

Kali as God

I became Kali's defender by default. My parents named me Kalli when I was born in 1955, and as Asian thought flooded the state of Oregon during my adolescence, people began to tell me that I had been named after Kali, the Indian goddess of destruction. "Creation and destruction," I would reply, protective of her as well as myself. Thirty years later, when I became a conscious devotee of this supposedly destructive goddess, I did some demolition of my own. I stepped away from the Lutheran faith of my Norwegian ancestors, many of whom were ministers, occasioning considerable family angst. I also moved away from the male-monotheistic orientation of American culture, including its academic establishment, which would regard an intimate devotional relationship to Kali as something illusory at best, if not shameful or dangerous. Abandoning all such ancestral and cultural touchstones, I made a commitment to anchor love and service in Kali, Mother Reality of the Hindu Shakta-tantric tradition. But why? How did she come so close?

To explore this revolution in my religious loyalties, I will retrace a few initial stages of my inward journey, and invite you on a metaphorical pilgrimage toward her. The entire route extends over the top of a mountain peak and culminates in a valley before toward her Tree of Life, but in this essay, we will take only four quick steps in her direction.

Our pilgrimage route will pass through four gates. Each gate corresponds to one of Kali's prime dimensions as a female-monotheistic divinity. Briefly put, she is beyond description; she is relative reality; she is absolute reality; and she dynamically mediates between relative and absolute reality. Along the way, I will compare Kali to the God with whom I was raised.

Moreover, as a feminist and astrologer, I will briefly illustrate my own experience--or lack thereof--of each of these four dimensional gates. Our journey will be brilliantly lit by the illustrious legacies of three of Kali's most remarkable lovers: Ramprasad Sen, an 18th century Bengali poet; Ramakrishna, a 19th century Bengali religious genius; and Lex Hixon, a 20th century American scholar.

As our hike up Kali's mountain begins, please use the trailhead trash can to deposit any image of her as an ugly, angry, cruel, hardened, shadowy, depraved, maniacal demon. She is adored, by those who know her as a sublimely beautiful, blissful, tender, playful, brilliantly fierce warrior of wisdom. May you someday come to meet her, face-to-face.

Kali is Beyond Description

Our stroll begins with the assertion that Kali cannot be described. Every expression composed in reverence to her—whether appearing in prayer, poem, chant, song, text, *yantra* (mystic diagram), painting, statue, ritual architecture, or pilgrimage—is one that will ultimately fall short of her identity and scope. As her poet Ramprasad sang in the 18th century: "Mother of Ultimacy, unspeakable and unthinkable, who can comprehend your countless revelations?"ⁱ Thoroughly and eternally, Kali is indefinable, unnamable, inconceivable.

How Her Inconceivability Compares to God

With respect to her incomprehensibility, Kali closely matches the mystery of God with whom I was raised. In this respect, as Lex Hixon observes, she is identical to the male-monotheistic Gods of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: "The Divine Mother is not distinct in essence from the inscrutable Yahweh of Jewish tradition, God the Hidden Father of Christianity, or Allah Most High of Islam, who is beyond all conceptions or descriptions."ⁱⁱ In this respect, Kali also matches

the God whom I studied at Jesuit institutes in Rome and graduate school in Berkeley. Briefly put, God surpassed our understanding; as such, he was not often addressed. As I recall, God became a hot topic only when cast by feminist scholars as a female or mother.

Kali's inconceivability seems to be held very much in mind by her devotees in India. Her inscrutability, elusiveness, and freedom situate her beyond the boundaries of human institutions; as a result, she seems to have only the vaguest interest in organized religion. As far as I've seen, her temples in India and the United States tend to be relatively fluid, anarchical zones, where little, if any, emphasis is placed on formal membership, systems of collecting dues, authoritative gurus, resplendent architectural facades, impressive grounds, or overt political objectives. Naturally, temple leadership exists, but it is shared amicably by many people, exercised so softly that it practically disappears, and transmitted gently, usually through ties of blood. Hixon fundamentally receives her as "the open space beyond religion, which I call timeless awareness. She stands always outside frameworks."ⁱⁱⁱ I would respectfully diverge from Hixon here, and venture that Kali *does* stand for a framework, but that hers is the subtle, quiet framework of leadership that was, and still is, intrinsic to matriarchal families, clans, and tribes.

With respect to her framework of leadership, Kali greatly diverges from the God with whom I grew up, and the one with whom I lived in Rome and Berkeley. There is no other way to say it: God's leadership was expressed in rigid hierarchies, and his success was measured by the numbers of people converted to his ways, the wealth in his coffers, the size and ornateness of his shrines, and the political influence of his constituents. While these measures of success clearly have nothing to do with the teachings of his prophet Jesus, they do speak for the overall trajectory of the past 17 centuries of western civilization, during which the administrations of Christian churches and the aims of eurocentric imperial states have been virtually inseparable.

The Benefit of Her Inconceivability

I strive to hold Kali's first dimension warmly in my mind, emulating the people of India. Here, she blissfully floats on the outermost boundaries of all names, thoughts, concepts, images, rituals, and institutions. As I approach her from a distance, I know that to even begin to reach her, I must be willing to slide off the edge of the known world. I must go further than I ever thought I would. Here, in this spacious, sliding, even free-falling atmosphere, egocentric drives have little opportunity to carve out their niches. Desires for self-perpetuation, survival, approval, personal advantage, dominance, wisdom, and sanctity seize one less readily. Her foremost imperative is abandon; it nourishes the rare bloom of humility.

Carrying Kali's indefinable, unnameable, inconceivable identity into my feminist spirituality community is itself an unknown prospect. Ours is a highly diverse group; our scholarship, art and activism attunes to a rich motherlode of consciousness. To name but a few sources of inspiration, we draw from the matriarchal and indigenous cultures that predated or survived the consolidation of patriarchy; the organized religions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, especially their mystical, occult, and feminist traditions; and the arts and sciences in general. Owing to this wide range of inspiration, over the past 30 years, I've heard "the Goddess" referred to in innumerable ways. For example, she may be invoked as a female divinity, like Isis; as a divine human female, like Mary Magdalene; as a planet, like Gaia; as a satellite, like the Moon; as an orthodox figure, like the Mother of God; or as or a heretical figure, like God the Mother. I feel as though I've heard it all, and at this point, I would diverge from my community and invoke her, first and foremost, as one who surpasses my understanding.

Kali, like God, is inconceivable. This essay, like every form of human expression, cannot begin to encompass her. On the sacred ground of her Mother Reality, some part of me remains

ever-unknowing. Even so, we will now pass to the gate of her second dimension, her cosmic presence within every aspect of space and space.

Kali is Relative Reality

The second way that Kali is similar to God is that she manifests as the entire cosmos, here referred to as relative reality. Relative reality is *reality with attributes* the omnidynamic power of consciousness and energy of awareness that projects, sustains and dissolves the universe. Kali's consciousness gives birth to, sustains, and destroys all time and matter, from fractions of nanoseconds to billions of years, from subatomic particles to galactic clusters. Moreover, as one steps through this second gate of relative reality, the river of time and the riverbed of matter interpenetrate in incomprehensible fusion, even as a rushing river is inescapably contained by the soil of its riverbed, and even as the riverbed's soil is conclusively shaped by the watery flow.

Note that the *source* of Kali's relative realm must be held firmly in mind. Undue emphasis upon her immanence in space and time leads to the error of minimizing the vast space of *awareness* from where her immanence proceeds. The source of space and time is her *consciousness*, although she manifests as the entire cosmos. Yet her consciousness and awareness are never transcendent! They are simply the omnidynamic means through which she projects, sustains and dissolves the cosmos.

Ramprasad never seems to tire of honoring Kali as the entire perceivable, intelligible, tangible, measurable, manifest universe of time and space. Here are a few of his persistent, passionate salutations: "This universe, with its endless dimensions, exists only within her luminous womb of power."^{iv} "O Mother, your power alone projects and dissolves the rainbow of the cosmos."^v "Sometimes you manifest as the radiant cosmos and its countless living beings."^{vi} "Your life alone, Great Mother, is the breath of every creature."^{vii} He stubbornly embraces

relative reality as her theatre, no matter how painful it may be: "Open your foolish eyes, cease formless meditation, and perceive the Goddess everywhere! Even the deepest darkness of this world is simply her light!"^{viii}

Ramakrishna profiles Kali's exquisite immanence as follows: "The mature ones among these ecstatic lovers know for certain that the Divine Mother has displayed Her own Heart as this entire living, conscious creation and as the cosmic principles and laws by which it manifests coherently. These souls fall in love with immanence, not with transcendence."^{ix}

How Her Relative Reality Compares to God

As relative reality, Kali is very similar to the God with whom I grew up. Our Father epitomized the constructive sector of reality with attributes. His own omnidynamic power of consciousness and energy of awareness created heaven and earth, monitoring and protecting everything in existence. He was especially present in the seasons, the weather, landscapes, trees, plants, and animals; St. Francis was probably his favorite person. The human body was his temple, especially the male body of his child, Jesus. However, although God projected and sustained the entire universe, he did not explicitly share Kali's power to dissolve it. Essentially loving and kind, with a definite preference for preserving the status quo, God was at best ambivalent about dissolution. He delegated unsavory cosmological power to a swirling storm of players, especially Eve, the mother of all, the snake, sexual intercourse, and the Devil. I learned that these agents did the dirty work, bringing original sin, suffering, mortality, death, and transformation into the world.

My First Kali Puja: Receiving Her as the Universe of Manifestation

I was initially led to step through Kali's relative gate-to receive her as the incomprehensible

fusion of space and time—after attending my first Kali Puja in July 2000, a weekend ritual organized by Elizabeth Harding's temple, Kali Mandir, in Laguna Canyon, California. *Puja* literally means flower-offering; in puja ritual every element in the universe is offered back to Kali. After all, she is their source! Over a puja weekend, in a spirit of purity, receptivity, innocence and selfless love, devotees reach naturally and directly toward total absorption in the divine. These efforts are assisted by a luscious cascade of flowers and lights, prayers and mantras, vocal and instrumental songs, drums and dances, delicious food and drinks. Kali is present to receive these offerings, residing before us in her living embodiment, a glorious statue known as a *murti*. Hour after hour, hearts open to her.

During my first puja, Kali began to tear apart my thoughts about time and space. When the faith takes root that she is real, she begins to speak in subtle ways, and in my case, a long-standing, deeply-embedded pattern of conceptual thought began to break down: the idea that the earth is female, receptive, mother, and that heaven is male, active, father. This assumption is so well-accepted in the west, especially its New Age subculture, that I have never heard it to be regarded as anything but a reliable reflection of cosmological order, a truth germane to all cultures, accurate for all time. However, during my first puja, and especially after I had returned home and resumed my work as an astrologer, this dualistic assumption sharply dematerialized. In fact, it shattered. Suddenly, the seemingly innocuous duet of mother earth and father sky had no genuine basis in nature, or intrinsic status in divine order. Rather, it was an overarching false principle—a cosmic "missionary position," if you will—that had long functioned to keep females down, lending a veneer of legitimacy to our colonization in sexual, reproductive, and domestic terms. I perceived the concept as a foundational mind control code of patriarchy, one initially seeded perhaps 4,000 years ago, and saw that over millennia, especially in the west, this false

principle had drawn a great western tribe of skydiving divine females down to earth, including Egyptian Nut and Grandmother Spider. Fortunately, skydivers to the east like the Hindu Aditi, Shinto Amateratsu, Taoist Dipper Mother, and the Buddhist dakinis were better able to elude the insidious force of its gravity, since Asia never fully surrendered to male-monotheism, the murder of Goddess, and philosophical dualism. At any rate, after my first puja, Kali came to reign supreme in the sky. She had taken up residence in deep space, and held court throughout the expanding celestial sphere. Nor was she alone: her sovereign parthenogenetic essence bridged naturally in eternal contact with Lord Shiva, the deathless force of absolute consciousness, her entranced consort, passionate spouse, and cosmic twin. Interestingly, the couple's material nexus in the cosmic mix was *starfire*. It was as though when seers first worked to bring the frequencies of Kali and Shiva to earth thousands of years ago, they were concentrating in meditative resonance with the violent artistry of stars, especially nebulae, the nurseries where infant stars are born, and planetary nebulae, the cremation grounds where stars die. From these stellar zones, Kali emanates our solar system, biosphere, and physical bodies over eons of time. As Ramprasad sang: "You emanate, sustain and absorb innumerable planets, planes, and spheres."^x

Receiving Kali as the relative universe of manifestation at the Kali Puja in July 2000, was an experience that revolutionized my work as an astrologer. Since adolescence, I had been painfully aware of the extent to which western astrology is inscribed with the vocabulary of an exclusively male God, or a rapacious team of invading sky gods. To me, this vocabulary held women and Goddess at arm's length from the stars and planets, and maintained an immense chasm between men and women. Although it was a snap to critique western astrology in systematic feminist terms, the task of posing a constructive astrological alternative seemed to be

far more than I could ever accomplish as an individual.

However, as soon as I was able to meditate upon stars and planets as emanations of Kali's omnidynamic consciousness, it became easier to transcend a strictly deconstructive stance. Heeding her subtle speech on a more regular basis, I have grown more bold about recasting aspects of the sky in female terms, for I am no longer alone in my task. In the same way that men have named the sky for thousands of years in communion with a male God, I have glimpsed the distinct possibility of following in their footsteps—albeit with a twist!

In the spring of 2002, almost two years after my first puja, I entered meditation for several weeks and created a collage of Kali's celestial sovereignty. This collage, entitled *Akasha Ma*, has become the guiding light of my feminist astrological efforts, and during the past year, clues as to the female identity of planets and stars have gradually trickled from its details.^{xi}



Akasha Ma

Regardless of how long this work will take to unfold, or how it will ever be received by others, I am secure in the knowledge that Kali exists, and that she guides me in all things. It is fantastic to know that her fully female relative reality of consciousness, the source of space and time, is inextricably and intimately connected to my female consciousness, and to my experience of space and time.

Perhaps one day, I will summon the courage to throw my life as an astrologer as far as it will go in Kali's direction. Meanwhile, I have a dream: in the future, in atmospheres free from all spiritual coercion, women at large around the world will meditate freely upon a Universal Female, aware that her consciousness resonates in celestial accord with the specific contours of women's lives, with our experiences of birth, of stability, of death and regeneration. In so doing, century after century, women will take back the sky. We will receive, name, and celebrate the heavens anew.

Relative Reality Includes Death

Kali's gate of immanence is sticky indeed. Lest one fall too much in love with it, it's important to remember that she is also death: her omnidynamic power of consciousness and energy of awareness also *dissolves* all spatial and temporal forms. Whenever we celebrate our attachment to her relative reality of space and time, we are also guests at an endless wake, and the blood of all suffering flesh, sacrifice, and war streams down her body. As Ramprasad contemplates death, he pitches himself headlong in her direction: "As my body dissolves into earth, and my mind into space, may I dissolve into you."^{xii} Ultimately, his mortal destination, Kali, stands outside of the spectrum of life and death: "After death, her dancing elements flow on, and simply Mother remains. We will be in the end what we were in the beginning, clear bubbles forming and dissolving in the stream of timeless Mother Wisdom."^{xiii}

My First Awareness of Kali as Death: Feminism

My first encounter with Kali as death was in high school during the early 1970s, when the feminist earthquake was leveling the landscape of sexual inequality according to which everything in my environment seemed to be organized. Thirty years have elapsed, so it may sound like an exaggeration today, but at the time, it was a deathly trauma to perceive power imbalances between men and women - imbalances considered to be natural matters of divine law by my family, school, society, and church. For example, these inequities were writ large in the daily dynamics of my parents' marriage; in my mother's labor on behalf of six children, which wasn't even defined as work; in my sisters and brother, born into prodigiously separate spheres and raised according to entirely different rules; in female absence from virtually all scholarship, medical research, psychological theory, legal codes, and professions; and above all, in our Christian religion, a near-incestuous metaphysical portrait of the Father and Son. Even more paralyzing was the classic feminist insight that this male-female imbalance had given monstrous birth to even more massive grids of imbalance. Entities conventionally perceived to be "feminine"—whether entire races, cultures, or the earth itself had been systematically dominated and exterminated for centuries, especially by western commercial empires, in intimate collaboration with the male-monotheistic church.

This feminist earthquake fractured my teenage being. Yet even then, I sensed that it had been drummed up by a great intelligence, a wild, truthful consciousness that would force us to evolve. At the time, I could only conceive of this consciousness as Kali; the reformation in awareness was too huge to image otherwise. It was Kali in the cremation grounds who pulverized the living forms of our cultural landscape, Kali who toppled the bones of our sexist icons, reducing them to white ash beneath her jingling feet. However disorienting her destruction

might seem-private or public, social or symbolic, secular or sacred-only with her compassionate fury could human ignorance be vanquished. Women and girls now partook of Kali's own consciousness, and men and boys were invited into Shiva's ecstasy of surrender. Like Shiva, men were invited to repose silently beneath her, in the splendid posture that awakens one from ignorance and death. Only through the extremely sacred process of entering her gate of enlightenment, and treading her path of cosmic balance, could men receive the bloody flower of feminist initiation, and only through this sacred process could we grow together toward the green light of love.

We now approach Kali's third gate of absolute reality, entirely distinct and opposite from her relative realm. Here, she is utterly transcendent, timeless, formless, and completely removed from processes such as birth, growth, decay, death, and rebirth.

Kali is Absolute Reality

Besides being all tangible physical manifestation, Kali is also entirely intangible, unmanifest in her dimension of absolute reality. The absolute is *attribute-less reality*-the essential stillness of consciousness and vast peace of transcendence. She reposes non-physically beyond the grip of space and time in a most primordial, powerful element: the absolute emptiness of the void. Ramprasad renders her absolute reality as follows: "Sometimes you remove every veil to be known by enlightened sages as the formless Mother of the Universe, the transparent presence who dwells secretly within every atom, every perception, every event."^{xiv} He portrays the vision of her absolute transparency and openness by writing: "This intricate play of transparent energy is initiated, sustained, and dissolved by Kali, who is the dream power of Absolute Reality. At this very moment, you are resting on the vast lap of Mother's cosmic dream."^{xv}

How Her Absolute Reality Compares to God

By definition, attribute-less reality—the essential stillness of consciousness and vast peace of transcendence—is always the same. Technically, there can be no difference between Kali and God in this respect. However, experientially, it is impossible for me to judge. Although Kali's devotees adore the ocean of her transcendent dreamtime, this absolute realm of hers is one in which I confess I am rather at sea.

Frankly, I have never had much experience of absolute reality. For one thing, I did not learn about absolute reality as a child. God was clearly unimaginably vast, but the concept of transcendence was never discussed. However, in retrospect, I think my father modeled much of his behavior on the transcendence of God. He was a Christian from the old school; he lived the true, unspoken morality of the old country, Norway. As a child, I never knew my father directly: he was kind and responsible, but also a hidden, distant, unknown figure, very involved in his work, often gone in the evenings and on weekends. I was terribly proud of him: the money he mysteriously earned nourished our beautiful island estate, and everywhere we went, overjoyed men would rush up to introduce themselves. At home, he was always on a permanent retreat, reposing in his den, or stretching out on a lounge chair, motionless, peaceful, quiet, mysterious, out of reach. Everything my marvelous father did went without saying, almost in another world. Although transcendence was never taught around the dinner table—as an American family, we were consummately attached to the material world—I did get a glimpse of it in my father's daily mode of being.

I learned even less about absolute reality in school. The notion of transcendence never appeared in my education as a historian and a theologian in Rome or Berkeley. In fact, during the 1980's, transcendence seemed to be wildly unfashionable, a theoretical indulgence

compared to the practical oppressions of sexism, racism, homophobia, imperialism, militarism, consumerism, and the rape of the earth.

As a result, I have not enjoyed a lifelong familiarity with the transcendent. In my meditations to date, I have only experienced states of mental clarity and luminosity; I have never attained the profound accomplishment of realizing emptiness, or meditating upon emptiness. In many ways, absolute reality is a realm toward which I have yet to grow, but fortunately, Kali leads me in this direction, so progress is inevitable. The task she now poses is this: I must uncover my resistance to her third gate; I must explore my resentment of transcendence.

My Resistance to Absolute Reality

Deep down, I have always nourished the suspicion that absolute reality—the state of complete disembodiment in time and space—is an imaginary, non-existent fantasy, and a spiritual poison to women and girls. Like many others of my culture and generation, I was raised under God, an exclusively male-monotheistic deity. During the 1970's and 1980's, I scrutinized the ways in which female oppression had been sacralized for thousands of years by the world's sacred texts, and by laws written across cultures and blessed with the seal of priestly approval. To my horror, no matter where I roamed in the orthodox philosophy and theology of organized religions, I found a primary sexual dysfunction: matter and earth tended to be associated exclusively with females, especially sexually active females and mothers, yet matter and earth were also routinely criticized as inferior realms that ensnared and dissipated human consciousness. Spiritual seekers, generally understood to be men, were almost universally encouraged to transcend the inferior realm of matter, especially by treading the saintly path of avoiding the company of women. Thoroughly disgusted by this widespread spiritual trajectory, I concluded that transcendence and disembodiment were invented by men, for men, within the

context of male-dominated societies, in order to help men cope with their own sexual problems. It seemed to me that the high priority placed on transcendence simply helped men cope with poisonous emotions that stemmed from their overwhelming attraction to, and jealousy of, the female body, whether in terms of female sexuality, or the miraculous female role in human reproduction.

Totally turned off by the dualistic sexism of the world's organized religions, I turned to global feminist activism for relief, and there, I learned an unforgettable truth, attested to by feminists the world over: whether Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, or Islamic, *the organized clergy was the greatest enemy of women and girls*. Yes, the world's organized clergy was always our most formidable adversary, at best ambivalent about ending female slavery in sexual, reproductive, and domestic terms. My rage could barely be contained. This was where the theory and practice of transcendence had gotten our species? What more horrifying indictment of the world's religions could there ever be? In such a suffering world, why would I invest my energy in anything having to do with transcendence and disembodiment?

I wanted to die, but instead, I revolted. Furious, I fell in line with a feminist phalanx of women with wings on the spiritual offensive. We dug up female deities from ancient or indigenous societies, and began to retrieve females, all matter, and the Universal Female from the ontological dump to which we had been consigned for millennia by prophets, priests, monks, philosophers, and theologians. Our mission was to lift her out of the garbage can and back to the altar, and-entirely in keeping with the thrust of our crusade-our rallying cry became the *immanence* of Goddess, women, girls, and nature. Anything that even remotely smacked of *transcendence*-the realm of the Father God, of his patriarchal priests and lawmakers, and of sky gods and invaders before him - was suspect.

Briefly put, these are the seeds of my resentment of transcendence, and my resistance to Kali's third gate. Gradually, she is now awakening me from this trance, and leading me toward her absolute reality.

The Benefit of Her Absolute Dimension

Kali cannot be restricted to time and space, or even to the consciousness that gives rise to time and space. Naturally, one can always be electrified and soothed by her relative dimension—her fully female cosmic manifestation in every tangible attribute of space and time—but nevertheless, even the vastness of consciousness, time, and space avoiding men entirely. But all these would merely be preliminary tactics. *My main goal would be to prevent male memory of, access to, and solidarity with the Universal Male—the one who resides in absolute reality, beyond the grasp of space and time—because more than anywhere else, this is where divine power is truly to be found.*

Instantly, Kali's third gate opens! Attributeless reality, unmanifest, formless and timeless, now leads us into the absolute emptiness of the void. This realm utterly destroys attachment. Nothing passes from here into an immanent condition.

Kali is Nondualistic, Unlike God

Almost immediately, a fourth and final gate swings into view! For in Kali's fourth dimension, she fuses the second and third gates—the relative and absolute realities through which we have already passed—into one inconceivable unity.

Like God, Kali is fully relative, and fully absolute, as Ramprasad understands: "You are physical universes and non-physical dimensions of luminosity, both root cause of every being and original source, untouched by causality ... You manifest as transparent consciousness and

as the principle of tangibility."^{xvi} Both Kali and God make parallel claims to a monotheistic unitive nature, and both are supreme within their respective religious traditions. However, Kali's first priority of business is nondualism, and in my experience, the same cannot be said for God.

In fact, my experience of God has always been dualistic. The God I grew up with was both absolute and relative, but under his leadership, the absolute and relative were held very much apart. On the relative side, there was stuff like the earth, the human community, Mary, females, mothers, nature, body, emotions, matter, soul, and so forth. On the absolute side, there was God, heaven, the community of angels, Jesus, males, fathers; culture, spirit, intellect, the intangible, spirit, and so forth. Having incarnated as female, I was clearly on the relative side of the equation, but I longed to be on the absolute side as well. So, I hung for years in limbo, somewhere in the gap.

Thankfully, as we pass through Kali's fourth gate, the relative and absolute are not two sides of reality-absolutely not two!-but one. In her Mother Reality, the absolute manifests relatively in the universe, and the relative universe expresses the absolute, so there is no formal hierarchy, much less painful division between the two. Kali strides along the boundary of suffering between the relative and the absolute, alert as to where the relative disappears into the absolute, and where the absolute disappears into the relative. Should either relative or absolute threaten to gain the upper hand, she strikes with her sword of nondual wisdom, destroying the principle of oppositional duality at every level. Therefore, Kali ecstatically fuses the relative and absolute, guiding us to embrace them both, so that only the wholeness of their union exists.

Therefore, God and Kali mediate between the relative and absolute in very different ways, and from my corner, only Kali succeeds in the unitive quest. Only the nondualistic sword of her maternal theology consistently gives rise to inconceivable fusion, to absolute oneness at every

point, in every direction, every dimension. The blade of her initiatory sword of nondualistic consciousness uniquely mediates between her second gate of time and space, and her third gate of timeless, formless transcendence, actively resolving any tension between the two.

Since her stomping ground is the landscape of fusion between the relative and the absolute, her maternal theology insists that we are surrounded by nothing but the incarnation of this fusion, a state of perfect realization in which the universe continually participates. When the divine fusion of her Mother Reality is held in mind, it becomes more and more effortless to perceive her directly-to see, hear, and feel her in all things.

Conclusion

We have passed through four gates on a metaphorical pilgrimage route in Kali's direction, exploring ways in which she compares to the God with whom I was raised. God and Kali have been seen to be indescribable, to manifest dynamically in the relative, and to establish the stillness of the absolute. Finally, Kali was seen as particularly distinct from God in terms of the dialectics of nondualistic maternal theology. I hope that the first four steps of this pilgrimage in Kali's direction have brought you somewhat closer to the epiphany of meeting her face to face. You are welcome to step through her indescribable, relative, absolute, and nondualistic gates at any time. In fact, as the current century unfolds, such an exercise may stand you in good stead. For of all the divine females on the earth today, I feel that the fully female, transcendent, conscious cosmos of Kali's Mother Reality is the loudest herald of the identity and scope of the second coming, that is, of the Universal Female to come.

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A. Preparing to depart, caveats about this pilgrimage

1. Even with expert guides, and guides perfectly understood, a pilgrimage path may go astray. My intention is to recapture my own journey with Kali, but the difference between an original experience with her and its retelling is vast. The original experience, silent and secret, is an inner spiral of sacred contact, an inward current of effort where the special personality is abandoned and a channel into meditative mind is established. In the retelling, when steps into this labyrinth are retraced, the spiral reaches out to others in an outer current of effort, and the speaker comes across as a personality who relies upon rational skill. As Ramprasad notes, so much can be lost in translation:

Those who worship Goddess with splendid ceremony become imbued with pride. Much better is the inward path of secret devotion Invisible to the curious stare of the world.^{xvii}

To increase the odds on faith fully transporting the reader toward the sacred, - I will maintain as private and humble a tone as possible.

2. Another reason to be cautious is that the muscle of rational mind, here extensively deployed, can pull one toward excessive identification with relative things, such as abstract boundaries, categories, and definitions, or personal religious fantasies, preferences and opinions. Ramakrishna teaches otherwise: "Never attempt to describe or to circumscribe God in

any way, through any notion whatsoever. I do not give a single thought to any structure or procedure of the universe but meditate on the Source of the Universe." (Hixon, Swan, 280) Following Ramakrishna's advice, then, and despite necessary forays into descriptions and concepts, this paper is intended as a meditation on Kali as the Source of the Universe.

As our trail hardens, stressfully approaching the summit, I will make the case for a difference between prime creatrix Kali and prime creator God. For although both deities are supreme within their respective traditions-shakta-tantric Hinduism and Catholic, Greek and Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant Christianity-and although both make parallel claims to a monotheistic unitive nature, I believe that only Kali succeeds in the unitive quest. Only the sword of her maternal theology consistently gives rise to inconceivable fusion, to absolute oneness at every point, in every direction, every dimension. As we pause to enjoy her unique unitive nature at the summit of the mountain, Kali will embody as human, as female, and as mother in the home one of her devotees. Next, as we wing down the mountain path, Kali will float out from beneath the trees, fabulously embodied in shimmering holographs beamed from her Dakshineswar temple in Kolkata: black, bloody, four-armed, three-eyed, garlanded with skulls and embryonic earrings. Finally, with reverence for her complex embodiment, we will sail down to a fertile valley and stand before her Tree of Life. Here, Kali stands supreme before her galaxies, and also in radical partnership with Lord Shiva as beloved, consort, and spouse.

Prior to our departure, a few words of caution are in order. To begin with, any pilgrimage must rely heavily upon the wisdom of respected guides. Our own walk will be brilliantly lit by the legacies of two Bengali saints, immortal poet Ramprasad Sen (1723-ca.1775) and religious genius Ramakrishna (1836-1886), as well as by the wisdom of Kali's western lovers Elizabeth (Usha) Harding, Lex Hixon, Linda Johnsen, and Nandu Menon. I hope to have represented their thoughts faithfully.

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- ⁱ Lex Hixon, *Mother of the Universe: Visions of the Goddess and Tantric Hymns of Enlightenment*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.1994, 76.
- ⁱⁱ Lex Hixon, *Great Swan: Meetings with Ramakrishna*. Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1992, 2.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Hixon, 1994, xii.
- ^{iv} Ibid., 62
- ^v Ibid., 148.
- ^{vi} Ibid., 76.
- ^{vii} Ibid., 128.
- ^{viii} Ibid., 43.
- ^{ix} Hixon, 1992,36.
- ^x Hixon, 1994, 128
- ^{xi} The Akasha Ma collage is the cover of the book.
- ^{xii} Hixon, 1994, 37.
- ^{xiii} Ibid., 105.
- ^{xiv} Ibid., 76.
- ^{xv} Ibid., 70.
- ^{xvi} Hixon, 1994, 128.
- ^{xvii} Ibid., 47.