

# Chanting Is Half the Battle!

Kathleen Karlsen

The old mansion in Chestnut Hills was three stories high, including an attic apartment. There were thirteen rooms for rent. I was in my early twenties and new in town with very little experience living on my own. I responded to an ad, rented a room and started a job in a restaurant downtown.

Shortly after settling in, I found a spiritual organization that appealed deeply to me. I began attending regular study groups and services. This particular path was going to be a central influence on my soul's journey for decades to come. My association with the group was a significant milestone.

One day a few months later, a friend I had met at work came over to visit me at the mansion. The phone in the kitchen rang while we were getting something to eat. My friend answered and went upstairs to let the couple in the attic apartment know that they had a call. There were no cell phones or wireless phones back then!

My friend came downstairs again looking a bit ashen and visibly shaken. He had inadvertently walked in on a strange ritual, more disgusting than horrifying. He saw that my housemates were following instructions in a book by Anton LaVey. Neither of us knew the name. (I later found out was the famous occultist and founder of the Church of Satan!) I never mentioned the incident to my housemates, but I was wary when they began inviting me repeatedly to an event they were planning.

Their event was slated for a Sunday a few weeks later. They described the event as a spiritual play, complete with costumes and props. They knew about my own spiritual pursuits and thought I might be interested in their activities as well. As the day approached, I became more and more uneasy.

On the Friday night just before the event was scheduled, I had a terrible nightmare. I was being

chased through the mansion by a frightening apparition. I ran out on a balcony to escape, looking down in absolute panic at the distance to the ground. I couldn't jump without being injured. I glanced back down the hallway. The witch-like phantom was getting closer by the second.

I woke up suddenly, as deeply disturbed as I have ever been in my life. I felt instinctively that the dream was related to the upcoming event. I decided to leave the mansion and town immediately. This meant that I was also leaving my new spiritual organization as well, at least for a while. The timing did not seem to be coincidental.

I packed my limited belongings and cleared out a couple of pieces of borrowed furniture. I left the rest of the month's rent with a brief letter on the kitchen table. I was gone before anyone else woke up in the mansion that morning. I quit my job, stayed a couple of nights with a friend, then flew back home to my parents. I was that scared.

Now you may be wondering: what does any of this have to do with chanting? There is a powerful saying attributed to Paramhansa Yogananda (1893-1952), author of the best-selling book *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Yogananda is reputed to have told his disciples repeatedly: "Chanting is half the battle."

This statement begs the question: "What is the other half?" Some might argue that mastering one's psychology or astrology is the other half of the

spiritual battle. Or that disciplines such as yoga, diet, exercise and meditation are the other half.

Based on ordeals like my strange experience in the mansion, I have come to feel that divine protection is the other half of any spiritual practice. There seem to be forces (sometimes blatant and sometimes subtle) that oppose whatever an individual may choose to do to transform themselves in a positive direction. I had found a new spiritual path. Simultaneously I felt that my well-being was seriously



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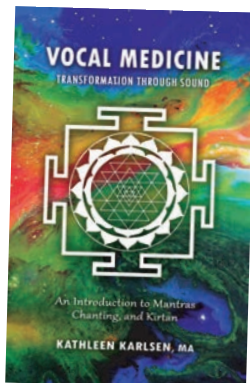
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endangered.

Whether the forces that might move in to derail our efforts are external or simply our own vulnerabilities, the reality of the need for spiritual defense is a theme that runs through virtually every spiritual tradition. The available protective forces are sometimes personified as guardians, devas, masters or angels.

In the Eastern tradition, there are fierce mother goddesses like Kali and Durga who battle evil on behalf of their children. Kali herself is an intimidating figure, brandishing multiple weapons with her four arms. She wears a skirt of severed arms and a gruesome garland of heads. These grisly body parts are symbolic of



the demonic forces that Kali slays to protect her devotees.

Durga is another Hindu goddess that represents the divine force or shakti used for protection. The name Durga means a fort or a place that is difficult to overrun. She is also known as the one who eliminates suffering. Like Kali, she is depicted as multi-limbed, having between eight and eighteen arms. Among other symbolic objects, she carries a thunderbolt, a bow, arrows, a trident and a sword.

In addition to chanting to these powerful goddesses, you may want to surround yourself with light, say a prayer or protective invocation, and be wise about your associates and where you live! Perhaps a greater awareness of the need for such measures would have helped me to avoid some of the more dramatic circumstances and challenges I have experienced along the way.

If Yogananda is correct, devoting yourself ongoing to a specific practice such as chanting is half the spiritual battle. If my experiences are also pertinent, recognizing the need for protection from negativity, impediments and potential harm on all levels may be the other half. ■

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Kathleen's book, *Vocal Medicine: Transformation through Sound* is available online at Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

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