

*The Invocation to Kali*

--May Sarton

... *The Black Goddess Kali, the terrible one of many names, "difficult to approach," whose stomach is a void and so can never be filled, and whose womb is giving birth forever to all things...*

--Joseph Campbell

1

There are times when  
I think only of killing  
The voracious animal  
Who is my perpetual shame,

The violent one  
Whose raging demands  
Break down peace and shelter  
Like a peacock's scream.

There are times when  
I think only of how to do away  
With this brute power  
That cannot be tamed.

I am the cage where poetry  
Paces and roars. The beast  
Is the god. How murder the god?  
How live with the terrible god?

2

*The Kingdom of Kali*

Anguish is always there, lurking at night,  
Wakes us like a scourge, the creeping sweat  
As rage is remembered, self-inflicted blight.  
What is it in us we have not mastered yet?

What Hell have we made of the subtle weaving  
Of nerve with brain, that all centers tear?  
We live in a dark complex of rage and grieving.  
The machine grates, grates, whatever we are.

The kingdom of Kali is within us deep.  
The built-in destroyer, the savage goddess,  
Wakes in the dark and takes away our sleep.  
She moves through the blood to poison gentleness.

She keeps us from being what we long to be;  
Tenderness withers under her iron laws.  
We may hold her like a lunatic, but it is she  
Held down, who bloodies with her claws.

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.

She cannot be cast out (she is here for good)  
Nor battled to the end. Who wins the war?  
She cannot be forgotten, jailed, or killed.  
Heaven must still be balanced against her.

Out of destruction she comes to wrest  
The juice from the cactus, its harsh spine,  
And until she, the destroyer, has been blest,  
There will be no child, no flower, and no wine.

3.

*The Concentration Camps*

Have we managed to fade them out like God?  
Simply eclipse the unpurged images?  
Eclipse the children with a mountain of shoes?  
Let the bones fester like animal bones,  
False teeth, bits of hair, spilled liquid eyes,  
Disgusting, not to be looked at, like a blight?

Ages ago we closed our hearts to blight.  
Who believes now? Who cries, "merciful God"?  
We gassed God in the ovens, great piteous eyes,  
Burned God in a trash heap of images,  
Refused to make a compact with dead bones,  
And threw away the children with their shoes—

Millions of sandals, sneakers, small worn shoes—  
Thrust them aside as a disgusting blight.  
Not ours, this death, to take into our bones,  
Not ours a dying mutilated God.  
We freed our minds from gruesome images,  
Pretended we had closed their open eyes

That never could be closed, dark puzzled eyes,  
The ghosts of children who went without shoes  
Naked toward the ovens' bestial images,  
Strangling for breath, clawing the blight,  
Piled up like pigs beyond the help of God...  
With food in our stomach, flesh on our bones,

We turned away from the stench of bones,  
Slept with the living, drank in sexy eyes,  
Hurried for shelter from a murdered God.  
New factories turned out millions of shoes.  
We hardly noticed the faint smell of blight,  
Stuffed with new cars, ice cream, rich images.

But no grass grew on the raw images.  
Corruption mushroomed from decaying bones.  
Joy disappeared. The creature of the blight  
Rose in the cities, dark smothered eyes.  
Our children danced with rage in their shoes,  
Grew up to question who had murdered God,

While we evaded their too attentive eyes,  
Walked the pavane of death in our new shoes,  
Sweated with anguish and remembered God.

4.

#### *The Time of Burning*

For a long time, we shall have only to listen,  
Not argue or defend, but listen to each other.  
Let curses fall without intercession.  
Let those fires burn we have tried to smother.

What we have pushed aside and tried to bury  
Lives with a staggering thrust we cannot parry.

We have to reckon with Kali for better or worse,  
The angry tongue that lashes us with flame  
As long-held hope turns bitter and men curse,  
"Burn, baby, burn" in the goddess' name.

We are asked to bear it, to take in the whole,  
The long indifferent beating down of soul.

It is the time of burning, hate exposed.  
We shall have to live with only Kali near.  
She comes in her fury, early or late, disposed  
To tantrums we have earned and must endure.

We have to listen to the harsh undertow  
To reach the place where Kali can bestow.

But she must have her dreadful empire first.  
Until the prisons of the mind are broken free  
And every suffering center at its worst  
Can be appealed to her dark mystery.

She comes to purge the altars in her way,  
And at her altar we shall have to pray.

It is a place of skulls, a deathly place  
Where we confront our violence and feel,  
Before that broken and self-ravaged face,  
The murderers we are, brought here to kneel.

5.

It is time for the invocation:

Kali, be with us.  
Violence, destruction, receive our homage.  
Help us to bring darkness into the light,  
To lift out the pain, the anger,  
Where it can be seen for what it is—  
The balance-wheel for our vulnerable, aching love.  
Put the wild hunger where it belongs,  
Within the act of creation,  
Crude power that forges a balance  
Between hate and love.

Help us to be the always hopeful  
Gardeners of the spirit  
Who knows that without darkness  
Nothing comes to birth  
As without light  
Nothing flowers.

Bear the roots in mind,  
You, the dark one, Kali  
Awesome power.