can destroy itself is fully alive.  
Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, para 93.

Several years ago, I had the following dream.

*There has been an earthquake and our apartment building has collapsed. Everything has been destroyed and lies in ruins. I feel that my life as I have known it until now is over and everything has been devastated. I wander helplessly through the wreckage and don't know what to do. In one corner of the building Martin (an artist friend who is a recovering drug addict) has set up a little restaurant and is cooking an East Indian meal of curry. I think, "Why is he opening a restaurant here at a time like this? Can't he see that the building has been destroyed?" Several people are eating with him and seem to be having a good time. I don't want to move out of this building. It occurs to me that perhaps we can afford to buy an additional apartment here for more space now that the value of the suites has come down.*

*Then a large black woman comes into the room where I am standing. She looks at me quietly. She is carrying a beautiful black velvet handbag with colourful embroidered trees and flowers, birds and butterflies on it. I notice that she is wearing a beautiful brooch which looks like a bird at first, but then I realize it is an elephant. She sees that I am looking at it and takes it off and offers it to me. Very softly she says, "It has been very hard for you, hasn't it? If this will comfort you, please take it."*

*I let out one loud anguished sob. I know that my life will never be the same and I am so grateful for her compassion. She tells me she is going to wander through the building because she would like to offer comfort to people. Suddenly I can think of eating dinner and someone says there are some good restaurants heading westward near UBC (the university where I teach). I think I'd like to go eat with my friends.*

Over the past decade I have had countless dreams of Black, Indian, and Gypsy peoples. Although there have been men in these dreams as well, more often it has been women, usually large, solid, ample bodied, whose presence radiates compassion, a quality of earthy acceptance, and a quiet but unmistakable certainty about themselves, who they are, and what they know. Over the years, they have offered me comfort, admonition, and support. They never say much, but their essence emanates powerfully and I feel awed and humble in their presence. Their non-nonsense attitude has been an important tuning fork for the superficial disturbances and insecurities of the dream ego, of "Marlene" in my dreams.

At first I did not understand why these dark feminine figures kept appearing in my dreams. Then it began to dawn on me that they were images of the Black Madonna. In the work of Marion Woodman I read that her analysands' dreams were full of dark, earthy women, healing

images of the transformative feminine. In one dream, “a Black Madonna, a radiant ten-foot woman, took the dreamer on her lap, nestled her curly head beside her great beating heart and rocked her” (RB 115). In a similar dream of my own, a tall strong Black woman who appeared out of nowhere curved her arm tenderly around my friend and me, as we stood too near the edge of a balcony, holding us safe. Such archetypal experiences of safety and cherishing surely indicate a yearning for something essential that has not been lived in our daily lives, neither on an individual nor cultural level. Woodman observes, “The Black Madonna repeatedly appears in modern dreams, and her presence suggests the possibility of a feminine consciousness as yet unknown to us. Her coming presages a new understanding of light in matter, light in nature, light in our own bodies” (RB 124). Elsewhere she goes into more detail concerning how this archetypal figure may appear in dreams. “This goddess takes many forms. Usually she is black or oriental or simply dark. She may appear as a proud gypsy, a dancer in a tavern, a sacred prostitute, a Mary Magdalene. Always she is outside the collective value system of the dreamer’s conscious world...and carries immense potential for new life” (PV 167).

In particular, Woodman’s account of her own transformative encounter with the stark life-and-death reality of Kali in India drew my attention. Woodman describes her utter disorientation in the chaos of India, her close encounter with death alone in a hotel in Delhi, and her anguished realization that at middle age, she had never accepted her incarnation nor moved into her own body. In the midst of a near-death experience, she realized, “Now it was my choice – either to move into my body and live my life as a human being, or to move out into what I imagined would be freedom” (178). Afterward, having been brought into life both through conscious choice and the lovingkindness of a stranger, “a large Indian woman in gold-trimmed

sari,” whose bodily warmth helped restore her to life, Marion felt herself to be a new creature: “I was participating in life with an open heart, ravished by the sights and sounds and smells of that extraordinarily paradoxical world” (180). Then she found herself unaccountably drawn into a strange experience of initiation on Krishna’s birthday, also her own, and writes, “In the Krishna ritual, after having so recently reclaimed my animal body, I experienced the grass as holy grass, and my milkmaid’s body as a vehicle through which the love of Krishna’s bride could flow. The contradiction of animal and divine was resolved” (182). Marion concludes, “India was my journey to my own India, my own dark underworld ... India forced me to look into the terrible face of the Goddess and that look put me in touch with a profound level of loving” (184-85).

The more I read the more fascinated I became. All my life I have had an irrational fascination and identification with Gypsies and India, although I didn’t realize that the Roma people originate in Northern India until approximately ten years ago. Around that time I also read *Dancing in the Flames: The Dark Goddess in the Transformation of Consciousness*, and began to understand the meaning of that fascination. Although Woodman and Dickson and many other writers see all of the dark goddesses as manifestations of a common archetypal energy, that of the Great Goddess, the two that speak most powerfully to me are the Black Madonna, and Kali. Why those two in particular, is a mystery to me.

Then, while writing my first symbol paper on the Gypsy last semester, I came across several references to Sara-la-Kali, the patron Saint of the Roma, variously referred to as Sara the Egyptian, Mary the Gypsy, Maria-Sara, Saint Sara, and other names as well. According to various Roma scholars and Gypsiologists, when the Romani people were moved out of Northern India between 800 and 950 AD, arriving in Europe after 1100 AD, they brought with them their

beloved Kali Mother goddess, which came to be identified with the Black Madonna. As I watched *Latcho Drom (Safe Journey 1993)*, Toni Gatlif's beautiful film about Gypsy music and dance, I was moved by how the Romani men played music to "Maria-Sara" or "Sara the Egyptian" at Les-Saintes-Marie-de-la-Mer, then went up and spontaneously poured kisses on her neck. There was an intimacy and even sensuality in their worship that one cannot imagine in the western adoration of the Virgin Mary.

My interest grew. Was there a significant connection among the emergence of Kali as a major goddess in the Hindu pantheon, the Roma's diasporic movement into Persia and Egypt and then westward into Europe after they were exiled from their home in Northern India, and the upsurge of interest in the Black Virgin - all around the period from 900-1100 AD? Certainly there are other significant historical events at play during this time (the Crusades, for example, and the likelihood that warriors returning from the east brought with them pagan statues and images that became beloved as Black Madonnas).

Now, while writing this essay, I continue to wonder about the apparent overlapping dates. The period around 900 AD seems quite important in these interweavings. At that time about 15,000 Roma were forcibly exiled to Persia and began their thousand year migration into many corners of the world. According to Ean Begg, the end of the ninth century was also when the Cult of the Black Virgin took root in Europe. And now I learn that this is also the time during which Kali began to flourish in India and become prominent in Hinduism after more than a thousand years of being a minor deity whose place was really on the periphery, just like that of the Roma, or Gypsies. The Black Madonna too has survived on the periphery until recent years, so that seems to constitute one significant shared strand. As I discussed these reflections with my

husband on the telephone, we thought that perhaps the fact that Kali - goddess of the periphery and of boundaries— became more important around this time was part of an archetypal field that also included the displacement of the Roma out of Northern India to Persia and then on to Central and Western Europe over the next several centuries. Could it be that the archetype of liminality was activated at that time?

While I was working on the Symbol paper last winter, my landlady went to India and I asked her to bring me back a small statue of Kali. As I held the heavy brass statue in my hands and saw the fierceness in Kali's form and imagery, I thought twice about whether I wanted to have it in my room! What does it mean to "live with Kali," and do I want to invite greater awareness of that energy in the world around me and within myself?

In this essay I would like to consider Kali and the Black Madonna as "Dark Sisters" of the East and West. They are dark sisters both to their white "twins," Durga/Parvati and the Virgin Mary, and to each other. But they are also dark sisters to me, a daughter of western patriarchy and more specifically of a German Baptist background (including two years of religious college) subsequently overlaid by academia's overvaluation of intellectual understanding and utter disregard and contempt for feeling values and embodied wisdom. Even the Jungian collective's drive toward consciousness has played a part in keeping me estranged from my own darkness, rather than accepting it as an integral part of myself.

For a basic understanding of the historical-mythological background and significance of Kali within Hinduism, I have relied primarily on the work of David Kinsley. Ean Begg's study of the Black Virgin, has provided the basis for my comments about the historical roots and evolution of the Black Madonna. What I appreciate greatly about both Kinsley and Begg is the

symbolic dimension they bring to their research, and their own obvious personal involvement with the material at hand. For an exploration of the archetypal resonance of these dark feminine energies, I have drawn from a wide variety of sources, including - beyond the work of Jung himself - von Franz, Neumann, Harding, Hillman, Brinton Perera, and others. On a personal level, the most important resonances for my own soul have come from the work of Marion Woodman, beloved mentor and friend. My love of other people's words and illuminations will be evident in the many quotations woven into my text.

## THE DARK GODDESS

Historically dark goddesses appear to have belonged to all religious traditions (although conspicuous by their absence in the west for the past millennium.) In his survey of the historical roots of the Black Virgin, Ean Begg provides an overview of many goddess figures who predate the Black Madonna, including the Queen of Sheba, Lilith, Kali, Inanna, Neith, Anath, Hathor, and Sekhmet, Artemis, Cybele, Isis, Aphrodite/Venus, and others. Although some of these goddesses were known primarily in their light manifestations, all were recognized in their dark form as well, thereby uniting within themselves the opposing qualities of Virgin and Whore, Mother and Witch, Creator and Destroyer. In *Descent to the Goddess*, Sylvia Brinton Perera discusses goddess pairs representing two distinct energy patterns, including Inanna and Erishkigal, Athena and Medusa, the heavenly Aphrodite and Uranian Aphrodite, and what she refers to as "the eldest of the fates; Mother Kali and devouring Kali-Durga" (44).

Begg writes, “Our Black Virgin in the west has much in common symbolically with the other great goddess figures of the world. In her subterranean darkness she could be compared with the terrifying maw of death, Kali” (131). Although Begg focuses on the origins of the Black Madonna, one sees Kali hovering nearby as the “one contemporary of Inanna’s still active today...who retains her awesome power” (42). Sekhmet, the lion-headed Egyptian goddess whom Begg posits as Hathor’s dark sister and the most bloodthirsty of European and Near Eastern warrior goddesses, symbolizes, like Kali, “the putrefaction without which the spiritual life-force cannot be released at death [and] the annihilating power which makes conception possible: one form must die before another can come into being” (47). Patricia Reis for her part writes that Greek Aphrodite “was also called Dark One, and Black, by the Greeks, indicating another side which should not be forgotten, and which indeed is essential to her nature. Greek worship of Aphrodite as a divinity of death and the Underworld was frequent” (121). And for the Gnostics Sophia represented “one all-embracing feminine wisdom, including both the virgin and the whore” (Begg, 100). What seems clear is that unlike our own Judeo-Christian tradition, where the feminine has survived primarily in apocryphal texts and Gnostic tradition, earlier cultures and religions have recognized and paid homage to the Underworld, the realm of the dark feminine.

## KALI

As I began to read about Kali in the context of the Hindu religious tradition, I felt overwhelmed by the opulence of this cosmology and the incredible richness and diversity of

religious scripture and imagery. I realized with a pang everything I did not know about Hinduism. Having meanwhile scraped the tip of this iceberg, drunk a drop of this ocean, I've discovered that the very abundance of religious mythology itself points toward few absolute certainties concerning Kali's origin and evolution. What does seem clear is that the figure of Kali first appeared in Hindu sacred writings somewhere around 400 B.C.E., although several sources also suggests the earliest reference to her may be older than that. David Nelson, for example, tells us that the name of Kali first appears in Sanskrit literature between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E. as one of the seven quivering tongues of the fire god Agni. He suggests, "Just as fire dissolves matter into energy, the goddess Kali dissolves the material universe into undifferentiated being."

In *The Sword and the Flute*, David Kinsley writes, "The wild, frenzied natures of Krsna and Kali suggest the conclusion that the divine in Hinduism is essentially unspecified. The divine represents or embodies unrefined, primordial Being...a dimension that is completely unbound, primordially free" (157). As I read these words I cannot help but relate them to the Greek principle of *apeiron*, explored at length in *Dimensions of Apeiron*, written by my husband, Steven Rosen, in 2004. He writes, "To early Greek science and philosophy, nature in the wild is *apeiron*. This is the Greek word for what is 'limitless,' 'boundless,' or 'indeterminate.' The *apeiron* is variously interpreted as 'the unintelligible; the many; the moving; the ugly; the bad...the inchoate flux of opposites or contraries...the principle of disorder or disharmony.' In its sheer boundlessness, *apeiron* defies containment within the ordering contexts of space and time" (xiv). Steve traces the role of *apeiron* – which he characterizes as the Dark Goddess – in modern philosophy (in the work of Nietzsche, for example) and in modern science, particularly

physics, and equates it also with the Mercurial spirit in the work of the alchemists (62-63). Since containment, order, and detachment are key features of our western attempts at rational thinking, he notes, “No wonder the specter of *apeiron* is so fearsome to behold,” and posits the question, “Does the vision of the ‘Black Goddess’ betoken the unavoidable demise of rational thinking, of language and reflective individuality?” Or is it rather the case that “*apeiron* – far from merely signaling the end of individuation – is the key to its genuine completion?” (62). The book’s two parts are titled “*Solve: The Flight from Apeiron*” and “*Coagula: The Return to Apeiron*,” and Steve concludes the first half of the book by suggesting, “Herein lies the ultimate paradox of individuation: How can *apeiron* be fully contained, and, at the same time, fully liberated?” (63). We might also ask that question in our efforts to explore and embody the energies of the dark goddess.

Heinrich Zimmer writes, “Shiva und Devi, seine Gemahlin mit den vielen Namen – Kali, Durga, Parvati [usw.] werden als die uranfängliche zweifältige Personalisierung des Absoluten angesehen” (219). Thus Kali clearly represents the feminine half of creation. However, in *The Sword and the Flute*, David Kinsley argues that just as male gods are not subsumed by a single “Great God” tradition on the basis of their maleness, Kali cannot be reduced to simply a manifestation of the Great Goddess, but has a distinct identity of her own that is different from that of other female deities (84). Kinsley traces Kali’s gradual emergence in Hindu religion and mythology from the ranks of a minor deity during the period of 400 B.C. to 400 A.D. to “the highest manifestation of the divine in India” in our own time, and suggests, “How Kali succeeded in achieving this status, how she grew from a helper of Durga, an embodiment of her

wrath who played a subservient role, to mistress of the universe, the Mother of all, is extremely difficult to determine” (93).

Perhaps it is fitting that the historical background of a goddess representing the ultimate paradox of creation and destruction, containing within herself both the ecstatic dance of life and the death-dance on the cremation grounds, should be filled with uncertainty. In his three books on Hinduism, Kinsley offers many variations of Kali’s origin. In *Hindu Goddesses*, he recounts that as Durga is about to be attacked by demons during battle, she becomes furious and suddenly Kali springs from her forehead and ultimately defeats the demon by swallowing his blood. Kinsley writes, “Kali appears to represent Durga’s personified wrath, her embodied fury” (118). In other myths, Kali seems to represent the dark alter ego of Parvati and Sita as well. In the former case, dark-complexioned Parvati (also called Parvati-Kali), generally a benign goddess, attempts to take on a lighter golden complexion, only to be faced again with her own “dark, negative, violent nature in embodied form” (118). Conversely, Heinrich Zimmer describes Parvati as “an incarnation of the supreme goddess of the world Kali-Durga-Sati, Siva’s eternal counterpart and projected energy, whom the god, for the well being of the universe, was to be brought to recognize and know” (141).

There is so much that can be said about Kali. In all of the myths about her, she threatens stability and order and, in the context of battle, she becomes so wild and uncontrollable that she can destroy what is hers to protect. With her fury and wrath, she seems to be a shadow sister to the other goddesses, “a frightening, dangerous dimension of the divine feminine that is released when these goddesses become enraged or are summoned to take part in war and killing” (HG

120). Kali represents “something that has been pushed to its ultimate limits... unspeakably terrifying, something totally and irreconcilably ‘other’” (SF 82).

From approximately the 6<sup>th</sup> century on, Kali exists both as an independent goddess and as the top goddess among the ten Mahavidyas (the ten forms or manifestations of Kali that arose as Siva tried to flee Sati’s anger) from around the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The Mahavidyas in turn are reflections or manifestations of the “terrible” aspect of the Mahavedi or Great Goddess. Kinsley suggests that the tumultuous and uncontrollable aspects of the Divine that appear in other deities are manifest in their extreme form in the image of Kali. “Her appearance and mythology, one could say, ‘completed’ the universal character of the Great Goddess in classical and medieval times by adding to it the dark, terrible aspects of reality that the Goddess represents as life itself” (SF, 149). (I must admit that my stomach churned when I read Joseph Campbell’s description of human sacrifices to Kali which ended only around 1835, less than 200 years ago. I am not sure what horrified me more: the forced or voluntary sacrifice by decapitation. It’s one thing to hear Kali’s destructive side described as monstrous and uncanny, but quite another to read the description of the endless ritual decapitations carried out on her altar.)

The name “Kali” means “the dark one” and various scholars relate it also to time (Kala) which inevitably reduces all human accomplishment to ashes in the cremation ground only to begin yet another cycle in the eternal round. She is also associated with the night, and her fury is equated with “prakrti – the realm of vibrating matter that proceeds according to its own laws” (SF 106).

In later more recent times, perhaps largely through the adoration of a number of Bengali devotional poets, Kali has taken on the meaning of Universal Mother not apparent in her earlier

manifestations. Indeed my western sensibility has found it a challenge to comprehend that throughout her long reign, Kali has been depicted in so many contradictory ways – from overwhelmingly fierce and threatening to nourishing and life-sustaining, from skeletal and emaciated to voluptuous and sensual, and from decreeing death and decay to embodying the saps and juices of life. She is at once the goddess of creation and destruction but also of ferocious sexual appetites, uncanny human and animal sacrifice, and utter disregard toward human desire. As Heinrich Zimmer says, “To the Goddess is due the life blood of all creatures – since it is she who has bestowed it – and that is why the meat must be slaughtered in her temple: that is why temple and slaughterhouse are one” (cited in Neumann, 152). In one version in the later evolution of Kali, she has become the “supreme mistress of the universe,” and along with Siva, her spouse, the creator and destroyer of worlds. At this point she is no longer only the dark mediator of Parvati’s or Durga’s wrath, “not only the symbol of death but the symbol of triumph over death” (HG 124-25).

In his discussion of Kali’s importance within Hinduism, Kinsley says that what remains constant in Kali’s mythology and imagery over time is her association with blood and death, a shocking and subversive reality within the purity-minded culture of Hinduism. This makes her a dangerous being in a culture which has elaborate rituals of purification (samskaras) to enable safe passage through contact with blood and death. Kinsley suggests, “Kali may be one way in which the Hindu tradition has sought to come to terms, at least in part, with the built-in shortcomings of its own refined view of the world.” She reminds Hindus that “certain aspects of reality are untamable, unpurifiable, unpredictable, and always a threat to society’s feeble attempts to order what is essentially disorderly: life itself” (HG 129). In other words, he seems to

be suggesting that even within Hinduism itself, Kali may be a reminder of the uncontainable *apeiron*. “To meditate on the dark goddess, or to devote oneself to her, is to step out of the everyday world of predictable dharmic order and enter a world of reversals, opposites, and contrasts and in doing so to wake up to new possibilities and new frames of reference” (HG 130). (Perhaps we could also describe this from the psyche’s perspective as the plunge into chaos, as opening ourselves to the tension of the opposites with the often painful process of waiting for the “new thing”, the third, the transcendent function to appear.)

Kali, says Kinsley, allows and even forces us to see the complete picture, invites a more realistic reflection on our lives: where we have come from and where we are going. She gives us a clearer perspective on our true place and value in the world, leads us to see ourself as only one being “in an endless series of permutations arising from the ever-recurring cycles of life and death that constitute the inner rhythms of the divine mother.... Kali reveals that ultimately all creatures are her children and also her food and that no social role or identity can remove the individual from this sacrificial give and take” (HG 130).

## THE BLACK MADONNA

The Black Madonna is much more comprehensible to me than Kali. Although the Roman Catholic reverence for the Virgin Mary was considered heretical during my Protestant Christian upbringing, I certainly felt keenly the absence of any feminine presence whatsoever throughout my twenty one years as a “believer.” That the personified Sacred should consist of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit also presumed to be male, (or as a renowned American nun put it, of “two men

and a bird”) with no recognition of the other half of existence struck me as unfathomable and absurd. But even the image of Mary, Mother of God did not answer my hunger for an authentic, earthy, life-affirming feminine presence that would balance the righteous, heavenly-minded demands of Father and Son. At the age of twenty two I made a definitive break with my religious upbringing, no longer able to tolerate what I perceived as the narrow-minded patriarchal stagnancy of the German Baptist tradition.

John Dourley, Jungian analyst and Roman Catholic priest, suggests that Mary’s restoration as “Mother Goddess” in 1950, does not restore a balance because “only her immaculate aspect is divinized.” He adds, “Those sides of the feminine personified in such non-Christian figures as Circe, Venus, Artemis, Hecate and Kali are excluded from the heaven in which the Virgin-Mother rules. Thus the image of Mary divinizes the virginal and the maternal.... Christianity’s recovery of a fuller relationship to the feminine would thus require, in the logic of Jung’s own thought, the introduction into the Christian pantheon of Goddesses whose presence there might make its current occupants decidedly uneasy” (60, 61). Although recognition of the Black Madonna is a start, Dourley feels something far more radical would be needed to restore “full-blooded bodiliness” to Christianity (65).

Marie Louise von Franz describes the dire consequences of Christian dualism that resulted in the witch persecutions. In contrast to the Egyptian Mother Goddess Isis, and to Kali who appear as both lifegivers and destroyers, the Virgin Mary has been stripped of her shadow side. “Since the shadow of the Great Mother was not contained in any officially worshipped symbol of the Goddess [she] became split into the positive mother and the destructive witch” and the dark side “got projected onto women” (126).

The Black Madonna holds so much of what I was intuitively longing for during those early years. The fact that she has roots in many older goddess traditions only enriches her meaning for me (but I will go into the personal resonances later). What I have been able to gather about her origins is as follows. The image of the Black Madonna is likely derived from the black goddess Isis, in order to bring wholeness to the pure, white, ethereal aspects of the Virgin Mary. Ean Begg suggests that early images of Madonna and child were based on those of Isis and Horus, and on other pagan goddesses predating the rise of Christianity. During the Crusades, warriors brought back pagan statues and images of goddesses from the east as madonnas. Most importantly these were images of Greek Artemis, and Phrygian Cybele, and Egyptian Isis, herself a “universal Mother and mistress of all things” (61). This, says Begg, is the most plausible explanation for the existence of Black Madonnas throughout Europe, “a survival, and a continuation under a new name and a new religion of goddesses from the classical world” (49). Although many Black Virgins in France trace their origin to the period between 500 and 750, it was the 9<sup>th</sup> century with its discovery of the Madonna of Montserrat in Spain and the arrival of the Black Madonna in Einsiedeln, that really fixed her place (20). He also traces the Black Madonna’s growing popularity with the flowering of the Magdalene cult between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> c. since at least fifty Magdalen centres also contain shrines to the Black Virgin (98). In a related article, Begg writes, “It seems likely that much of the shadow aspect of the Madonna relating to secret – even heretical – knowledge, magical practices and unconventional sexual attitudes has been incorporated into the cult of the Black Virgin which also contains traces of traditions belonging to Mary Magdalen and Mary the Egyptian. Nevertheless, the most important source of the Black Virgin tradition is to be found not in Christianity but in the repressed, pre-Christian

goddesses of the West” (124). In *Woman’s Mysteries*, Esther Harding too includes the Black Madonna in her discussion of “Moon Mothers” and says that the Black Madonna at Einsiedeln “has an Egyptian or Moorish appearance. She stands on the moon” (112).

Marie Louise von Franz says that many images of the Black Virgin have been derived from images of Isis and Horus, but have been impoverished in symbolic meaning, robbed of Isis’ dual representation of the “highest divine spirituality” and simultaneously her role as “underworld goddess, ruler of the dead” (40). A black mother goddess, Isis held sublime spirituality as the Mother of God but also “the darker, chthonic aspects of the Great Mother.” Mary, Mother of God, in contrast, carried the qualities of purity and spirituality, but the dark, earthy energies were denied her. Those are exactly the energies we are now seeking.

*Wednesday, May 9, 2007, 8:30 am. Journal entry.*

*This morning I woke up dreaming that I am taking the first of five singing lessons with BP (a wonderful choir master and singing teacher from 25 years ago). He wants me to sing the Phrygian scale (E to E with only white notes, which I only came to know while writing my Ethnology paper on the role of song in the lives on European Roma today). At first I am not sure how to do it and try to tell him that I need a few minutes to relax and wait for the complex in my throat to subside so that I can sing in my own voice.*

*While writing this paper I have been very aware of the complex that tells me to read more, research more, and demonstrate that I do indeed “know something” about Kali and the Black Madonna. Yet the whole time another part of me just wants to “sing this essay” just as I “danced” my earlier Gypsy symbol paper. The need to “know something” takes the pleasure out of this process which otherwise feels like a treasure hunt to me, each insight or intuition taking me deeper into this whole beautiful mystery which I feel so alive in my body and soul. When I follow those vibrant clues, I feel that I am engaged in “Lila,” in divine and spontaneous play. But when my head reminds me that this is an exam, the joy disappears and I feel heavy with gravity.*

*Last night I longed for a dream with some insight into this complex, and this morning I woke up with the Phrygian scale, a little mournful, a little foreign and exotic, echoing in my inner ear. As the dream ends, I am singing softly and I can hear my authentic voice, deep, rich, full of vibrato and resonance, beginning to emerge. I find this dream very beautiful and now I can’t stop weeping. How can I “sing” the Black Madonna? How can I bring the haunting tones of the Phrygian scale into the rest of this paper?*

Ean Begg relates the rise of the Black Madonna to all manner of historical circumstances and secret societies, often preserving clandestine forms of Christian belief, including the activity of the Cathars, the Templars, and the Freemasons, as well as the symbolic secrets of the Tarot, Astrology, and Alchemy, itself the most important precursor of Jung's psychology. In a lovely statement, he writes, "The Black Virgin reminds us that we have an alternative and that not all roads lead to Rome. Isis the alchemist, in whose myth are contained all the elements of the art, is still with us." Begg traces the etymology of both Egypt and alchemy to "Khem" or "black earth," suggesting again that it is our own black earth that the Black Madonna holds (144). She is a symbol of "that elemental and uncontrollable source of life, possessing a spirit and wisdom of its own not subject to organization of the laws of rationality" (27). Like many, he believes that the rediscovery of the Black Virgins in our times is, like the many apparitions of the Virgin Mary, a manifestation of the new attitude toward the feminine, but also concedes that "all the evidence is circumstantial and associative. There is no written account of the intentions of a carver or painter of the ancient Black Virgins" (130). Finally, Marion Woodman writes of the archetypal resonance of the Black Madonna that she is "nature impregnated by spirit, accepting the human body as the chalice of the spirit. She is the redemption of matter, the intersection of sexuality and spirituality" (PV 122). Woodman also relates a beautiful passage from the Book of James in the *Apocryphal New Testament*, where Joseph turns to Mary and sees her looking sad, then happy, and she responds, "It is because I behold two peoples with mine eyes, the one weeping and lamenting and the other rejoicing and exulting." Mary simultaneously weeps over the sacrifices ahead, and exults over the imminent arrival of her baby: "Death and life meet at the threshold of birth" (PV 124).

## DARK SISTERS

Kali and the Black Madonna both began on the periphery of their respective religious traditions and, due perhaps to some unconscious lack or hunger within their religious mythologies, gained prominence and moved into the center. In the case of Kali, Kinsley suggests there is no obvious reason why Kali has gained such a central role within Hinduism, while the Black Madonna more obviously serves a much-needed compensatory role to the overvaluation of virginal femininity within Christianity. Begg and other scholars point out that while Kali, with her necklace of skulls, is clearly a headhunter, the Black Madonna herself stands on top of the skull of St. Meinrad (50). Perhaps there is some connection here to Jung's statement that "Beheading is significant symbolically as the separation of the 'understanding' from the 'great suffering and grief' which nature inflicts on the soul" and which are embodied by both Kali and the Black Madonna (CW14/730).

Jung has drawn his own parallel between these two dark goddesses. He states that the dual nature of the mother – loving and terrible – is evident in the Virgin Mary, "who is not only the Lord's mother, but also, according to the medieval allegories, his cross. In India, 'the loving and terrible mother' is the paradoxical Kali." However, while Christianity split the divine into good and evil, Kali retained her "original paradoxical morality undisturbed. Thus Kali is representative of the East and Madonna of the West. The latter has entirely lost the shadow that still distantly followed her in the allegories of the Middle Ages" (CW 9/1, para. 158,189). It is interesting indeed that while Kali appears as both the greatest manifestation of the Mahadevi and the central divinity within Hinduism, the Black Madonna has always lived on the periphery of

Christianity, in the shade surrounding the spotlight focused on her White sister. Still, they are dark sisters indeed, sharing the embodiment of chaos and irrationality, suffering and death, and the chthonic dimension of human life.

Kinsley attributes Kali's blackness (like Krsna's) to their tribal, indigenous ancestry, the fact that they are of the land and of non-Aryan origin (SF 153). Kali lives at the edges of society, in the mountains, jungle, or the creation grounds on the outskirts, emphasizing her unmistakable connection with death. In a sense she inhabits the underworld of Hindu society

Both she and the Black Madonna are loved by the poor and the outcastes, the marginalized, the suffering, who may recognize in these goddesses a reflection of their own experience. Both challenge the existing order and values, and provoke attitudes and behaviour outside the norm, stepping into a realm of untamed reality far beyond domesticated norms. Perhaps most importantly, both convey the paradox that only in the recognition and acceptance of suffering and death are humans liberated into divine play ("Lila") – they demand surrender of the ego's desire to rule and control, and acceptance of the extreme realities of both life and death as equally real and inevitable. In a beautiful statement of where this can lead us, Kinsley writes, "To ignore death, to pretend that one is physically immortal, to pretend that one's ego is the center of things, is to provoke Kali's mocking laughter.... To accept one's mortality is to be able to act superfluously, to let go, to be able to sing, dance, and shout" (SF 145).

Even though the Black Madonna shares much of Kali's dark energy, I have not found any indication that within her lies the same degree of wrath, orgiastic excess, or willful destruction as Kali manifests. Often the deepest aspect of her darkness is interpreted as a profound sorrow and compassion for the suffering of the world, rather than the manifestation of her own terrifying

depths. Andrew Harvey, for example, sees three dimensions of the Black Madonna: the “Queen of Darkness,” the Queen of Nature,” and as the “Burnt Woman” who has been burnt by “the constant, unavoidable opening of the heart to the misery of life” (50). However he also relates Ramakrishna’s dream of the Mother rising out of the Ganges, giving birth, and then ecstatically tearing her baby apart and eating it, before sinking back into the water and drowning, thereby demonstrating “the shocking, terrifying coexistence of crucifixion and resurrection at every single level of the universe” (52-53). For Harvey, this ruthlessness is an aspect of the Black Madonna as well.

## ARCHETYPAL DIMENSIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

The archetypal dimensions of these two goddesses, representing as they do, the moist, dark, fertile, mysterious feminine underside of our dry, white, sterile, dominant patriarchal ethos are very rich and I can only touch on them in this discussion. After Jung’s trip to India in 1938 he described his impressions in several essays. In India, he observed, the people “die and are born in ceaseless waves, always much the same, a gigantic monotony of endlessly repeated life...there seems to be nothing that has not lived a hundred thousand times before” (CW 2/984, 986). In what is probably his most oft-quoted comment about India, he wrote:

It is quite possible that India is the real world, and that the white man lives in a madhouse of abstractions. To be born, to die, to be sick, greedy, dirty, childish, ridiculously vain, miserable, hungry, vicious...that is perhaps the real life, life as it was meant to be, the life of the earth. Life in India has not yet withdrawn into the capsule of the head. It is still the whole body that lives (988).

So much of what Jung says is utterly relevant to this discussion but I will limit myself to one additional quote: in India, “one gets pushed back into the unconscious, into that unredeemed, uncivilized, aboriginal world, of which we only dream, since our consciousness denies it” (1011).

Since coming to Zurich in the spring of 2005 I have visited the Black Madonna in Einsiedeln many times. I am always moved by the obvious love and devotion of the Brothers during the “Salve Regina,” and by the mystery of Her being. But I did not fall in love with her until the first time I saw her – in contrast to her usual splendid regal royal blue or green and gold gown – dressed in her “Gypsy dress,” flamboyant red with huge yellow flowers, a Gypsy Madonna. That day I recognized my soul in her image and Her essence in me.

As a counterpart to Jung’s observations on India, I would like to offer my personal reflections on what it is that calls me to Einsiedeln and the Black Madonna. I love that She is in a tiny humble chapel just off the entrance to that enormous fantastical baroque church with its many plump angels in every corner. The main part of the church is so ornate and formal, with the monks separated from the lay audience by iron rails and gates, singing their distant ethereal praises to the masculine Trinity. I love their slow walk toward the back during the “Salve Regina” and the way they must crowd closely together in order to sing to the Black Madonna. I love the reverence and deep devotion in their voices, and I especially love joining them in singing the beautiful old hymns of adoration, how close together everything is physically and how intimate it feels, emotionally and spiritually, on those hard wooden benches. I love the variety of people who gather there, people of all ages and walks of life, so many more black and

brown people than one sees in the streets afterward, and I love that some of them are beholding Kali as I behold the Black Virgin. I cherish my memory of a tiny dark-skinned girl whom I observed there two years ago.

*May 30, 2005. Journal entry.*

*On Saturday afternoon we took the train to Einsiedeln, home of the magnificent Benedictine Abbey and the Black Madonna, which Steve had not seen. It was a very hot day and the cool interior of the Church, golden and bejewelled with Baroque frescoes, and the quiet reverential chanting of the monks at Vespers were a lovely counterpoint to the intense, bright, tourist-filled sunshine outside. As we sat in the small chapel at the back of the Church in which the Black Madonna is held, I watched as a tiny little black child in bright pink sundress and diminutive sandals, got up to leave with her clearly adoptive and adoring white parents. As she turned to the back, the little one intently offered her tiny hand to one of three nuns sitting in the row behind her, then to the second, and finally to the third one, each of them beaming with pleasure at the sweetness of this unexpected leave-taking. I wondered what prompted the little girl, a year and a half at most, to do this, and with such seriousness on her little face, as if this was of utmost importance to her.*

I love the shared contemplation of the mystery, and I even love not knowing why the Black Madonna moves me so much, why I am drawn to Einsiedeln over and over again, or why I feel such kinship with every person, black, brown, and white, who sits next to me there in silent meditation. When I cannot go to Einsiedeln I love my black candles with her image on them, which sit in the window of my study at home and which I light only rarely and briefly for ritual moments.

Kali and the Black Madonna are archetypal images of psychic energies we have long repressed and denied, hated and feared, and which now demand our attention as we stand at the edge of natural and socio-political disaster. Kinsley quotes J. C. Oman as saying that Kali has “somehow blundered into the daylight of the twentieth century...unmodified by time and

unsoftened by culture” (SF 82) In our era of assumed progress, development, and the sophistication of the 21<sup>st</sup> century psyche, Kali offers us the feminine side of Jung’s “two million year old man” and confronts us with primal aspects of our natures. Why else would she speak so powerfully to western culture? Taken symbolically, Kali’s demand for ritual decapitation in order that she might drink fresh blood may point to the need, in our rationalistic times, to reclaim the life of the body, to depotentiate the mind’s domination of the individual’s life and body, but also of the life of the communal and social bodies.

How we may actually experience the archetypal energy of these dark sisters in our day to day lives has been beautifully explored by a variety of Jungian analysts and artists in *The Moonlit Path: Reflections on the Dark Feminine*. Two essays in particular seem to capture the essence of this experience. The first of these is an excellent article by Ashok Bedi, a Jungian analyst and psychiatrist, titled “Kali – The Dark Goddess.” Bedi writes, “The archetype of the dark goddess Kali incarnates in our life drama to destroy the darkness of personality and make room for new consciousness to emerge.... She embodies the *complexio oppositorum* – the union of opposites in our personality” (157-58). Bedi continues, “Like Shiva, [Kali] frequents lonely places at the outskirts of towns. Symbolically, she gives voice to the marginalized aspects of society and personality – the shadow and the inferior functions of both individual and collective consciousness. She embodies the fury of the dishonored Feminine” (160). The second essay is by Cedrus Monte, titled, “At the Threshold of Psycho-Genesis: The Mournful Face of God,” a beautiful meditation on the Dark Goddess’ symbolic representation of the sorrow and darkness that must be embraced as integral dimensions of our human experience. “Within the nature of her being, she holds the paradox: in and through darkness lies a fertile resurgence of life” (18).

Archetypal dimensions of Kali and the Black Madonna include their obvious representation of the personal and collective unconscious and particularly the shadow; their identification with darkness and especially blackness; their relationship with the nigredo and prima materia of alchemy; with the repressed feminine dimension of life including matter; their representation of otherness, chaos, and boundlessness; their association with peripheral and liminal states; and their fierce identification with life and death, so beautifully symbolized in Woodman's metaphor of "dancing in the flames."

Erich Neumann writes,

The Terrible Female is a symbol for the unconscious...the black abysmal side of life and the human psyche. Just as world, life, nature, and soul have been experienced as a generative and nourishing, protecting and warming Femininity, so their opposites are also perceived in the image of the Feminine: death and destruction, danger and distress, hunger and nakedness, appear as helplessness in the presence of the Dark and Terrible mother (148-49).

Facing the dark goddess involves a willing confrontation with the unconscious and particularly with the shadow. As Kinsley observes with such astute psychological precision,

In confronting the terrible, black goddess, the adept...puts the spotlight, as it were, on those darker, murkier dimensions of his own being. He lets the ghosts and frightening monsters of his instinctual unconscious being emerge into the light, where they are aired, studied, consciously accepted, and hence stripped of their power to bind him (SF 146).

This is usually one of our first endeavors in analysis: to bring attention and awareness to the "ghosts and frightening monsters" that live in our dreams, daydreams, fantasies, and irrational loves and hatreds. I'm not so sure that we ever manage completely to strip the monster

complexes of their power over us (and perhaps that is not the goal anyway), but we may gradually develop an ability to coexist with them rather than be possessed by them. On the collective level, it is almost impossible to imagine what it might mean for an entire culture or nation to take back the “evil empire” projection and consider its own ghosts and monsters – even though Jung stated more than once that the slender thread of humanity’s survival would depend on enough people being willing to do just that.

## DARKNESS

In *Woman’s Mysteries*, Esther Harding states, “In our modern view the positive or bright aspect of things is always considered to be the most powerful and dominant and to it we give the greatest emphasis and the most constant attention, disregarding the dark and shadowed side as far as possible” (113). Not surprisingly a longing for darkness and muted shades is not uncommon in our light-oriented times, for as Meister Eckhart said, “The ground of the soul is dark” (MP 83). This is where everything begins, where our own creative impulses germinate long before they come to us consciously. As Edward Bilous expresses it so beautifully, darkness is “the most direct metaphor for what we have not yet dared to think or what we are afraid to feel. It is the colour the soul uses to paint our unconscious yearnings” (MP 229). (Bilous is a New York composer who is creating a series of musical works titled “Archetypes” that explores the Gnostic traditions within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and includes a cantata about the Black Madonna, “The Underground Stream.” He focusses on seven themes - The Great Mother, The Virgin, The Rose, Queen of Heaven and Star of the Sea, Mother of Sorrows, The

Wanderers, and The Underground Stream - and bases the libretto on texts from pagan and religious sources, sung in their original languages, including Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew, and others. This project sounds fascinating to me and I hope to see it performed one day.)

In the dark, we may flounder in uncertainty and obscurity, but perhaps also feel, sense, and intuit things unavailable to us when the focused eye of thinking rules our perception. In the dark our eyes can rest. Other unseen realities step forward and claim our attention. We may cease our fevered frantic pace and sink into the slower rhythms of body and soul that take their own time. We may fall into wordless melancholy and longing for something we cannot even name. We may simmer and percolate, not knowing whether what we are brewing will ever see the light of day, but grateful perhaps for the reprieve from the necessity of seeing. And we may discover, with Cedrus Monte, that “In pilgrimage to the shrine of darkness, something is attempting to come into fuller consciousness...the rites of mourning are asking to be lived; death is seeking to be fully embraced as part of life; the dark sister, the Dark Feminine, is asking to be honored” (24).

## BLACKNESS

Kali’s blackness, say David Kinsley, represents her “all-embracing, comprehensive nature, because black is the colour in which all other colors merge; black absorbs and dissolves them. Or black is said to represent the total absence of color, again signifying the *nirguna* (beyond qualities) nature of Kali as ultimate reality” (TV 87). “The Black Madonna is black,” says Marion Woodman, “because she has literally or figuratively been through the fire and has emerged with an immense capacity for love and understanding” (PV 100).

Colours are archetypes that carry distinct and powerful energies. James Hillman (citing Victor Turner) suggests that colours are archetypal forces that precede – on biological, psychological, and logical levels, human divisions according to class, clan, and totem. “For culture, black and white, as well as red, precede and determine the way human life is lived” (43). In a fascinating essay titled “The Seduction of Black,” Hillman suggests that the process of blackening “negates the ‘light’,” “dissolves meaning and the hope for meaning” and breaks down “the inner cohesion of any fixed state” (47). “Black matter,” he suggests, is “the least formed and the most susceptible to dissolution – or in our language, chaos.” Thus black “sucks into it and makes vanish the fundamental security structures of Western consciousness.... [It] breaks the paradigm; it dissolves whatever we rely upon as real and dear” (48). As a champion of the underworld and its many shades and shadows, Hillman argues that it is urgent that we “never lose the dark eye and never ignore the soul’s desire for shades and sorrow” (52). By finally including black in the spectrum of colours rather than continuing to regard it as a non-colour, we may begin to recognize the dignity both of darker people, and of “darker shades of existence” within our own lives. “Western consciousness might break the naïve fundamentalism of its hopefully colored illusions” at last, he concludes (52).

The longing for darkness that manifests the “soul’s desire for shades and sorrows” is beautifully embodied in this excerpt from Pablo Neruda’s poem, “To Sadness” (the complete poem is included at the end of this essay).

[...]  
And so give me your black wing,  
sister sadness.  
I need sometimes to have the sapphire

extinguished and to have  
the angled mesh of the rain fall,  
the weeping of the earth...Now I am missing  
the black light....

## THE REPRESSED FEMININE

In his essay, “A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity,” Jung wrote, “The Platonic freedom of the spirit does not make a whole judgment possible; it wrenches the light half of the picture away from the dark half.... We can only rise above nature if somebody else carries the weight of the earth for us.... The dark weight of the earth must enter into the picture of the whole” (CW 2/264).

The dark goddess embodies the “dark half of the picture” and the “dark weight of the earth.” She represents the repressed feminine dimension, but particularly its primal aspects that threaten the status quo of patriarchal structures and value systems. Esther Harding writes, “In nature the feminine principle, or as naïve man would say, the feminine *goddess*, shows itself as blind force, fecund and cruel, creating, cherishing, and destroying. It is the ‘female of the species, more deadly than the male,’ fierce in its loves as in its hate. This is the feminine principle in its daemonic form” (34). This fierce side of the feminine strikes us as terrifying and totally “other,” yet its denial and suppression from conscious life only increase its “demonic” force in the unconscious and also rob us of its passion and instinctual energy. Perhaps if we more consciously spent time at the “shrine of darkness” those dark energies would not have such uncanny power to overwhelm and possess us (MP 22). Denied their due, they come at us from behind and force our attention.

“Matter is the Dark Mother that has been rejected,” Fred Gustafson writes. “Matter, *Mater*, Mother. Matter is living, a fact that is consistent with the discoveries of modern physics.” (MP 4) Much could be said about the rejection of *Mater* and the living matter that constitutes the natural world including our own bodies in one-sided favour of abstract spirit. Our hunger for the archetypal Mother and for our own bodies is projected outward into the excesses of materialism, where more is better and nothing is ever enough, because that hunger has been concretized rather than worked with according to its true meaning. What follows are addictions of all kinds, whether to alcohol (spirit), food (sweetness), drugs (ecstasy and transcendence), work (meaning) and any other substance or activity that becomes an unconscious, thus demonic “shrine of darkness.” “Spirit without matter is a ghost, and matter without spirit is a corpse,” said a famous rabbi (whose name I don’t recall).

In *Descent to the Goddess*, Sylvia Brinton-Perera describes the cultural ideal of a “good woman” in the West as consisting of “the good, nurturant mother and wife; the sweet, docile, agreeable daughter; the gently supportive or bright, achieving partner.” She likens this ideal to the corsets that prevented our mothers and grandmothers from breathing fully or moving freely, and suggests, “An image for the goddess as Self needs to have a full-bodied coherence” (12). Kali and the Black Madonna represent the life of the body, which demands its due. If anger really is the last taboo for women, then the extremes and excesses of a wrathful Kali provide a much needed compensation for too much politeness, reticence, stifled rage and shame, virtue and modesty, and what I have experienced as a kind of subtle but insidious depotentiation. She embodies the primal wildness and uncontainedness that can break through these artificial constraints and put us in touch with the chthonic aspect of our natures. The full expression and

experience of our sexuality is one important dimension here, since sexuality like anger has been feared and denigrated in women, thus shoved down into the unconscious where it may resurface in dreams of whores and prostitutes.

Other significant archetypal dimensions of Kali and the Black Madonna include their meaning within alchemy, their marginal and liminal status, and their embodiment of the opposites of life and death. The correspondences between the dark goddess and alchemy are important enough to warrant a detailed exploration of their own; all I can do here is point in that direction. In *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Jung's discussion of the 'anima media natura' is related to the Platonic world-soul and Sophia, the Wisdom in the Old Testament, and Jung describes it as "a state of incubation or pregnancy" suggesting the importance of the feminine aspect of waiting in the blackness. He quotes from the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, "When you see your matter going black, rejoice: for that is the beginning of the work" (CW 14/729). In the first stage of the alchemical transformation process, the nigredo, we see the necessary dissolution without which nothing new can come into being." Hillman suggests that during the nigredo phase, "the modus operandi is slow, repetitive, difficult, desiccating, severe, astringent, effortful, coagulating, and /or pulverizing" (46). Marion Woodman writes, "In alchemy there is the concept of the *deus absconditus* (male), the hidden god in matter. But the unconscious also includes the *dea abscondita*, the Black Madonna, the goddess who has chose to hide herself in order to protect humanity from the devastating consequences of killing her" (AP 79).

Kali is powerful and full of energy, David Kinsley writes, "perhaps because of being an outsider, a breaker of boundaries and social models" (TV 80). She is "a being who is liminal in nature, who dwells on the boundary of society and threatens, subverts, or challenges the status

quo” (TV 90). Kinsley states that Kali and the other Mahavidyas are “deliberately depicted as breaking stereotypes of the properly socialized female. They are symbols of the ‘other,’ of ways of being female that male-dominated mainstream society sees as dangerous.” Kali’s unbound and wild hair and her lolling tongue are particularly important expressions of her Otherness, of her “nontraditional, boundary-stretching, role-shattering, liminal character” (TV 81).

Although less given to extreme behaviour, the Black Madonna too is a boundary figure (“Our Lady of the Forest” in Einsiedeln), in the shadow of her White sister (herself a boundary figure within the Christian myth) who has nevertheless had a more visible place on the altar over the past two thousand years. Both have been beloved of the Roma, perhaps the world’s ultimate “marginals,” the only people in the world who have never had a homeland and who, according to some sources, were outcastes even in North India before their exile. Begg quotes the *Everyman Dictionary of Non-Classical Mythology* which states that in “Les Saintes Maries de la Mer, Isis has been demoted to the rank of a serving-maid with the name of Sara, in which capacity she is still the divinity of the gypsies.” Begg concludes, “So the Great Goddess is now unmanifest, save as mother of the outcast gypsies” (144).

But perhaps it is precisely among the outcast sons and daughters of patriarchy that the seeds and scintillae of renewal can begin to spark. It clearly won’t come from any of the outworn collectives. (This liminality, marginality, and borderline character is also part of what I find so compelling about the Roma, nationless, and dependent on the primarily oral language of Romani - with more than 60 dialects - to communicate with other Roma throughout the world.) The Black Madonna may be the patron saint of the outcast gypsies but, as Marion Woodman, herself a “Soul-Gypsy”, says in the quote I have set at the beginning of this essay, the Black Madonna is

also the patron saint of “abandoned daughters who rejoice in their outcast state and can use it to renew the world” (122). I count myself among these.

Why does the Dark Goddess speak so powerfully to us now? She offers an image of totality that we have repressed in our single-minded, goal-oriented drive toward progress and perfection, invincibility and control, longevity and immortality; an image of nature - in all its many manifestations including our own human nature - that has been brutalized, destroyed, and abandoned; an image of the ecstasy that is lost to us and the destruction that threatens us in this one-sided emphasis on utilitarian rationality. Heinrich Zimmer has expressed our collective western shadow in the following quote:

To us of the West, brought up under the shadow of the Gothic Cathedral, where the benign figure of the Blessed Mother, immaculate, is uncontaminated by the darker principle... India's Mother, eternal India's horrific-beautiful, caressing-murdering...symbolization of the totality of the world creating-destroying eating-eaten one, seems more than difficult to love. Yet, we can discover if we will pause, something that will speak to us of a wonder beyond beauty and ugliness, a peace balancing the terms of birth and death (MP 1-2).

We see this paradox again in James Hillman's claim that a large part of depth psychology's mission has been a “Resurrection of the Dead,” the recall into life of so much that is forgotten and buried in each of us (DU 66). What may feel like sinking into a bottomless pit of anguish and misery may be the necessary first step for coming alive in a reclaimed and resurrected body and soul.

The last archetypal association to the dark goddess I'd like to make here is to dance. As Marion Woodman tells us, “Without the recognition of the cycle of life-death-rebirth there can be no transformation, no true progression grounded in nature for the human species.... To

refuse to enter into Kali's dance of creation and destruction is to get stuck in a one-sided view of reality that can bring anarchy – destruction without creation.” (DF 45). Kali's ecstatic and frenzied dance is a metaphor for the ceaseless flow of energy in life that contains all opposites, a very different experience of life than that of linear movement toward a goal. To dance is to be fully alive to the moment, with body and soul in harmony, and nothing held back. In the words of T. S. Eliot, “At the still point of the turning world... There is only the dance.”

### “There is Only the Dance:” Bringing the Dark Sister Home

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton,” from *The Four Quartets*

During my second semester at ISAP I had a vivid dream that still lives in my body and soul. Out of that dream has come an ongoing Active Imagination in writing and movement with an older black woman whom I referred to as “Lady from Papua New Guinea”, and whose wisdom is far beyond anything my conscious ego holds. Then she instructed me to find her a fitting name. That proved to take a long time, more than six months, and when she reminded me of the task, I took a meditative ritual walk through Zurich and returned to my room with the name “Laylah.” (Although it was winter, Zurich is for me “the city of lilac.”)

When I looked up the etymology of the name, I discovered it was from Sanskrit roots meaning “born at night” and “black.” And indeed I was born at night – at 12:45 am on October

3rd, in the black of night, 45 minutes after my mother's own birthday. Born under the sign of the scales of Libra, I am forever trying to hold the tension of the opposites which are fierce within me, forever attempting to find a balance, equilibrium, harmony. Libra is under the rule of Venus/Aphrodite and that also rings true, given my lust for life and beauty. I feel what Kinsley evocatively refers to as "the hungry pulse of life" alive in me, and even more so as I grow older and am less concerned about the collective's normalizing influence.

I feel deep gratitude toward Marion Woodman and the Body Soul Rhythms and Leadership programs which offered me a containing space of freedom and an archetypal experience of unconditional love in which my body and soul could blossom and begin to find their way home. In that work, my own body became sacred to me, not in a sentimental way but in something like Kali's stark assertion that what is dross and destructible matter fit for the cremation ground just as fully partakes of divinity itself.

One essential dimension of the weeklong Body Soul Rhythms Intensive is the creation of a mask that allows the emergence and exploration of new energies, previously suppressed. During my first Intensive I found myself creating an ancient feminine earth-spirit, a dark rose and brown-tinted Gypsy, her forehead studded with jewels, her face outlined with gold beads and shimmering with gold sparkles, her wild hair made of many long strands of multi-coloured wool. In writing an Active Imagination about the mask shortly afterward I connected her with Kali, the Black Madonna, and Mary Magdalene. My next mask carried the archetypal energy of Medusa, another dark-faced primordial sister to Kali (Erich Neumann, for example puts Kali and the Gorgon in the same sub-category of goddess images in *The Great Mother*). As I worked with both of those masks, it became clear that they held wild primal energies that I had never before

experienced with such intensity. They were not the least inhibited by social notions of appropriateness or civilized femininity. They were wild and spontaneous, raw and crude, and passionate in their loves and hatreds. Following them into the fields and forest around the workshop room, I found myself wanting desperately to climb into the trees, but not to sit on the branches, rather in order to merge into the tree. At one moment I was almost inverted, as if my head wanted to disappear into the earth next to the tree trunk. The urge for that moist thick darkness was visceral and overwhelming (Ean Begg notes that “the most notable cultic feature belonging both to Artemis and to the Black Virgins is that they both tend to make their home in trees where they are later ‘found,’” 54).

The third mask was most definitively a masculine hermit who cared nothing for human company or convention and wanted only to live deep inside the forest. This was long before I had heard about St. Meinrad, whose hermitage ultimately became the Einsiedeln Monastery, dedicated to the Black “Madonna of the Hermits in the Dark Forest.” And so I feel that these archetypal energies have been simmering in my body and soul for quite some time. I have felt richly woven into a tapestry of synchronicity.

My name, Marlene, derivative of the Hebrew “Magdala,” a blend of Maria and Magdalene which refers to Mary Magdalene, is itself a bringing together of the White and Dark Virgins. My second name, “Adeline,” is also a derivative of Magdalene. There is no denying my symbolic and felt connection to the figure of Mary Magdalene. My mother’s name, Lilli, is etymologically related to Lilith which is related to Lalita, one of Kali’s names among the Mahavidyas, and Lilith similarly acknowledges Kali as one of her own fourteen names (Begg, 42). For me, words and names are images that hold mysterious worlds within themselves, so

these etymological correspondences deepen my sense of synchronicity. (James Hillman writes, along these lines, of the “etymon,” of the hidden truth of a name buried in its roots. “The search for the roots of words, the etymological fantasy, is one of the basic rituals of the imaginative tradition because it seeks to recover an image within a word...In their names are their souls” 62).

Two years ago a close friend gave me a beautiful symbolic sheathed “sword of discrimination” just before I arrived in Zurich, full of anticipation but also doubt about whether a Jungian Training Institute could accommodate the soulwork that is the essence of my life, and whether my Gypsy could survive in a collective with its own orthodoxies. I think of that sword when I look at the heavy sword in Kali’s right hand, with which she slays demons in battle and slashes her way through all that is irrelevant in our lives.

The Dark Goddess continues to appear in my dreams. Who and what She is remains a mystery that I expect to contemplate the rest of my life. It is fine to say that She asks us to accept our own darkness, but my question is always, what does that mean in daily life? Here is some of my experience so far. According to my dreams it has much to do with the life of the body. To recognize the Black Madonna in me means to accept incarnation in a feminine body and to live that embodied life fully. It means the ongoing struggle to hold the opposites, to allow awareness of the extreme polarities within me without acting them out blindly or concretizing them. It means to be who I am, no more and no less, and sacrifice the need to be “better than I am.” It demands humility – to stay close to the ground and to my peasant roots. It means to move organically, to take my time in the dark, even when something inside me says “too little, too late.” And it means acknowledging my own rage, cruelty, and repeated failures of integrity. But it also means seizing the freedom to “act superfluously,” as Kinsley put it, the right to live

spontaneously and extravagantly, knowing that today is all I have. It means opening myself to the archetypal energies playing through me without identifying with them, feeling the Lila of divine play within my body and soul.

This essay can have no real conclusion. These reflections, intuitions, and feelings continue to live me, to move me, to enter and create the dense texture of my daily life. I realize that there is still so much I have not said. I have focused here on the “Dark” aspect of these two archetypal images and not on their “Virgin” quality in Esther Harding’s sense: “The woman who is “one-in-herself, does what she does – not because of any desire to please, not to be liked, or to be approved, even by herself; not because of any desire to gain power over another...but because what she does is true” (125). Neither have I said anything about the symbolism of Kali’s iconography, nor about the role of the Dark Feminine in descent and initiation, two other rich dimensions for further exploration. Those must remain for another day. For today ...

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night  
and day runs through the world and dances in  
rhythmic measures.  
It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the  
earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into  
tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.  
It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth  
and death, in ebb and flow.  
I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world  
of life.  
And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my  
blood this moment.

- Rabindrath Tagore

“To Sadness/II”

Sadness, I need  
your black wing.  
So much honey in the topaz  
each ray smiling  
in the wide fields  
and all an abundant light about me,  
all an electric whir in the high air.  
And so give me your black wing,  
sister sadness.  
I need sometimes to have the sapphire  
extinguished and to have  
the angled mesh of the rain fall,  
the weeping of the earth....Now I am missing  
the black light.  
Give me your slow blood,  
cold  
rain,  
Spread over me your fearful wing!  
Into my care  
give back the key  
of the closed door,  
the ruined door.  
For a moment, for  
a short lifetime,  
remove my light and leave me  
to feel myself  
abandoned, wretched,  
trembling in the web  
of twilight,  
receiving into my being  
the quivering  
hands  
of  
the  
rain.

- Pablo Neruda  
(Cited from Cedrus Monte's essay in *The Moonlit Path.*)

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