

Daya Mata
The Third SRF President



Daya Mata (Rachel Faye Wright, 1914-2010) is probably Yogananda's best-known disciple, as she represented him for over half a century as the President of his organization, Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF). Needless to say, she was one of his closest disciples. Her life of devotion, her advanced soul, and especially her love, has touched countless devotees.

It might be claimed that after Yogananda, nobody had a stronger impact on shaping SRF (and therefore his mission) into what it is today. Rajarsi Janakananda, Yogananda's successor, was unable to make any lasting impact, as he fell seriously ill in Aug. 1952, merely five months after assuming his role as SRF President. Also Dr. Lewis, acting from 1952 as the Vice-President, had comparatively little influence.

Daya Mata was a monastic, through and through. Her main characteristics may be listed like this: love; unqualified devotion to God; unconditional dedication and loyalty to the Guru; maintaining the purity of his teachings; and strengthening the centralized power of Mt. Washington as the headquarters of SRF.

Let's look at her life, starting many centuries ago.

Earlier incarnations

Yogananda told Daya Mata (who shared the story with Swami Kriyananda) that when he was incarnated as William the Conqueror, she was one of his daughters, Agatha. Daya Mata said: "William sent me to Spain to be the wife of the heir to the king of that country. But I had a deep desire to dedicate my life to God, and prayed to be spared the destiny my father wanted for me. When the ship arrived in port, I was found kneeling by my bed in an attitude of prayer, dead." As a consequence, she said, "in this life, I have had trouble with my knees."

In fact the *Historical Dictionary of the British Monarchy* documents the incident:

"Agatha of Normandy (c.1064-1080): ...The same source notes that Agatha was promised in marriage to Alfonso VI, king of Galicia and Leon, but she passed away while on her way to meet her prospective husband, and was buried in the Cathedral of Bayeux. The cause of her death is not clear, but some writers claim she may have resisted the match and died of a broken heart." She was only 16.

A more recent incarnation must have been in India, as a renunciant. SRF writes: "At the age of eight, when she first learned about India in school, she felt a mysterious inner awakening. That day, when school was over, she ran home and exclaimed jubilantly to her mother, 'When I grow up I will never marry; I will go to India.'" Later on she read the *Bhagavad Gita* which moved her deeply. It certainly stirred up her soul-memories.

A special family

Daya Mata was born as **Rachel Faye Wright** in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Jan. 31, 1914, into a Mormon family, affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

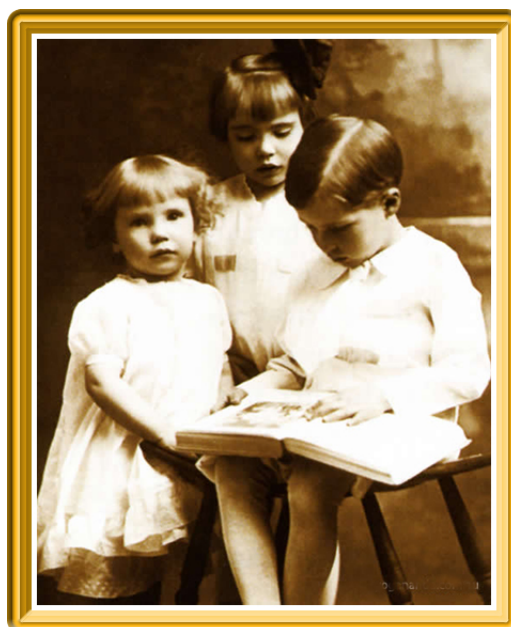
Her mother **Rachel Leah Terry** (Jun 15, 1887–Aug. 16, 1972) herself became an SRF nun, called Shyama Mata.

Daya Mata's father, **Clarence Aaron Wright** (Aug. 21, 1886–Dec. 07, 1967) was a bookkeeper (Daya Mata had administrative skills in her genes!). He was drafted for WWI, when Daya Mata was just a little girl. He lived in Salt Lake City at least until 1930. Later in life his residence was in Los Angeles, at 91343 North Hills, 25 miles from Mt. Washington. He died there, aged 81, and was buried at the Forest Lawn Memorial Park at Glendale, close to Daya Mata and the rest of the family. It seems that at some point he came to live close to them. It could also be that SRF (or his wife, Shyama Mata) took care of “father Wright”, as virtually his entire family had left him to follow Yogananda.

Daya Mata's older brother **Clarence Richard Wright** (Dec. 09, 1911- Jan 09, 2002) became famous among Yogananda's devotees for being described in the *Autobiography of a Yogi* as Yogananda's secretary, whose travel diary was in part included in the celebrated book. He joined Yogananda in late 1932 and left in Jan. 1941 (See his story).

They had a “mysterious” sister, who died at age 6, in 1920: **Vanda Wright**. Why mysterious? Because her birth certificate shows that she was born on Feb. 15, 1914. However, that's impossible, if Daya Mata was born in on Jan. 31, 1914. In other words, either Vanda's birth certificate is wrong (however, it's the original from 1914), or Daya Mata was not born in 1914. It's indeed the weirdest thing: Daya Mata's birth certificate (issued in 1935) shows January 31, 1913 as her birth, but it was changed in pencil to 1914. The *U.S. Social Security Death Index* too gives her birth year as 1913, which is probably taken from her original birth certificate. The 1920 and 1930 census might give her birth as 1914, but dates estimated on any census are not thought to be exact.

The reader may decide for himself: on the photo, does Daya Mata (center) appear 2.5 years older than Ananda Mata (left)? Then she was born in 1913. Or does she look 1.5 years older? Then she was born in 1914. Alternatively, looking at Richard on the photo: does he seem a little over one year older than Daya Mata? Then she was born in 1913. Or a little over two years older? Then she was born in 1914. Well, it doesn't really matter anyway. Daya Mata's soul is ageless.



Her younger sister **Virginia Lucy Wright** (Oct. 07, 1915 - Feb. 05, 2005), later called Ananda Mata, or “Mataji”, also became a well-known and prominent nun of the SRF order. She joined Mt. Washington in 1933, two years after Daya Mata. Possibly she waited until she had reached adulthood, because Yogananda might have accepted only adult disciples, for legal reasons. In California, majority was 18 at that time. At any rate, Roy Eugene Davis tells how he, aged 18, met the Master: “His first question to me was, ‘How old are you?’ And the second was, ‘Do your parents know you are here?’” (Mrinalini Mata came as a minor, but was with her mother.) That too would indicate that Daya Mata was born in 1913, making her 18 in 1931. However, we stick with her own words: “I was a young girl of 17...”

Whatever the case, they had a latecomer little brother, **Samuel Dale Wright** (Apr. 30, 1924–Jan. 13, 1987). He was ten years younger than Daya Mata and came to live at Mt. Washington too, aged eleven, when their mother joined in 1935.

Childhood

Daya Mata's childhood doesn't sound altogether easy: she recounts that "as a child, I used to be very sensitive, and extremely shy." One can imagine her reaction, as a very sensitive girl, when her father was drafted into war. One can also imagine what her sensitive nature felt, at age six, when her sister Vanda died. Another pain was spiritual: from her earliest years, Daya Mata had a deep longing to know God, but her Church couldn't offer what her heart was yearning for. Her greatest trial however must have been from age 14, when "Faye," as she was called, had a severe skin disorder. Her face was "very much disfigured by this blood poisoning," as she relates. For three long years no doctor had been able to cure her. As she was "very sensitive", it is not hard to picture how she felt in public. She relates: "I had developed a deep sense of insecurity and shyness as a result of it." It was "very depressing" for her and even caused her to leave school. Imagine her inner drama.

Meeting her Guru

On Oct. 03, 1931, her "saviour" Yogananda came to speak in Salt Lake City. At first however, even though her mother, Richard, and Ananda Mata all went, she didn't want to go, because of her loyalty to the Mormon Church, and mostly because of the way she looked. Finally, fortunately, she agreed to come along, with "bandages covering her swollen face": one can indeed sympathize with how she must have felt in public.

Meeting Yogananda was the most divine and life-changing experience of her life. She saw "a figure that seemed to be in that golden light." He struck the deepest chords of her soul. "He *knows* God!" That night her life direction was set, at age 17: "Him I shall follow." Never did she waver in her sacred decision.

Yogananda, aged 38, then gave a month-long program of classes at Salt Lake City, which the Wright family eagerly attended. The Master, seeing Daya Mata's bandages, asked her mother about her condition. Hearing about it, he invited the family for the next days' class on divine healing, inviting them to stay on afterwards. During that class Daya Mata's faith was roused immeasurably. The Guru asked her: "Do you believe that God can heal you?" Her answer was "I *know* He can." He stretched out his hand and spoke: "From this day forward *you are healed*. This condition will go away, and will *never* come back." That is exactly what happened. After a week she was fully cured, miraculously.

It sounds like Jesus healing his disciples. One can imagine what tremendous effect this divine encounter and healing had on Daya Mata: she wanted to leave *immediately* to join the Guru.

So she did. But was it easy? Not at all. It was a struggle. SRF writes that "family opposition was great. She was still a young girl, and her staunchly Mormon relatives – with the exception of her understanding mother – were firmly set against her leaving home to follow a religion wholly foreign to them." Also her father apparently was opposing her, in addition to her eleven aunts and uncles, plus her grandfather, an architect of the famous LDS *Salt Lake Tabernacle*. But she prayed fervently one night, and "tears flowed as she poured out her heart to God." Suddenly a deep peace came over her, and she knew that her prayer had been heard. Things indeed changed, and on 19 Nov. 1931, not even two months after first meeting Yogananda, she was able to sit at his feet at the "Mother Center" in Los Angeles.



By this time, Daya Mata had already learned two major lessons: the power of the Guru, and the power of deep prayer.

1931-35, age 17-21: the training years

Soon after joining Yogananda, she received her vows of renunciation, becoming a nun. The Master referred to her as his “nest egg”, for it was from her arrival that he dated the beginning of his monastic order.

Discipleship wasn't all easy, she recounts. Soon after her arrival she received the “same intense spiritual discipline that his guru, Swami Sri Yukteswar, had given to him.” What that means is clear to everyone who has read the *Autobiography of a Yogi*.



One such “intense” lesson (see SRF magazine, 1979) happened “shortly after I had come to the ashram” and had “just finished taking my vows”, being still “a young seventeen-year-old devotee.” It concerned her shyness, and her sensitivity of what others might think of her. That sensitivity probably stemmed from her disfiguring illness, which had passed only very recently. At any rate, Yogananda and some disciples one day fashioned a funny “dunce cap” (a fool’s hat). He looked around, to see who could put it on, and asked Daya Mata: “Come”. But that was too much for her. She replied: “No!” A second time: “Come”. Her answer was, again: “No!” A third time, sternly: “Come!” She: “No, Guruji, not *this*.” Yogananda now sent everyone else away. She asked him, being quite upset: “Do you think that was the right way to behave before all of these people? Is it right for the guru to make fun of a disciple before all of the other disciples?” He told her: “To be bound by the ego like this will *not* take one to God.” She was still fiery: “Master, I cannot accept the notion that one should be scolded and ridiculed before others.” As an answer, he commanded her to stand in a corner, facing the wall, on one leg “until you understand what I am trying to teach you.” She did it, and understood. Now she was ready to put on the dunce cap. But it wasn't necessary anymore. She had learned.

A similar lesson occurred in a group of nuns: they were in the car with the Master, who (so the story goes) made them get out to consume a large, very juicy watermelon. He cut it into unwieldy pieces which made sure the juice got all over their arms, hands, and faces. The nuns were acutely embarrassed, resistant, but then accepted his lesson: to be indifferent to what people might think, and enjoying the good fun.

In fact, there was another teaching in the above “dunce cap” story. Daya Mata tended to be rather serious in her dedication. She was, as she said, unable to enter into the light-hearted spirit of fun of the occasion. Yogananda had his own ways to teach her and others: from his third-floor window he called down, where the nuns had their rooms. When they put their head out a little, he requested: “Come out a little further, I can't see you.” At that moment he poured a pan full of water on their head, roaring with laughter. (See Durga Mata, *Trilogy of Divine Love*). Yogananda, she writes, “was full of mischief and fun.” It was to “keep us balanced.” He would even “take water in his mouth and squirt it at us.” How did Daya Mata, being raised in a very proper Mormon environment, react to such “showers”? Probably in time with merry laughter.

From time to time the Master, wearing scuffs (slippers), came out into the hallway where a nun was standing, “aimed with his feet and threw his scuffs at us,” bouncing with laughter.

He also “loved to tell jokes. Sometimes he would only tell half, laughing through the rest of the story” (see Durga Mata). Everyone joined in with his contagious laughter.

All this was probably an important lesson for the nuns. He knew that one day they would play a major role in SRF's future, and wanted them to create a deeply sincere and devotional

atmosphere, while maintaining a light spirit, lively with fun, joyful interaction, with laughter ringing through the hallways. Daya Mata in the end had, as Brother Vishwananda shared, “that same ability [as Yogananda] to enjoy fun.”



Another, certainly tougher, lesson concerned Daya Mata’s mother, who had been the only person to stand by her side in her wish to leave the family and join Yogananda: now she had difficulties and was in need. Daya Mata asked Yogananda if she ought to go out and find work to support her. As a shocking response he cried: “*Leave! Go on! Get out this minute! I don’t want you here!*” She wept: “Master, I don’t want to leave here. This is my entire life!” “That’s better,” he replied, gently. “You have given your life to God, and renounced all worldly ties. The responsibility for your mother is now His alone.” (story told by Swami Kriyananda). Soon her mother came to live at Mt. Washington. Was it due to Yogananda’s secret or overt help?

A further important lesson she learned was to spend time in solitude: “Seclusion is the price of greatness,” the Master taught. She followed this teaching strictly, even at the cost of finding herself being dubbed by less devoted disciples as “the half-baked saint”. But by now probably the opinions of others didn’t touch her as much as before.

A stern Yuktaswar-type lesson concerned her love for the guru. She was still a teenager and had developed a profound devotion and love for her Master. At first he treated her lovingly, like a daughter. Suddenly however his attitude changed: all at once he seemed aloof, even stern. It was painful. She prayed deeply for understanding. At last she reached a firm resolution. “Divine Mother,” she vowed, “from now on I will love only Thee. In beholding him, I will see Thee alone in him.” The Master gently told her, “very good,” and from then on again became affectionate toward her. It was a lesson in deeper, impersonal love. (See *The New Path*, by Swami Kriyananda).

Probably sometimes tears flowed. Yogananda told her: “Poor girl. I have been very hard on you in this life.” Fortunately, when she arrived, Sister Gyanamata, the great mother of nuns, was already living at Mt. Washington. So was “Ma Durga”. Both these deep souls must have been a great inspiration, support, and at times consolation, for her.

As a (long) aside: Usually it is written that Sister Gyanamata came to live at SRF in 1932, taking her sister vows during that year. Durga Mata however writes that the vows occurred on July 20, 1931. It appears that she is right. The mistake could have crept in right after the death of Gyanamata, when in an article in the *Self-Realization* magazine, January 1952, the date 1932 for her vows was given. The writer must have not been all too concerned about correct dates, since the article quotes Yogananda saying: “It was in 1927 that I first met Sister Gyanamata in Seattle.” In truth the Master had met her in 1924. The article also says (as does the book *God Alone*) that the husband of Gyanamata, Clark Prescott Bissett, brought her to live at Mt. Washington in 1932, and that he predicted that he would die a few months afterwards, which indeed so happened. Her date of arrival in 1932 is obviously a mistake, as her husband died on January 9, 1932 (his death was even published in the *New York Times* on January 10, 1932). A few months before that is in 1931. In *God Alone* we read: “She was joyously received at Mount Washington and Paramahansa gave her the honor of becoming one of the first Self-Realization Fellowship monastic disciples to take the final vows of renunciation. In short, both Gyanamata’s Sister arrival and vows are given for 1932, while, as Durga Mata writes, they occurred in 1931.

Daya Mata also arrived in 1931, as we said. That year, and 1932, were financially tough times for Yogananda. The residents of Mt. Washington didn't receive a penny in salary. For the same reason of financial hardship, Yogananda in 1931 did not print a single East-West magazine. These were the depression years. Daya Mata, as a newcomer experienced a truly Spartan life: "I am reminded of a time in 1931 when funds were urgently needed. During this period, the financial resources were so meager that the Guru and disciples subsisted on thin soup and bread, or totally fasted."

Did she mind that penniless situation? Hardly. She was a renunciant by heart and was experiencing great inner joys. One such joy must have been to participate, just a month after arriving, in the very first all-day Christmas meditation which Yogananda conducted.

Meditation was balanced by service. In the early years of the work, the Master conducted morning group meditations at Mt. Washington headquarters. After each such meditation, as Daya Mata recalled, he would lead the disciples out of doors to sweep the walks, urging them, as they swept, to continue in the thought of God.

She had good administrative skills, and worked in time as a secretary for Yogananda.

Daya Mata knew shorthand. One of her most important jobs, from early on, was to record Yogananda's lectures and talks. This is how the books *Man's Eternal Quest*, *The Divine Romance*, and *Journey to Self-Realization* were finally born. Just a little over half a year after arriving, during a Summer class in 1932, she recorded these powerful



words, in which Yogananda describes his inner state: "I am living in the Eternal Flame of Spirit. This body has come and it will go, but I shall not recognize that. I have seen, long before I was born in this body, and I shall also see when this body will be gone, that I am the *ever-living Flame*. I am the past, future, and present. I am living in the Eternal Present."

One can imagine how deeply inspired she was, completely devoted to her Master.

Frequently, however, the Master was off on his teaching "campaigns". In January 1932, when Daya Mata had been with him for just a month and a half, he left for a two months lecture tour in Kansas City, where he met Rajarsi Janakananda. In October 1932, he left for Pasadena, for a series of lectures and classes. In January 1933, he was in Santa Barbara, where he gave a series of lectures and classes. In February of that year he conducted three weeks of classes in Hollywood. In May he was in Tacoma, offering a month-long series of lectures and classes. In September he addressed the *World Fellowship of Faiths* at the Chicago World's Fair. In September 1933, he travelled to Indianapolis, for a month-long series of lectures and classes. Then in November 1933 he was in Louisville for another month-long series of lectures and classes.

1933 must have been a happy year for Daya Mata, since her sister Ananda Mata joined Mt. Washington. Her brother Richard had joined already, in late 1932. Their mother Shyama Mata and the other brother, young Dale followed in 1935.

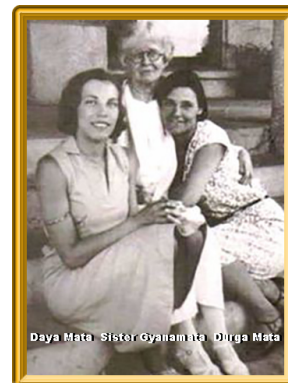
In 1933 Yogananda appointed Daya Mata as a minister, publically calling her "Sevaka F. (Faye)". *Sevaka* means divine service. Also Sister Gyanamata and Durga Mata were announced as ministers.

From 1934 Yogananda withdrew from his lecture “campaigns”, and stayed mostly at Mt. Washington. Spartan times began once again. The residents ate mostly self-grown tomatoes.

What did it matter? There was an abundance of other food. One sweet spiritual “food” Daya Mata enjoyed was playing the cymbals for Yogananda, for example during his Christmas meditations and for other occasions. Durga Mata writes: “In 1934-1935, Master had a radio program every Sunday at 4:15 p.m. He gave a fifteen-minute talk. He opened the program by playing the harmonium, Daya the cymbals, and I the big drum.”

1935-Dec. 1936, age 21-22: a year and a half without her Master

When Yogananda was gone to India, life at Mt. Washington was certainly different. Sister Gyanamata and Durga Mata were in charge. To the right there is a beautiful photo of them.



1937-1945, age 23-31: at Encinitas

Daya Mata was part of Yogananda’s most important public work: his *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Yogananda predicted: “When I have left this world, this book will change the lives of millions. It will be my messenger when I am gone.”

The greatest portion of it was composed during the period 1937–45, in Encinitas. Daya Mata, Ananda Mata, Shradha Mata were around him much of that time, helping to type the manuscript (mostly in the evenings, as during the day Yogananda had countless other duties). After each part was typed, it was given to Tara Mata, his editor.

1941 must have been a sad year for Daya Mata, as her brother Richard Wright left. He had been on the Board of Directors. She was now appointed to the Board.

1946-1952, age 32-39: years of increasing responsibility



In 1946, when the *Autobiography of a Yogi* was finally published, Daya Mata was back at Mt. Washington. Yogananda in that year wrote her this loving birthday greeting: “Many years God has travelled us together working for Him. Your birth has been important in the family of SRF, and the family and parents who brought you up. Your sincere joyous intelligent service to SRF and to God has been extremely pleasing to me. May you be born in the Cosmic Mother and inspire all with your spiritual motherliness only- only to bring others to God by the example of your life. Happy Birthday to you. Blessings eternal. Yogananda.”

Durga Mata had been in charge of the Mt. Washington office from 1944-1948 (see her book). In 1948 she moved back to Encinitas to take care of Rajarsi, who after a serious illness in 1946 now spent “four to five months in the winter months at Encinitas, and three months or more in the summer months.” So in 1948 Yogananda “decided to put Daya in charge of the office – I must say, a very wise decision.”

Running the office was not a small thing. It meant being responsible for Mt. Washington itself. And since Mt. Washington was the headquarters from which directives went to the other colonies and centers, Daya Mata was now also the person directing everything, under

Yogananda's supervision. Her ways were loving: she received a sweet Christmas card from the devotees working with her: "To our boss who never bosses." In other words, she inspired, rather than being authoritarian.

Swami Kriyananda, like most other renunciants, was grateful for her uplifting presence: "Of the nuns, Daya Mata was the one I got the opportunity to know best, and also the one from whom I drew the greatest inspiration. I found her always fair-minded, gracious to all, humble, childlike in her spontaneity. What inspired me most about her was her utter devotion to God and Guru."

1948 was an important year: in June she was part of the little band who were present in Yogananda's "great samadhi".

A few months later, however, a dangerous physical karma hit her: she almost died during a surgical operation. The experience was actually blissful for her. In an ecstatic communion Divine Mother asked her to not pass on, but to return. Yogananda told her later: "Of course, that was your time to go. Many times Satan has tried to take your life. But know this: Divine Mother in this life has given you great spiritual freedom and power. No one will be able to balk you. Keep on like this to the end of life; your salvation is achieved."



So she survived and became ever more a right hand of the Master, for example as his treasurer. The Master praised her for her tight-fisted way of handling the finances: "Faye is a Scotchman!"

Swami Kriyananda recounts that it was deeply inspiring to see between them "a friendship truly divine."

However, when it came to taking on the role of future SRF President, she resisted, pleading with the Master to let her serve instead under whomever else he would choose. But, as SRF writes, he remained adamant: "Now my work is finished. Your work begins."

This story might in truth be a little bigger. Yogananda looked for alternatives first, according to Oliver Black and Swami Atmananda: both relate that the Master asked them to become the future SRF President. Oliver Black was his second most advanced disciple. Swami Atmananda was in charge of YSS Dakshineswar headquarter in India. Both men declined.

At any rate, the Guru trusted Daya Mata fully. He had said to Kamala, concerning Daya Mata: "I have been training her all these years... Now I am satisfied."

She was present when Yogananda passed away on March 7, 1952, together with two other close disciples: Ananda Mata and Swami Kriyananda (head of the monks): for some reason neither Rajarsi, Dr. Lewis, Durga Mata, nor the other beloved disciples were witnesses.

During that moment of Yogananda's *mahasamadhi*, Daya Mata had an overwhelming spiritual experience: "It was as if a tremendous force...entered my body that night. As it happened I thought, what is happening to me, what is this? what is this? A sense of deep expansion of my consciousness, a sense of such strength, such power, such aliveness, as if my whole consciousness became completely submerged in that instant with that alone which is real. I saw that night what Reality was, that God alone existed and naught else." She then tells how she felt that Yogananda put his "mantle" on her that night.

This seems very interesting, as “Master had said he would put his spiritual mantle on Rajasi” (see Durga Mata’s book). In fact he had written to him: “I am no more living in this world, but in the empire of Eternity, and you are my Vivekananda.” So if Daya Mata’s perception was accurate, we see that a spiritual mantle can be passed on to two (or more?) disciples simultaneously. At any rate, a divine power was transferred to her.

Shortly before his passing Yogananda left her a divine guideline. When she asked him how his work could ever continue without him, he answered: “When I am gone, only love can take my place. Be so drunk with the love of God that you will know nothing else but God; and give that love to all.”

1952-1955, age 38-41: The Rajarsi years

Now Rajarsi became the SRF President. Yogananda had been extremely worried about his health. Durga Mata writes that in the Summer 1951 “Master often told me that Rajarsi’s life was in grave danger, and that Satan was trying to destroy his body.” She asked him, “why”? The Master answered: “Because he has done, and is still doing, so much for the work, and is helping a lot of souls back to God as His divine instrument.”

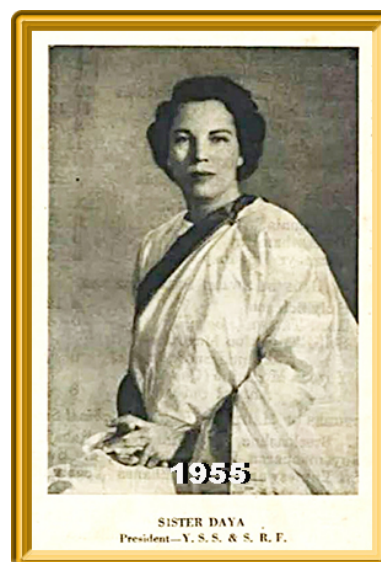
Unfortunately, Rajarsi fell sick quickly. Daya Mata during these years already ran SRF, being in charge at Mt. Washington. In 1955 he passed away. As she had received the spiritual mantle directly from Yogananda, Rajarsi now didn’t need to transfer it to her.

1955-1968, age 41-54: the formative years as President

In 1955 Daya Mata took over officially, becoming the third SRF President.

Her first years of leadership were a “tremendous test.” She didn’t feel worthy of the position, as she relates. Others recount that she felt insecure in the role. She found strong support in many members of the Board of Directors, mostly in Tara Mata. These were the years to gradually feel safe in the official and public saddle.

Soon changes occurred within SRF. It became exclusively monastic, and everyone took a spiritual name. Daya Mata herself, known as “Faye” up to 1953, now became “Sister Daya”.



In 1956 she toured through America, presenting herself as the new leader of SRF. Her vibrant spiritual magnetism took effect also on famous people:

In the late 50’s the tobacco heiress **Doris Duke** felt attracted to her, and later made generous donations to SRF. She regularly met with Daya Mata. In the 60’s she gifted a gorgeous house with swimming pool in Sierra Madre, where Daya Mata and Ananda Mata lived from 1968 to the end of their lives.

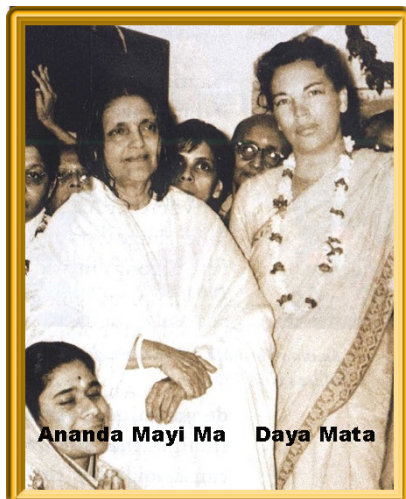
Elvis Presley, the king of rock ‘n roll, also felt drawn to Daya Mata. His wife Pricilla shared: “Elvis took to [Daya Mata] immediately. Thus began an ongoing dialogue between Elvis and Sri Daya Mata that profoundly influenced his life.” Elvis called her “Ma”.

In 1998 **George Harrison** met Daya Mata (there is a photo of them). He commented: “What is the essence of an angel? It’s somebody who’s angelic, somebody who has that purity within themselves. Just the presence within a person like Daya Mata is what I would call the

angelic quality.” George Harrison distributed the *Autobiography of a Yogi* everywhere. Part of the proceeds from his song “My Sweet Lord” was donated to SRF.

Ravi Shankar, the star of sitar music, met Daya Mata, as did **Deepak Chopra**, the famous teacher and author. There were others, like **Swami Chidananda** from Rishikesh. Everyone talked highly of her.

Visits to India



Yogananda had given her very strong directives concerning India. “Gurudeva had told me before he left his body, ‘I will not be able to go back to India, but I want you to promise me that you will take the same interest in our work there that I have, and that you will do for *Yogoda Satsanga Society* in India everything that I would do.’”

So soon in her presidency, in 1958, she went to India and spent an entire year there, being accompanied by Ananda Mata, Sister Revati, and Swami Kriyananda. Together they enjoyed meeting great saints, such as Swami Shivananda, Ananda Mayi Ma, Bhupendra Nath Sanyal, and the Shankaracharya of Krishna Tirtha.

What they didn’t enjoy, however, was the state of affairs of SRF/YSS in the homeland of their Guru. Daya Mata recounts: “All my dreams were shattered, because Guru's work had so badly deteriorated... my heart was heavy, as there was not among them the spirit I had expected.” Daya Mata “wept bitter tears” and prayed for divine assistance. It came in the form of Binayendra Narayan Dubey, later Swami Shyamananda, who soon headed up the work in India. His main inspiration was Daya Mata.

India inspired her to make several changes within SRF. When she returned home to Los Angeles in 1959, all the women disciples who had personally known Yogananda changed their name from “Sister” to “Mata”. “Sister Daya” now became “Sister Dayamata,” and later “Daya Mata”. The monks who had personally known Yogananda, however, remained a “Brother.”



The second change were the uniforms which now had to be worn by all. So far in SRF everyone had worn normal civilian clothes. But what, for Indians, is an ashram without a proper orange outfit? It’s hardly respectable. So the ladies received saris and the men renunciants’ clothes. Yogananda in fact had often said: “You don't have to wear a uniform, robes, or saris while I am here. That can come after I go to the Infinite.” (Durga Mata)

Another change was that the Indians convinced Daya Mata that “Paramhansa” was a wrong way of spelling the title: it should be “Paramahansa”. This change was implemented.

The Indians also didn’t like Krishna missing from the altar: it felt like a Christian mission (Christ had been at the center). So Krishna was included in 1960. Yogananda had wanted this addition anyway, as SRF wrote, “when the time is right.” And his picture was now placed more centrally on the altar. SRF explained: “The honored Indian tradition of respect to the guru is expressed, in one way, by the central placement of the guru’s image on one’s altar.”

Daya Mata returned to India in 1961, with Mrinalini Mata, who later wrote a booklet about it. They met Ananda Mayi Ma and Sitaramdas Omkarnath. Two years later, in 1963/64 Daya Mata returned and was blessed with the holy *darshan* of Mahavatar Babaji. This was, it seems, a turning point for her. So far she still had felt “so unworthy” about being the President, as she told Babaji in tears. Now he divinely reassured her, empowering her.

To end her India trips: in 1967/1968 she returned once more, and in 1972 she made her fifth, and last trip to India. After that, almost half a century passed until another SRF President, Brother Chidananda, visited India again.

1968-1971, age 54-57: the loss years

In 1968, as we said, Daya Mata moved from Mt. Washington to her beautiful new home in Sierra Madre. It must have felt like an energetic loss to the monks and nuns who lived at the Mother Center.

In 1968 Tara Mata, her strongest support, suffered a heart attack, and passed away in early 1971. It was certainly a major loss.

In 1970 Swami Shyamananda died. He had been the pillar of the work in India. It was a great loss to her. She returned to India only once after that, in 1972, and then never again.



In 1972 her mother Shyama Mata passed away. This loss was personal, of course, but also spiritual: she was a strong devotee at her side.

1972-1989, age 59-75: the stable years

During her presidency she inspired thousands of souls through her example, devotion, and guidance. Apart from leading SRF, she appeared during convocations, communicated personally or through her secretary Sister Savitri, received visitors, gave satsangs, both internal and to the public, published articles, and gave lectures and Kriya initiations in various countries.

Seven books were published in her name, containing her compiled talks and words, for example *Only Love* (1976), *Finding The Joy Within You* (1990), and *Enter the Quiet Heart* (1998).

1990-2002, age 76-88: the battle years

Fortunately Daya Mata had made an important decision: “I resolved very early in my discipleship that I would allow *nothing* to come between me and my God!” This attitude was now needed, as a storm arose in her outer life: she saw the need for a legal battle against Ananda and Swami Kriyananda, to trademark the names “Self-Realization” and “Paramahansa Yogananda,” and to ensure the exclusive rights of Yogananda’s books, photos, and recordings, in order to preserve the unique identity of SRF and its role as the only true representative of Yogananda and his legacy.

The heart of the conflict was philosophical. Daya Mata represented the Western idea that one Church or organization represents the Master (like the Catholic Church representing Jesus). Swami Kriyananda represented the Indian understanding that each disciple has the duty to represent his Master in his own way, including those who find themselves outside

the framework of his organization. Swami Shivananda, for example, founded the *Divine Life Society*, but Swami Chidananda (late President) would never have thought to attack his brother disciples Swami Satchidananda, Swami Satyananda, Swami Vishnudevananda, all of whom founded their own societies, using the Guru's name, photos, and teaching.

SRF's 12-year lawsuit against Ananda was certainly not an easy time for Daya Mata. SRF writes: "This period of litigation has been difficult for all parties involved."

She had been convinced of an immediate and quick victory: even before the courts had reached any decision, she wrote a letter to Swami Kriyananda, telling him that his loss was due to "flaws" that "have put us in opposite positions". Imagine the surprise when the judge decided that the name "Self-Realization" and "Paramahansa Yogananda" were in public domain. The greatest blow came when the original *Autobiography of a Yogi* was declared to be in public domain. Sister Savitri (who was on the Board of directors, Daya Mata's personal secretary, and on the SRF legal team, but then left SRF) said that it was "a black day for SRF." It was inconceivable: "How could God have allowed this to happen?"

SRF, under Daya Mata, fought hard. They repeatedly appealed, and in the end even submitted matters to the U.S. Supreme Court. In a settlement meeting with Ananda in 1997 in Pasadena, Daya Mata told all present – Ananda Mata, Mrinalini Mata, Brother Anandamoy, Swami Kriyananda – that Yogananda had appeared to her, ordering her: "Settle!" But the legal battle went on for another five years.



When it finally finished in 2002, after 12 long years, both sides had wins and losses. Sister Savitri revealed that SRF, under Daya Mata's guidance, had spent the staggering amount of 40 million dollars. Small wonder: they had employed *Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher* – at that time the third-largest law firm in the world.

The whole situation might, or might not, have been a spiritual test for Daya Mata. Yogananda's final instruction to her was: "When I am gone, only love can take my place... and give that love *to all*." She certainly always gave it fully to SRF friends. But did she succeed in giving it "to all"? Did she succeed in being born, as the Master had wanted from her, "in the Cosmic Mother," and not only as a mother of SRF? She might have. In a personal letter to Swami Kriyananda she wrote: "My love and friendship never change." Nor did his love change, throughout the fierce battle. He felt closer to Daya Mata, he said, than to anyone else in the world. They had been brother and sister, he told his friends, in a former lifetime. The question is: if their love indeed remained intact, will their followers understand, and be able to love likewise? Usually battles close the heart.

The lawsuit years were, at any rate, a time of testing for everyone. By 2002, when the fight finally ended, 40 monastics had left SRF. Over the phone, a representative is reported to have explained: "We live in hard times." Ananda similarly went through fires of testing. Members left. Amazingly, both organizations started expansive projects during that time.

On the other hand, the sale numbers of the SRF magazine (published for decades) spoke unmistakably: they had steadily increased throughout the years: in 1972 the "total paid circulation" was 11,899; in 2000 it had reached 20,604. But from the year 2000 onwards the

numbers began to drop constantly: by 2004 it had fallen to 14,634, and afterwards these numbers weren't published anymore.

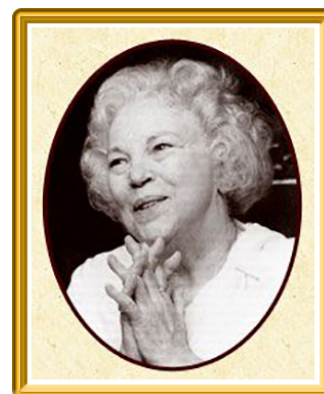
SRF's aura, so magnetic for decades, apparently got a little scratched.

There is a letter of Yogananda to Rajarsi (it still exists) in which he lists his most highly advanced disciples. Daya Mata and Ananda Mata, surprisingly, are not on it. Similarly at a gathering of monks, the Master once stated: "First in realization is St. Lynn (Rajarsi Janakananda), then Mr. Black, and then Sister Gyanamata." The monks wondered: "And Faye (Daya Mata)?" Yogananda, catching their thoughts, commented, "Faye? Well—she still has her life to live."

The Master certainly deeply loved her, and was profoundly grateful to her. And of course she was highly developed. However, he must have seen some unresolved karma. Did it finally crystalize as this lawsuit? It certainly seems like a major karmic bomb.

At any rate, during those "battle-years" Daya Mata (through lawyers) also threatened Joan Wight with a lawsuit, who had published Durga Mata's book.

In this same period Brenda Lewis, the daughter of Dr. Lewis, got into trouble too, because she had published a book outside of SRF. It contained precious letters of Yogananda. The family of her brother Bratford writes: "SRF took over the rights to the book." And: "There was and has been a struggle between the Lewis' & the Board of SRF."



Daya Mata without doubt only did what she thought would be Yogananda's will: strengthen and protect SRF, his organization. Once the battle was over, her intentions must certainly have expressed his wish: "We are now able to look forward to what we hope will be a future of harmony, understanding, and goodwill."

Moral for devotees

For those who love Daya Mata: her ecstatic devotion, profound love, selfless service, and dedication to God and Guru are certainly to be emulated by us all. If you are an SRF member, Daya Mata's letter to an Ananda devotee, written in the midst of the lawsuit, might serve as an inspiring guideline: "We want to assure you that we hold no ill will toward Ananda or its members and realize that there are many who are benefitting from the life there. We believe, as did Gurudeva, that there is room enough for all in this world, and do not want to question the sincerity and devotion of anyone who is earnestly seeking God by whatever path they have chosen... God love you, Daya Mata." This attitude of course applies to *all* Kriya Yoga organizations. Acceptance, harmony, and friendship are needed.

For those who disagree with Daya Mata on certain issues: has SRF been strongly colored by her in a Catholic monastic style, while Yogananda's original colors had been considerably different, more Indian? Was it Yogananda's intention that SRF becomes exclusively monastic, or was it her own deep-seated predisposition? Where did his colony ideal go? Was her strong centralized control really his way, without distributing any authority to the branches of the work? And would Yogananda have endorsed to forcefully defend SRF's exclusive role? Or does he also guide, miraculously protect, and empower other sincere disciples, because they reach souls which SRF would never reach? Agreement on these topics will be hard to find. But no matter which side we are on, what counts is our heart.

It seems advisable to heed Mahavatar Babaji's advice to "be like the wise ant which seizes only the sugar, and leaves the sand untouched." Where Daya Mata is concerned, she is a very high soul, higher than most, with deeply inspiring qualities, and that's the "sugar" the "ant" may focus on. Should it turn out that she indeed needs some correction, Yogananda will take care of it personally: he has never been shy in teaching her. Our own job is to love, since "only love can take my place." Love is one yardstick of our discipleship. "Love is God," as Sri Yukteswar writes his book, *The Holy Science*. In the *Autobiography of a Yogi* he explains: "Divine love is without condition, without boundary, without change." Love means victory.

2002-2010, age 88-96: the final years

By the time the lawsuit ended Daya Mata was almost 90. After it (after 2001) she stopped participating in the SRF convocation, sending video-tapes, or messages. Now she spent her time mostly in seclusion. One or two nuns stayed with her to assist. She kept two pet dogs.

In 2005 her sister and closest life-companion, Ananda Mata, with whom she had shared a house for almost 40 years, passed away.

A final joy for her must have been to know that the film "Awake" was in the making, which would present her divine Master to countless viewers.

She left her body on 30 Nov. 2010, in Sierra Madre, in her house. Mrinalini Mata, following Daya Mata's wish, succeeded her as the SRF President. She was almost 80.

In August 2017 a younger President took over: Brother Chidananda, aged 64. Soon the SRF online presence increased; many more videos are being published; and the website was transformed. Regular blogs are being offered. Also, earlier on it was not possible to contact SRF through the website. Now contact is invited. Brother Chidananda went to India immediately upon being made President, strengthening the SRF-YSS connection. Under him the new SRF Lessons finally appeared: a project which devotees had been expecting for decades. He seems to be making a big difference within SRF.

His 2019 New Year message reveals his intentions. It urges devotees to "take deep within" these expansive words of Yogananda:

"With the opening of the New Year,
all the closed portals of limitations will be thrown open
and I shall move through them to vaster fields,
where my worthwhile dreams of life will be fulfilled."

Brother Chidananda always keeps Daya Mata's presence close to his heart: "Beloved Ma, *pronams* from my heart. I know in that halo of Divine Mother's love that has emanated from you these many, many years, you will always be near."

