

Memoirs of a Western Disciple

**Life with Baba Somanath Ji
1971-1976**



by Christopher McMahon

Som Ajaib Kirpa Ashram
Guddella, Andhra Pradesh, India

Photo Credits:

Most photographs used in the *Memoirs* are taken from the collections of Graham Gibson and Bernard Daniel. Many thanks to all the disciples of Baba Somanath Ji, Indian and Western, who furnished other images of the Master. Photographs of Sant Ajaib Singh were taken from the online archives of *Sant Bani Magazine* published by Sant Bani Ashram, Franklin, NH. The image of the Gateway of India, Mumbai in Chapter 2, "A Trip to India," is licensed from Getty Images. The photograph on p. 374 was taken by Dr. Sudarshan.

Cover Design:

Prem Shinkar

Publisher:

Som Ajaib Kirpa Ashram
Guddella, Marimakala Palli, Kambadur Mandal
Anantapur District 515765, Andhra Pradesh, India
1st edition

Printed by:

Prem Shinkar, 2024

Table of Contents

Preface	v
1 My Search Begins.....	1
2 A Journey to India	21
3 Meeting with Baba Somanath Ji	33
4 The Daily Routine	45
5 The Gift of Naam	59
6 Bombay Bhandara	73
7 Incident of the Falling Rice Sack	97
8 Further Stories from Bombay.....	109
9 What is the Mind?	135
10 Christopher's Plan to Marry an Indian Girl	161
11 Kengeri Collage, 1972-1974	177
12 Episode of the Barking Dog	215
13 A Visit to Betta	235
14 In the Company of the Master, 1975.....	257
15 Last Tour to Dhareshwar, Sirsi, and Davangere	275
16 Baba Somanath Ji's Final Days in This World.....	313
17 After Baba Ji's Departure	335
Addendum: Sant Ajaib Singh on Baba Somanath Ji	355



Baba Somanath Ji

Preface



*If a man had no more to do with God than
to be thankful, that would suffice.¹*

This attempt to describe the time from 1971 to 1976 when I lived with Baba Somanath Ji for six months each year on his farm—located about ten miles south of Bangalore² near the village of Kengeri on the Deccan Plateau—has been many years in the making. After Baba Ji cast off the mortal coil, all efforts to tell what it was like to be with him remained incomplete. I could not put it together as a coherent whole.

As time passed, because of the many twists and turns of the life journey, the remembrance of the beauty and significance of that experience began to subside. And though the awareness that something profound and vital had happened lingered in my heart, still I could no longer feel what it was like to be in his company. The

1 From: M. O'C. Walshe, ed. and trans., *Meister Eckhart: Sermons & Treatises*, v. 1 (Shaftsbury, Dorset: Element, 1987) Sermon 27, p. 209.

2 Please note that in this book I have employed place names according to the usage at the time I am writing about; for instance, when writing about my stay at Kengeri Ashram during Baba Somanath Ji's lifetime, I refer to Bangalore, but when describing recent events, like the recent trip to Channasandra ashram, I refer to Bengaluru.

timeless teachings of the Saints and Sages, as revealed through the many experiences of everyday life I had known in the ashram and on tour to the Satsang centers throughout South India, were slipping away.

Sometimes, the best things happen amidst the deepest darkness, which is what occurred in my case. During the summer of 2018, I began watching videos of Baba Ram Singh Ji at His Som Ajaib Kirpa Ashram near the village of Guddella in South India. For me, Baba Ram Singh Ji had always been a very dear Gurubhai. We had both lived at Baba Somanath Ji's ashram, working together in the fields and on other ashram-related projects. After Baba Somanath Ji departed from the physical plane, we again met in the company of Sant Ajaib Singh Ji during his numerous trips to South India to give Satsang programs for the benefit of the disciples of Baba Somanath Ji and to initiate seekers who were drawn to Surat Shabd Yoga, the Path of Celestial Light and Ringing Radiance. However, our interactions were very brief since Ram Singh Ji would be helping with the food and staying arrangements for the Indian dear ones while I was busy with the needs of the Westerners.

Who he really was in actuality was not completely lost on me since my dear friends Bernard and Dominique Daniel had become close to him and knew that he had done a lot of meditation and had served the sangat wholeheartedly during the years following Baba Somanath Ji's passing. My wife Suzanne had also attended a Satsang and meditation program with Baba Ram Singh Ji in 1998 in Rajasthan, after Sant Ji had completed his life's work, and she had a wonderful experience with him. Yet even with the good influence of these dear souls, I remained unaware that he was to be the One who would rekindle in my heart the most precious experiences of my life.

It is all a mystery to me how these things happen, but the fact is that suddenly there arose within me a genuine longing to go and become reacquainted with this simple, quiet, gentle, and loving Saint about whom both Suzanne and Bernard had told me. In January 2019, by good fortune, Suzanne and I were able to travel to India to meet with Baba Ram Singh Ji, and so began a whole new happy and grateful life. Through his kind attention and radiation, the memory of all that had been forgotten about the earlier days with Baba Ji was rekindled. Moreover, to it was added a much deeper appreciation of the inner significance of everything that had happened during that time. It was an unbelievably wonderful experience for me. No words can express the significance of this event.

As a result, the story that I had been unable to tell has now gradually taken form. The years of Baba Somanath Ji's life up to the time I met him have now been documented in *The Life Story of Baba Somanath Ji: Saint and Sage of South India*, published in 2023, which tells how Baba Somanath Ji, born in 1885 in a small village in Karnataka, embarked on a profound spiritual journey which led him through the arduous practices of Nathpanth yoga, on long fruitless pilgrimages across the length and breadth of India, trekking high into the mountain fastness of the Himalayas, and finally reaching the refuge of Hazur Baba Sawan Singh Ji in Beas, Punjab. Receiving initiation from the Great Master, Baba Somanath spent several years at the Beas ashram immersed in intense meditation and tireless seva, till he was instructed by Hazur to return to Bombay and spread the teachings of Sant Mat to sincere seekers in South India.

Upon his return, Baba Somanath Ji opened a cloth shop to earn his livelihood, while giving Satsang in Bombay

and the surrounding area, as well as in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

During this time, he took hundreds of aspirants to Hazur Sawan Singh for initiation. And after Hazur left the physical plane in 1948, Baba Ji gave initiation to seekers after Truth, according to Hazur's instructions. In 1958, he established Sawan Darbar Ashram near the village of Kengeri, just outside of Bangalore, where he was residing when I first came to India in July 1971.

And now, through the *Memoirs of a Western Disciple*, I am continuing that story to include the final years of his life, a time I had the great good fortune to experience firsthand. In the following pages, the reader will find a brief description of how that first trip to India came about. Also, I will share many details concerning what it was like to be in Baba Somanath Ji's company from the vantage point of a young Westerner who had nothing going for him except a genuine wish to improve his life and to grasp the essential Truth that all sentient beings have their origin in the infinite Sea of Love and Light.

The stories or episodes that you will read here are often humorous but sometimes serious. The whole purpose behind them is to reveal how a Saint takes a very raw recruit like myself and gradually helps him understand that the ways of the mind and the Path of Love are two very different things. I was then, and still am, a very ordinary human being with an admixture of good and bad qualities. I have no genuine sense of the higher inner aspect of the Teachings of the Saints. One might say that from the time I lived with Baba Ji up until the present, I have been learning one long lesson in becoming more kind, sympathetic, and gentle towards all beings. I understand much better now that the vast

majority of us are suffering—still under the dominion of the mind—while, at heart of hearts, longing for freedom, peace, love, and light.

When I reflect on all the incidents that happened during my time with Baba Somanath Ji, the lessons I learned really boil down to developing a compassionate attitude toward all and everything. Of course, there is a deeper inner spiritual dimension to the teachings of the Saints, but until one becomes a good human being, that subtle dimension of life will remain a mystery.

Sant Kirpal Singh Ji often used to say, “God realization is easy, but to become a true human being is very difficult.” I have certainly found it so. It seems so simple in writing, but for me, it has been an almost fifty-year learning curve just to get the tiniest glimpse of what it is like to live a life of gratitude, appreciation, and respect for all. At the core of it, hidden beneath the veneer of outer appearance, is the mystery of Love. That Love permeates every cell of the Creation and is—with the Master’s grace—the key that unlocks the meaning of life.

It is my hope that the readers might feel that they are with me, sharing the experiences that arose while living with Baba Ji. No doubt, what I will relate has a personal dimension to it. Still, the individual details about my interactions with the Master only serve to make the experience understandable on the human level.

I feel that we are not different from each other; the same mind that bothers me and creates this feeling of distance and duality from the spirit of Oneness and Unity at the core of all life is also perhaps creating the same disturbance in the hearts of others, the only difference being in the outer forms it takes. Knowing this in a practical

way helps us turn off that part of the mind that makes us feel superior or inferior to anything or anybody. We are One, all of us, and the most important thing we can do is encourage each other to awaken to the common denominator that we all share—the Light and Love of the Pure Consciousness within.

Mikhail Naimy beautifully captured this reality in his *Book of Mirdad*:

MIRDAD: Love is the Law of God.

You live that you may learn to love. You love that you may learn to live. No other lesson is required of Man.

And what is it to love but for the lover to absorb forever the beloved so that the twain be one?

And whom, or what, is one to love? Is one to choose a certain leaf upon the Tree of Life and pour upon it all one's heart? What of the branch that bears the leaf? What of the stem that holds the branch? What of the bark that shields the stem? What of the roots that feed the bark, the stem, the branches and the leaves? What of the soil embosoming the roots? What of the sun, and sea, and air that fertilize the soil?

You say, "But there be leaves and leaves upon a single tree. Some are healthy, some are sick; some are beautiful, some, ugly; some are giant, some are dwarfs. How can we help but pick and choose?"

I say to you, "Out of the paleness of the sick proceeds the freshness of the healthy." I further say to you that ugliness is Beauty's palette, paint, and brush; and that the dwarf would not have been a dwarf had he not given of his stature to the giant.

You are the Tree of Life. Beware of fractioning yourselves. Set not a fruit against a fruit, a leaf against a leaf, a bough against a bough; nor set the stem against the roots; nor set the tree against the mother-soil. That is precisely what you do when you love one part more than the rest, or to the exclusion of the rest.

You are the Tree of Life. Your roots are everywhere. Your boughs and leaves are everywhere. Your fruits are in every mouth. Whatever be the fruits upon that tree; whatever be its boughs and leaves; whatever be its roots, they are your fruits; they are your leaves and boughs; they are your roots; if you would have the tree bear sweet and fragrant fruit, if you would have it ever strong and green, see to the sap wherewith you feed the roots.

Love is the sap of Life. While hatred is the pus of Death. But Love, like blood, must circulate unhindered in the veins. Repress the blood, and it becomes a menace and a plague. And what is Hate but Love repressed, or Love withheld, therefore becoming such a deadly poison both to the feeder and the fed; both to the hater and to that he hates?

A yellow leaf upon your tree of life is but a Love weaned leaf. Blame not the yellow leaf. A withered bough is but a Love-starved bough. Blame not the withered bough.

A putrid fruit is but a Hatred-suckled fruit. Blame not the putrid fruit. But rather blame your blind and stingy heart that would dole out the sap of life to few and would deny it to many, thereby denying it to itself.³

— *The Book of Mirdad*

³ Mikhail Naimy, *The Book of Mirdad: a Lighthouse and a Haven* (London: Stuart & Watkins, 1962) p. 62-63.

This is the great lesson I learned from Baba Ji. All he said and did in this life was meant to bring us into the realization that the problem of life was not something outside of oneself but was, in fact, being created by our own perceptions of the events of which our life is composed. The solution to this problem was to patiently sacrifice—with a true heart—all that self-created pain and suffering on the altar of Love in order to regain our lost spiritual heritage. For me, he was the living example of Love, and while having a body, was yet not that body but the spirit of Love itself.

My gratitude to Baba Ram Singh Ji for approving and supporting this project is inexpressible. Only by his grace did inner inspiration began to flow, making the impossible possible and bringing to fruition my heartfelt wish that Baba Ji's life story could be shared with other spiritual seekers. Remembering my precious time at the feet of Baba Somanath Ji has been a great source of happiness to me, and I pray to the Master Power that it may also prove helpful and encouraging to others.

I would like to thank Revati Shinkar for reading the manuscript of the memoirs to Baba Ram Singh Ji. Also, I would like to express my gratitude to Joe Gelbard for proofreading the manuscript, to Albrecht Czernin and Larry Flagg for their suggestions for improvement, and to my wife Suzanne for editing and layout. I would also like to acknowledge my heartfelt thanks for the encouragement that I have received from my brother disciple, Bernard Daniel throughout the project.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that it is virtually impossible to adequately portray the life of such Exalted Ones, for the vast Reality of their Being remains secret,

hidden from outer eyes. Still, I hope that this account of some of the insights I gained at Baba Somanath Ji's feet and glimpses I had of his glory may act as an inspiration to others in their journey back to the True Home of the soul.

—Christopher McMahon

Memoirs of a Western Disciple

1



My Search Begins

Growing Up in Davis During the 1960s

My longing to travel to India in search of a Spiritual Preceptor, one who could practically instruct and guide me on the inner Spiritual Path, occurred in this way. Like many young people in the 1960s, I wholeheartedly became involved in the counterculture that was arising at the time.

I grew up in California's Central Valley, in the small town of Davis, and, as we were near to San Francisco, the influence and impact of the hippie lifestyle were felt there almost immediately. By the time I was a senior in high school, I had become more and more enchanted by the possibilities that such a lifestyle presented. I made several forays into the Haight-Ashbury district, one with my mom and another with a close friend of my brother, and this increased my longing to break free from all the familiar patterns of living I had known up to that time.

Like many teenagers of that era, I was living a average, unremarkable sort of life—deeply involved in athletics, wondering where I would go to college to get an education, and how I would find a job—but my exposure to the counterculture movement changed my perceptions radically. A three-day trip to the Monterey Pop Festival

completely convinced me that I was destined to become part of this new wave of young people who were going to change the world.

Leaving Home to Attend Reed College

After graduating from high school in 1968, I left home to attend Reed College in Portland, Oregon, where my brother Patrick was in his senior year. Reed, while having a reputation as a relatively conservative educational institution, was, in reality, a gathering place for young radical intellectuals from all around the USA. The strange thing was that I was not at all an intellectual interested in bookish knowledge but rather a person eager to explore the path of experience. Still, for the brief period of the six months that I was there, I was stimulated by the idealism of my friends and classmates.

Of course, I became involved in the drug culture, rock music, and all the other dimensions of the alternative lifestyle emerging at that time, none of which inspired me towards the concentrated academic pursuits that my course of studies demanded. By mid-February, my stay at Reed was over. I suddenly dropped out of school one day and hitchhiked back to California to the small town of Arcata. I stayed there for a while with a high school friend before wandering throughout California and across into New Mexico—searching for something but not having a clue of what it was.

By June, I'd had enough of this nomad lifestyle and decided to return to Arcata to attend summer school at Humboldt State College. But I grew more and more unhappy and restless with each passing day. I attended classes throughout the fall term, though I could hardly keep up with my studies. But during that time, one

thing occurred that began to help me think of something deeper. I was taking a course on Eastern Philosophy, and the man who taught it was very sincere in his presentation of the subject. I later came to know that he was himself deeply involved with the quest for Truth. My personal interactions with him were brief, but I felt something in my heart that I had never felt before. I suddenly realized that there had to be more to life than enjoying the pleasures of the senses (which, in fact, were causing me so much misery).

I also had an independent study class that was centered on mysticism, and the professor who hosted that class was a prominent disciple of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. I had the same experience with him that I'd had with my instructor in Eastern Philosophy. I realized at once that here was a person who had some substance to him. I met other students in the class who were following different spiritual paths, which also affected me. One of them was Baden Powell, an initiate of Maharaj Charan Singh Ji, the well-known spiritual head of Radhasoami Satsang, Beas, in Punjab. Our acquaintance was casual, but I liked him and noticed in him some indefinable but real power working that I had seldom encountered before.

My Search for Truth Begins

During the fall quarter, a dear friend, Chuck Creighton (Chuck later became an accomplished musician and director of a high school orchestra in Oregon), and I rented a cabin along the coast near the town of Trinidad. It was a beautiful location, not far from Patrick's Point State Park, one of the natural treasures of that area.

I became a vegetarian and read the *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramhansa Yogananda. Reading that book was

a turning point in my life. I was convinced that I needed to go to India and experience what Yogananda had experienced, but I did not realize that my involvement with drugs was seriously hindering and not helping me. One day, we picked up a hitchhiker when we were returning to the cabin. He was heading up to Oregon. We offered him a place to stay, which he gladly accepted, as it was starting to get dark. After dinner, we, in a spirit of friendship, asked if he would like to smoke pot with us. He was very self-contained, serene, and beautiful. He told us that he appreciated our offer, but drugs played no part in his life because he had found something much higher. His words penetrated deep into my heart, for there was real power in what he said, and, as with a few others who I had met, there was genuine radiation coming out of him that was more real than anything I had encountered up to that time.

Visit to Hawaii and Sojourn in a Zen Training Center

After the quarter was over, I went during Christmas break to visit some friends who were attending the University of California in Santa Cruz. They were all pursuing a similar course to mine, except that they were excelling in their studies while pursuing alternative lifestyles. (Later, two of my friends, Barbara Hurley and Mark Jungerman, were instrumental in bringing back the lovely Sage of North India, Baba Haridas Ji, to the United States)

While there, I suddenly decided to go to Hawaii—just like that. I had no idea why, but I had my friends take me to the airport, where I purchased a ticket, and the next thing I knew, I was in Honolulu without any idea of what I would do when I got there. Then, I heard some

young people talking nearby, and they were saying how beautiful the island of Maui was, so I decided to go there.

On the plane, someone had mentioned a commune for devotees of Lord Krishna that they thought I might enjoy visiting. Since I had no place in particular to stay, I went to the suggested community. They warmly welcomed me, and, for a couple of days, I stayed in their loving company, chanting Hari Krishna and helping in various ways about their property. They were kind and sweet people, but my restless spirit pushed me on to gain more experience.

I was told of a Zen training center nearby and decided to go there as my brother, Patrick, was a devoted practitioner of Zen Buddhism and was always extolling the benefits of regular meditation. Again, I was welcomed and settled in to experience a disciplined lifestyle for the first time in my existence. There were four regular meditation sessions each day, along with study periods, work in the gardens, and doing other chores. Then there were periodic two-day sittings called sesshins.

Two exceptionally kind people acted as our guides—Robert Aitkin and Sekida Roshi (from Japan). They were truly inspirational people helping a group of ten young men to lead a disciplined life dedicated to the search for Truth. But I was not ready for such a disciplined schedule and regretfully returned to Davis after about a month in that blessed atmosphere.

Return to Davis to Stay with My Mom

In January 1970, I returned to stay with my mom, Betty Longshore. Up to now, I have not mentioned her. There is no way that I can find words to describe her. She was then and is now—having left her mortal coil at

the age of 100—far beyond me in every way. She was the embodiment of simplicity, practicality, kindness, and so many other things, ever patient, ever loving, ever ready to stand by and support me, no matter what crazy thing I was doing. For me, she was always a true Angel of Grace, and this time was no exception.

I came home very depressed and disoriented. I had seen and experienced many important things, but because my mental and emotional state had become imbalanced by drug use, I could not put into practice what I knew to be right and true. In consequence, the moral and ethical fabric of my being had been severely damaged, and I did not have the strength or wisdom to know how to repair it.

But my mom was there, full of that incredible love that only such a parent can have. She allowed me to be just what I was: a very confused young person without any firm direction in life, deeply despondent and depressed as a result. Just being with her was healing, for her love was unconditional. I am so fortunate and glad that I had such a mom.

It was a cold, cloudy winter's day when I went out for a walk. My mood was as dark and chilly as the weather. I could not see a ray of hope in any direction, but suddenly, a strange thing happened. I heard the beautiful sound of birds singing. I looked up, and, on the telephone wires above my head, a group of small birds were chirping. The innocent song of these tiny creatures, who had no fixed home and no regular source of food, touched my heart. Even though they had no secure way to make a living, still they were there singing beautifully, and I realized, in that moment, that a change was coming and

all would be well. Within a few days, I decided to go back to Arcata and, perhaps, return to school.



*Betty and Billy on a walk by
the Puget Sound*

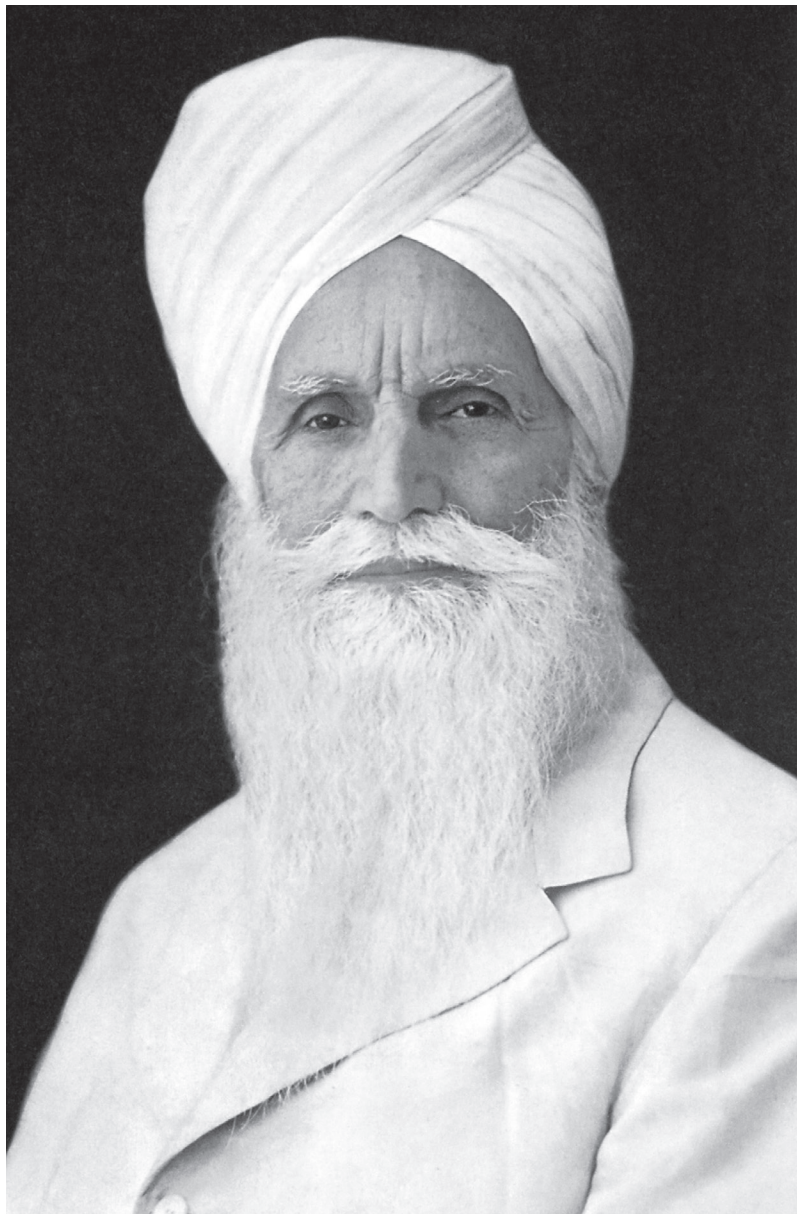
A Beautiful Dream and a Photo of Baba Sawan Singh

When I reached Arcata, I had to find a place to live, and, by good fortune, a lady I knew had a small detached building in her backyard that she said I could rent. It had only a single light and no heating, but it suited my needs very well, as all I wanted was a bit of peace and quiet so I could contemplate what I was doing in this world. I moved into my solitary room and daily tried to meditate and generally keep myself focused on what step I would take next.

One night, I dreamed that I was sitting in some beautiful mountains, unlike anything I had ever seen before. They were made of crystal, and light was shining from inside them. As I sat, I saw an elderly man with a long white beard approaching with two men, who I somehow understood to be his disciples. He came directly to the place where I was sitting, and, looking at me with his beautiful, clear, radiant eyes, he said, "If you wish to follow the path of Truth, then you must forever give up drugs."

Later in that dream, I was sitting in a car with my mom and several other people, and he once again appeared there and said, "You are the only one who can see me." When I woke up, I clearly remembered all that had happened. It made such a powerful impression on me that I never took any drugs from that day onward.

There was a bookstore in town that had a small selection of spiritual works from different religious traditions. I did not have much money, so I could not purchase anything, but I liked to go in and browse through them. There was one book there called *Path of the Masters* by Julian Johnson. In the front of the book were pictures of several distinguished gentlemen, one of which



Hazur Sawan Singh Ji

particularly attracted me. It had the caption "Hazur Sawan Singh Ji." I liked that picture very much and returned to look at it several times. He reminded me of the Sage I had seen in my dream, and I felt happy and peaceful looking at his photo.

The Path of Sant Mat

One day, I was walking along the street where the bookstore was located, and, coming towards me, I saw one of the students from my independent study class of the previous quarter. It was Baden. As he approached, he recognized me and gave me a kind and welcoming greeting. We talked for a few minutes, and then he quietly mentioned that his spiritual preceptor was coming to California in the summer and was drawing to him all the people who could benefit from his Satsang and darshan. I was astonished and thrilled to hear those words come out of his mouth. I was strongly pulled to know more. (It was, in fact, Baden who had given the bookstore several copies of Julian Johnson's book for people to purchase.) I expressed my pleasure in receiving this information and enquired how I might learn more about his Guru.

He told me that he held Satsang at his house once a week, and I was welcome to attend if I felt inclined to find out more concerning the Path of the Masters. I eagerly accepted the invitation, and, in the course of the next several months, I was able to get a basic understanding of the principles of Sant Mat. It impressed me so much that I decided that when Maharaj Charan Singh Ji came to the USA, I would request the gift of initiation.

Shortly after I encountered Baden, we started living together. He had to vacate his apartment and find a new place, and I also needed to find something a bit more spacious than the unheated, one-light room

in which I was living, so it was a good arrangement. Together, we also hatched a plan to start a fresh juice bar at the local health food store since he was a friend of the owners, Luke and Carla, two very kind and thoughtful people. They accepted our proposal and gave us a space within the store to execute our idea.

It was a wonderful time because I was working amongst loving people following different religious and spiritual traditions, including a couple, David and Margaret, who were initiates of Sant Kirpal Singh Ji. It was because of their sweet natures that I came to know of Sant Kirpal. It is to be remembered that I was totally new to the Path of the Masters, also known as Sant Mat, and was only beginning to discover the beautiful diversity of Saints working on the earth plane. In due course of time, I came in contact with many of Sant Kirpal Singh Ji's disciples who were living in and around Arcata, as his Sangat was quite large for such a small town.

Maharaj Charan Singh Ji Comes on Tour

As I continued to read the available Sant Mat literature, which Baden had collected, I felt certain that I was destined to follow the simple, timeless teachings expounded therein. As the time approached for Maharaj Charan Singh's program in Menlo Park, California, just south of San Francisco, I grew more and more excited, realizing that something of great importance was about to happen. I was present, along with many other people, when he gave darshan in a high school auditorium.

It was a remarkable event. He came in and sat down, majestic as an emperor of old. He had a unique spiritual luster, which seemed to radiate far beyond his physical body. He sat there and did not speak but gazed quietly into the eyes of everyone present. There was a powerful,

electric, pin-drop silence that was charged with a loving energy I had never experienced before. He got up and left after the darshan session, and then I broke down and wept uncontrollably for over half an hour.

Later that morning, I had a chance for a personal meeting with Maharaj Ji. I was awe-struck and could barely stutter that I wished to be initiated. He was very gracious and encouraging but informed me that I was not yet old enough to be initiated and should wait for several more years and then apply again. I managed to leave the room without displaying any emotion but, once outside again, burst into a storm of tears as I felt my life had ended and that (silly as it may seem) I might die before receiving initiation. But, of course, the emotion passed, and, for the next week or so, I attended beautiful Satsangs in the Bay Area and Los Angeles. Everything that happened during that time increased my desire to travel to India and live in the land of the Saints.

Admission to Friends World College

When I returned to Arcata, Baden and I opened up our juice stand, and, by good fortune, there was a one-month program given by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi that summer at Humboldt State College, attended by hundreds of his followers. Many of them came to our juice bar, and I met a number of wonderful people during that time who were deeply committed to meditation.

During that summer, I received a newsletter called something like "Organizations for Social Change." I cannot remember the name exactly, but there was a blurb in that newsletter regarding a Quaker-sponsored school called Friends World College, whose main campus was on Long Island in the state of New York. I was very excited to learn of this institution, for they had a branch in

India. I felt that the opportunity to go and live in India might be fulfilled by gaining admission to the school. So, I applied and received a reply that I could meet with the admissions officer in September at a Quaker Center located in San Francisco. I traveled there and, after a short interview with the school's representative, was told that I was accepted and my admission date would be January 3, 1971.

The school's curriculum was somewhat unique, based on direct interactions with people working in your specific fields of interest. The fundamental role of the school was to act as a resource center that helped students find their way to archaeologists, social workers, weavers, dancers, poets, political activists, or whatever the student was drawn to. The educational process was not based on a particular course of study but rather on specific projects through which a student gained knowledge in their area of interest by working directly with people who were specialists in their field. Then, every six months, the students would hand in a journal of what they had been doing to be evaluated by the core staff at FWC in New York. There were no formal examinations or standard tests such as one might expect in a traditional school curriculum. Amazingly, the program was accredited by the State of New York.

The first six months with Friends World College began with a three-week orientation program. During that time, one attended lectures by specialists in different disciplines, took field trips to places where the concept of social change was promoted, and interacted with the school's core group of teachers and professors. The purpose of that orientation was to give the students a chance to place their research projects within the framework of becoming a world citizen—someone who, while having

a specific career goal in view, realized their individual path was interwoven with many other approaches to the search for truth and understanding.

After three weeks, each student was expected to venture forth on a project of their own design and specific field of interest. At the end of four months, each student returned to the school on Long Island to present the fruits of their research and to prepare for the next six months of study. Then, after this session, each student would travel to one of the school's centers in England, Mexico, Japan, Kenya, or India.

Leaving Arcata to Begin a New Life

When I returned to Arcata after having been granted permission to attend Friends World College, I began winding up my affairs there. A whole new world was opening before me, but for the first time in my life, I was leaving wonderful friends and experiences that had helped to consciously awaken me to an inner purpose of existence that was beyond the plane of the senses. I was deeply grateful for this phase of the journey and everyone associated with it.

Soon after I returned, I wrote a letter to Maharaj Charan Singh Ji explaining that I was planning to come to India to study through FWC and asking if I could come and stay at Dera Beas and be part of the community there. Some weeks later, I received a kind reply saying I was welcome to come to India to pursue my course of study in Eastern religion and mysticism, but I could not stay at the Dera because it was set up for people who were already initiated and actively practicing meditation.

Once again, I felt tremendously sad and disappointed, but I understood the letter's love and kindness and

felt encouraged since Maharaj Charan Singh Ji had extended a gracious welcome to come to India to pursue my course of studies. I was deeply grateful and remain thankful to this day for the role Maharaj Ji played in my life.

I then returned to Davis to be with my mom during the Christmas season. More than ever, I realized what a gift I had in the form of my mom. She was ever by my side through all these early trials and tribulations, offering an unconditional love when I needed it most. And in her natural spirit of support for anything positive she saw coming my way, she encouraged me to go to the East to pursue my quest. She did not exactly know what this spiritual quest entailed and what mysticism was all about, but these types of details were not of any importance to her. What was important was lending her support to me so that I might realize the purpose of my life.

Later, I came to understand how worried she was at that time; her young son was leaving home to go to a foreign country and would be far from her care should he need it, but she never said a word of this at the time and instead sent me forth with her blessing.

Getting Started with Friends World College

On January 1, 1971, I flew to New York and reached the school late on a cold winter's night. After a day's rest, I commenced my one-month introduction to the school's educational approach that focused on becoming a world citizen based on direct experience of life in cultures beyond one's own. There were just twenty people in my class, and during that time, we developed a warm camaraderie. Each one of us was embarking on a totally new life adventure with a school whose philosophy on



The author at twenty, shortly before his first trip to India

education was unique and innovative. While pursuing the school's educational goals, we each were expected to practically develop an individual study project for the following four months in our specific fields of interest. Our instructors worked with us individually and put us in touch with experts in our various fields throughout the USA.

Once the orientation program was completed, we would then venture forth to gain practical experience following a self-directed independent study program. This required that we come out of our personal comfort zones to experience a living, vibrant education that was self-motivated and disciplined.

Going to Boston to Study Hatha Yoga

Since I was interested in the mystic traditions of India, my first project took me to Boston, where I lived in a yoga training center, studying hatha yoga while meeting with a wide variety of people engaged in spiritual disciplines of considerable diversity. Each interaction was filled with meaning and inspiration because I began to see that, although I had discovered a particular approach to the inner way that resonated with me, there were many other approaches whose followers were equally as enthusiastic as I was. There I met with Hindu sages, American swamis like Swami Rudrananda, Zen Buddhist roshis like Philip Kapleau, famous astrologers like Isabel Hickey, adherents of Tibetan Buddhist Guru's Tradition like my yoga teacher, Patricia Harvey (who followed Trungpa Rinpoche) and disciples of Gurdjieff like Patricia's husband. I even had the golden opportunity to have a delicious raw food lunch at Ann Wigmore's famous Hippocrates Health Institute.

Ann was there herself and, if I remember correctly, so was Victoras Kulvinskis, who later became one of the leading proponents of raw food vegetarian diet in the USA and abroad.

Along with meeting these great spiritual personages, I devoured books concerning the individual quest for enlightenment, like *Way of the White Clouds* by Lama Govinda, *Search in Secret India* by Paul Brunton, and *Wheel of Life* by John Blofield, amongst many others. All these experiences combined to instill in my heart a yet keener desire to go to India so that I could myself become deeply grounded in the spiritual traditions of the East. It was an exciting time, full of new and rich discoveries. But to experience those mysteries, one must sometimes move forward on an uncharted road that requires trust in a Higher Power to guide one to the right places and people.

Departure for India

I returned to the school for a brief period of time to go over all that I had learned, following which I wrapped up my activities in Boston. Then, along with a group of initiates of Maharaj Charan Singh Ji, I traveled from Boston to Pittsburgh to attend a bhandara where a number of respected Satsang leaders from the East Coast were giving talks on Sant Mat. Ishwar Puri, an initiate of Baba Sawan Singh, gave a beautiful Satsang, which I found very inspiring. Ishwar Ji, in fact, was later to have his own following in the USA and abroad. After the three-day program was over, I hitchhiked across the USA with a friend from FWC.

Finally arriving back in Davis, I spent a few weeks with my mom before embarking on the most important journey of my life. That journey would bring me

into the company of a great Sage and Saint of South India, who would commence the process of remaking my life (that required some serious renovation work, which is going on even to this day). I cannot grasp how I was so lucky as to have such a beautiful soul as my mother, but certainly, it was a matter of great good fortune. She had passed through many, many ups and downs in her life, as we all do, but no matter what happened, she always came out of it with a yet more positive attitude. She was always finding something nice to do for others within her own limited means. She would go out and collect wildflowers and press them to make beautiful cards, which she would send to her friends in times of celebration or in times of grief. They were filled with the love that was in her heart, and that love communicated itself through whatever she did. Some people who received those cards have told me they had them framed because they meant so much to them.

And yet, she never thought of herself as being something or doing something special. All that she did was flowing out of a hidden fountain of goodness, which dwells within all hearts. That fountain often gets buried under the duress of life on the physical plane, but with my mom, it never stopped flowing.

As I reflect on this aspect of her personality, I am in total awe of how she did this. She was a sterling example of making the place where you live bright with love. Nothing flashy, nothing outwardly extraordinary, yet powerful simply because her actions arose from a deep sincerity and honesty that were a natural part of her day-to-day life.

So it was that I bade farewell to my mom and began the trip to India, which will be taken up in Chapter 2.



Gateway of India, Mumbai

2



A Journey to India

*Today there is a great awakening beginning. Some have got the answer, some have not; but the search to solve the mystery of life has been born all over the world. The day that question arises in the mind is the greatest day of one's life, for once it is born it does not succumb until it is satisfied.*¹

—Sant Kirpal Singh

First Impressions of India

The school's center in India was in Bangalore, situated on the Deccan Plateau in deep South India. Bangalore was an ideal place for the college. It was just one large residential building. It was not a formal campus but simply a resource center where three professors helped students get oriented to India and then linked them up with professionals within the country who could act as mentors for them in their specific areas of interest.

The first step on the journey to India took me to the UK. While there, I visited the school's center in Cambridge but managed to get caught in a heavy rainstorm, during

¹ Kirpal Singh, *Sat Sandesh*, January 1971, "It is a Noble Search," p. 14.

which I was soaked through and through. I was so excited about this new adventure that I did not pay much attention to physical concerns. This neglect led to a gradual deterioration of my health as the trip progressed, although I was not aware of it due to the intensity of the new impressions pouring in from all directions.

I vividly remember looking out the window as we approached the Bombay airport and seeing the dawn sky filled with the luminous rays of the sun. My heart was filled with gratitude that, by some great good fortune, this trip was written in my destiny. In those days, there was no direct entrance into the terminal. Instead, the passengers disembarked onto the tarmac via a long staircase and walked to the terminal from there. As soon as my feet touched the ground, I bowed down and placed my forehead on the sacred earth of Mother India. It was an incredible moment in my life—reconnecting to a new land that was somehow familiar to me in a most intimate way. So many deep impressions of a more profound existence flowed into my heart, and I felt a connection with that environment, which, forever after, would never cease to amaze me.

In the following years, I have traveled to India over 60 times, and on each trip, the same electrical feeling of connection has touched my heart. It is a mysterious sensation, for it has nothing to do with being physically comfortable in India. Indeed, the physical aspect has never been easy for me, as my health is not that robust, but that never lessened the incredible feeling that pulses through the body, heart, and soul when there.

On the flight over, I sat next to a young Indian woman who had been working in the UK but was now returning to be with her family in Bombay during her holiday leave. When she came to know about my plan to travel

via train to Bangalore from Bombay, she suggested that I spend the morning with her family, who would escort me about the city to see some of its attractions before heading south. Naturally, I accepted her kind offer. When we passed through customs, her family was waiting for her, and they graciously took me to the Hanging Gardens and other important places around the central part of the city. It was a kind thing to do as I was a long-haired, bearded, hippie-looking type of person, and her family was wealthy and well-groomed. But they treated me as a dear friend and made me welcome.

The journey about the city was one intense sensory experience after another. Bombay has, for many decades, been a vibrant cultural and economic center. People from all parts of India have been drawn there, each contributing something of their own diverse backgrounds to the city's character. This vibrant lifeforce, created by the complex interweaving of cultures in a harmonious whole, resulted in a sensory bombardment that was difficult to assimilate all at once, particularly for a young person with no experience of such things. Wealth and poverty, sickness and health, beauty, and ugliness, all the multifarious textures of which life is composed, revealed themselves as we traveled through this teeming city. It presented a richly-textured cacophony of sounds, smells, and sights that baffled the human mind.

Journey from Bombay to Bangalore

By the time we reached the train station, I was amazed and bewildered by all that I had seen in my first few hours in India but ready and eager to continue with the journey to Bangalore. I did not know much about the train schedules but, fortunately, was able to procure a seat on an evening train that would reach there in two

days. As we pulled out of the busy Victoria Terminus railway station at dusk, I looked out of the window at the scenes unfolding before my eyes—especially as we reached the outskirts of the city and entered into the surrounding Indian countryside—and realized that my life, as I had known it, was gone. I was entering a totally unknown arena of my existence, and I had no idea what the future held. Small temples, villages, agricultural fields, grazing animals, and many other beautiful vignettes of Indian rural life revealed themselves as we headed toward the Western Ghats, the mountain range to the east of Bombay.

As I was not familiar with the etiquette of train travel in India, I did not know how to adjust myself as people settled down for the night. I was in a sitting compartment (no sleepers), but gradually, my fellow travelers seemed to find a way to stretch out a bit so that I was nudged off my seat onto the floor, where I made myself at home, as best I could, and passed a restless night on that hard surface. Some type of insect was also sharing my space and covered me with bites so that, within a day or two, my skin developed a rash. But even then, I was hardly conscious of my body as I became more and more absorbed in everything that I saw.

Arrival at the School and a Trip to Tiruvannamalai

By the time I reached Bangalore, my health was sinking fast. Still, I was not aware of how severe my condition was. I had developed a bit of a sore throat along with some ominous aches and pains, but that could not compare with my excitement at being in India. I proceeded straightaway to the school where I would reside during the orientation period. The school was located in a quiet residential section of the city, with beautiful bungalows and lush gardens.

After getting acquainted with the school, the students, and the Bangalore environment, I decided to take a bus trip to visit the ashram of Ramana Maharshi in the town of Tiruvannamalai. Before coming to India, I had read in Paul Brunton's book, *Search in Secret India*, about his meeting with this great Sage, so I was strongly drawn to go where this meeting took place. Brunton's description of that encounter touched my heart, and I wished to experience the atmosphere in which Ramana Maharshi had dwelled (for he had long since passed away). I went to the bus station and stood in line to get a ticket, but within minutes, I was pickpocketed. Fortunately, I had left my passport back at the school, but all my ready cash was gone. I was stunned and upset.

Two elderly Indian gentlemen, seeing my distress, enquired what the problem was, so I explained all that had happened. As it turned out, they were going to an ashram of another revered saint, Shri Aurobindo, at Auroville in Pondicherry and, realizing that I had come to India as a seeker of Truth, they gave me the money for a round trip ticket to Tiruvannamalai. I gratefully accepted their kind offer and so boarded the bus for my cherished destination.

Arriving late in the afternoon, I was welcomed by the ashram custodians and given a clean, small room to use for the duration of my stay. I visited the hall where Ramana used to sit and give darshan and joined others in meditation there. I then returned to my room to rest and wait for dinner. It was at this point that I became aware that my body was not well. And what is more, I realized I was now in a world totally different than any I had ever known with no one to help make sense of all that had been happening with me as I made the journey into South India. Suddenly, I became overwhelmed

with loneliness, and that, along with a physical collapse, caused me to enter a very dark and depressed mood. I knew that I had to get back to the school to be amongst fellow students and also that I needed medical attention.

Return to Bangalore and a Stay in the Hospital

I resolved to leave early the next morning, and from that moment onwards, I became increasingly disoriented. I managed to get to the bus station and board a new bus going to Bangalore. Every place was taken except for a small space on a metal seat near the bus driver, so I squeezed myself into position there, at which point a severe pain in my side began to trouble me. The bus driver, proud of his spiffy, shiny machine, wished to impress on any unwary travelers that he was king of the road by constantly beeping his loud, brazen horn. So, for the next six hours, I suffered a unique type of torment both within and without.

Arriving back in Bangalore, I took a rickshaw to the school and managed to get to my room to lie down while signaling that I was not well. Immediately, the director of the school, the wonderful Dr. Krishnaswamy, called a taxi and took me to a good hospital, where I was admitted for treatment. I was delirious at this point, but the capable hospital staff took over and got me settled; then, under the doctor's directions, they immediately administered a cleansing enema and commenced a course of antibiotics. I had an advanced case of double pneumonia, as it turned out, but within 24 hours, the worst of it was over, and I began slowly to recover my health under their kind and gracious care. It was a hospital run by the Catholic Church. The nuns looked after me with great love and kindness, and for the next week, I remained in their custody.

It was a great experience because it gave me a chance to digest the sensory overload that India presents to a newcomer from the West. The impressions that assail one daily cover the entire spectrum of life, from the most tragic to the most sublime and elevating. They were all jumbled together in a continuous flow of impressions that were difficult to reconcile on an intellectual level, but, in fact, in due course of time, they became perfectly understandable in some strange way. In the beginning, though, it was more than the human brain could comprehend.

While resting in the hospital, I had a chance to read one of the great classics of Indian spirituality, the *Gospel of Ramakrishna* by M. It was the perfect book to read at this time because it created in my heart and mind a vivid picture of an era when just a few fortunate disciples were close to one of the great spiritual Masters. As I read the accounts of this great Sage and his interactions with his disciples, the longing to have such an experience myself grew very intense.

One of the students, whom I had met briefly at the school before I got sick, came to visit me. We had sat together on one or two occasions and discussed the spiritual quest. He was a very interesting person by the name of Graham Gibson. He had been involved with Tibetan Buddhism and other spiritual paths and was actively practicing meditation to awaken the kundalini. In our brief meetings, a warm friendship had sprung up between us, and when he heard I was sick, he came to the hospital to spend some time with me and to give me a blessed Tibetan wooden rosary. It was a kind gesture on his part, and we spent a wonderful afternoon together.

While I was recovering, all of my ideas about living in North India and becoming somehow involved in the

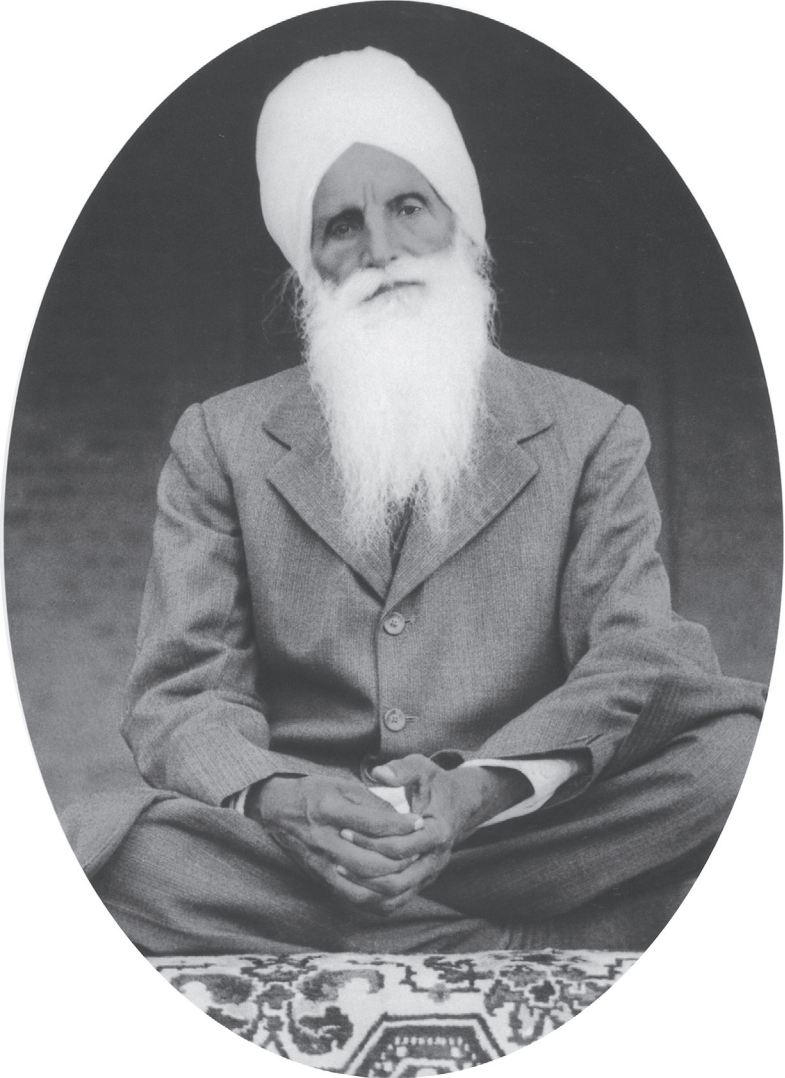
spiritual traditions of the East, as manifested through Maharaj Charan Singh and his community at Beas in Punjab, went through a radical transformation.

My original plan was to go live in Amritsar, commence a study of traditional Indian healing techniques, and from that base, periodically travel to Beas, a short train journey from Amritsar, to attend Satsang. But when I started feeling better, the director of the school and I consulted about my future plans, and it became clear that I had to temporarily abandon any idea of going to live in Punjab during that season of the year.

It was now early July. In Punjab, during the hot season, the temperatures are pretty toasty and not at all suitable for a person in a delicate state of health. Bangalore's climate, by comparison, was mild and salubrious, with fresh sub-tropical breezes washing over the area both day and night. The British had, in fact, used Bangalore as a summer retreat during their sojourn in the country. The director, therefore, advised me to spend the next several months in the Bangalore area, during which I could explore many other aspects of the spirituality of India in a more comfortable environment. Disappointed but realizing the wisdom of his words, I relaxed and reset my goal of visiting North India until the cool season that commenced in October.

Discovering an Ashram Near Bangalore

Meanwhile, I requested Dr. Krishnaswamy, the school Director, to see if there was a branch of the Radhasoami Satsang Beas in Bangalore since Maharaj Charan Singh was known and respected, not only abroad, but in India as well. His teachings appealed to people from the Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jewish, and Islamic traditions alike, as they were universal in nature and



Hazur Baba Sarwan Singh Ji

oriented towards seeing unity in diversity. So the director kindly enquired from one of his colleagues with the local newspaper and was told that there was a small ashram outside of Bangalore near the Bangalore-Mysore Road. It was located about eleven miles outside of the city and was called Sawan Durbar Ashram. The reporter did not know anything more but had heard that it had some connection with the Sant Mat teachings and thought that it might prove worth a visit for me.



Baba Somanath Ji's bungalow, Soham Shabd Gunjar

So, the day after I got out of the hospital, which I believe was July 5th, Dr. Krishnaswamy and I took an auto rickshaw out to the ashram. At that time, Bangalore was a bustling, thriving city but still maintained much of its charm as a summer haven. It was beautifully laid out with grand, tree-lined avenues, large parks, and numerous lakes. The surrounding countryside was even

lovelier, having the freshness and beauty of a subtropical paradise, where many small, well-kept farms displayed their ancient beauty as we proceeded along the road.

Finally, near the village of Kengeri, we came to an old, battered metal sign by the side of the road on which was written "Sawan Durbar Ashram," with an arrow indicating to proceed up the dirt lane to the left. So, traveling along the indicated route, we went deeper into the Indian countryside. It was all quite stunning and amazing to me, a young person from the West, in this remarkably beautiful landscape, in an ancient land, filled with some unexplainable mystery that I did not understand but only felt in my heart. After ascending a hill, the road turned left upon a sort of levee. To the right of the levee lay a large holding pond that caught the rainwater during the monsoon season and held it for use during the dry months; and, to the left, small farms and the Mysore Road, by which we had come, were visible in the distance.

At the end of the road was a compound wall with a metal gate that the gate attendant opened once he learned the purpose of our visit. Then we went up a slight incline, which led to a centrally located two-story bungalow on the left, with a balanced arrangement of buildings to the right. Beyond the arc of these various constructions stretched well-kept orchards and fields of grains, vegetables, and legumes. Just below the two-story bungalow was a veranda. On the walls, in the shadowed area, were perhaps two or three images of the great Saint of Beas, Hazur Maharaj Baba Sawan Singh Ji (the spiritual preceptor of Maharaj Charan Singh). But there was a picture of another man sitting in a reclining chair, someone who I had never before seen. I was wondering who he was and what role this farm played

in the Sant Mat tradition. I felt mystified and elated at the same time because we had come there thinking this was a direct branch of the Beas group, but it appeared that this might not be the case after all.



Baba Somanath Ji

Just then, a beautiful Indian woman came out on the second-floor balcony and asked, “Why have you come?” I enquired if this was an ashram of Maharaj Charan Singh Ji, and she said, “No, but there is a living Sage in residence here. If you like, you can come up and see him.” I was puzzled because none of this was in the script that I had imagined, and at the same time, my heart was dancing inside. A few minutes later, we entered the room where I met Baba Somanath Ji, who was to become my Best Friend and Spiritual Guide.

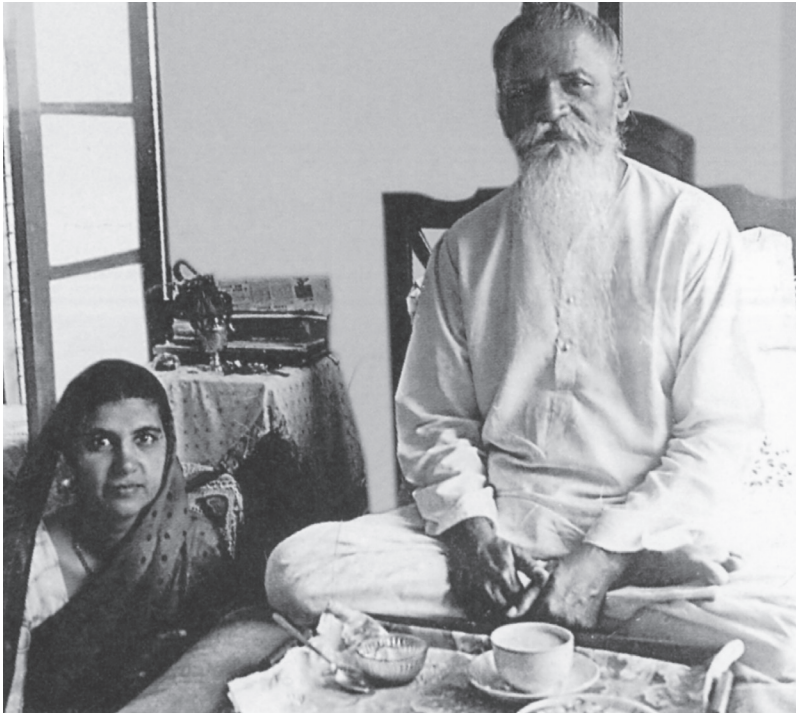


Meeting with Baba Somanath Ji

In Baba Ji's Physical Presence

When I entered the room, I beheld an elderly gentleman sitting in a chair. At that time, Baba Ji was 86 years of age. He was not dressed quite like my image of a spiritual luminary. (In fact, just about every preconceived notion I had of “spirituality” was to be eradicated in the weeks to come.) He was wearing a simple, white t-shirt and lungi—a cotton piece of cloth wrapped in the particular style of South India, which covers the lower part of the body. His long hair was tied on the top of his head in a knot, and he had a silken, silvery-white beard. He was well-proportioned in every way, and his skin had a lovely golden-brown sheen to it. His face had no wrinkles; it was smooth, soft, and glowing.

But the most remarkable thing about him was his eyes. I had met many sages from different spiritual traditions during the course of my search in the USA and had been deeply moved by them. I had seen great beauty in their eyes, but for me, this was something totally different. His eyes radiated power, dignity, and beauty, yet there was nothing aggressive or forceful about them. They were deep pools of peace, wisdom, kindness, and understanding. I knew I had found a True Friend on both a personal and spiritual level.

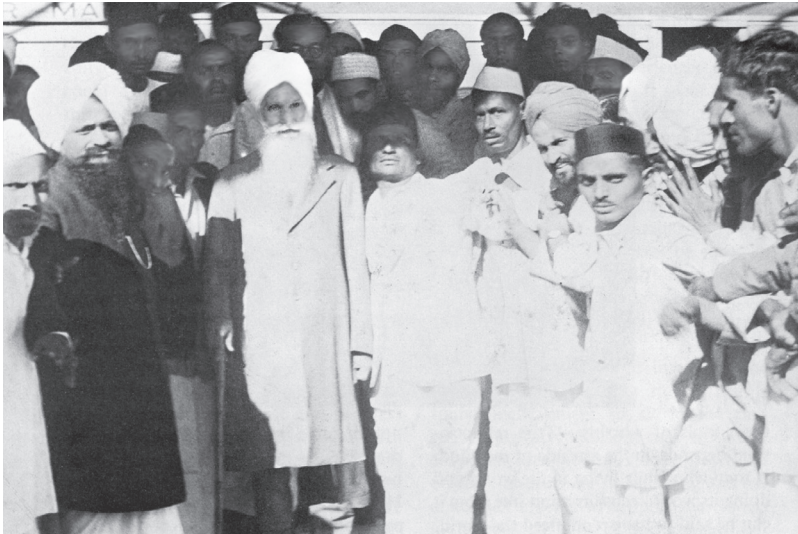


Baba Somanath Ji with Shri Pushpamma

He spoke in Kannada—the language of Karnataka State—and the words flowed from his lips in a rich, musical cadence. The lady mentioned earlier (her name was Pushpamma meaning “fragrant flower mother” — an apt name for her) spoke perfect English, and she translated Baba Ji’s words. He welcomed us and asked why we had come. I was both confused and elated. No one in the West had ever heard of Baba Somanath Ji, so I could not help but wonder who he was. I was familiar with the Sant Mat teachings, having read much of the literature coming out of Beas, and now I came to know that Baba Somanath Ji had taken Naam from Baba Sawan Singh Ji

in the late 1920s and had been commissioned by him to spread the teachings of the Saints in South India. Then I began asking Baba Ji various questions related to what he was teaching and how it related to the Path of the Masters as I had encountered it thus far.

He patiently gave short and succinct answers to all my questions in a deep, kind, and loving manner. I told him frankly that I did not know what to make of this meeting, as I had found out about the Path of the Masters through Maharaj Charan Singh Ji and had plans to go live in North India later in the year.



*Early photo of Baba Somanath Ji (in turban far left)
with Hazur Baba Sawan Singh*

Baba Ji smiled and said that it was all up to me to decide, and I was, of course, free to do as I liked. But he suggested that I come back the following Sunday (I think it was a Monday, July 5th, when this meeting took place) and take advantage of the afternoon discourse. At that

time, many people from Bangalore would be coming out to the ashram to join the 100 or so farmers currently in residence.

I do not know what possessed me at that point, but I simply said, "No, I can't wait that long. I want to come and start living in the ashram today." Baba Ji said simply, "Well, if that is your wish, you are most welcome to do so."



The Residence Hall, Someshwar Bhuvan

Moving to the Ashram

Dr. Krishnaswamy and I then returned to the school, where I picked up my few belongings. Before departing, I went to say goodbye to Graham Gibson, who was the person I felt a special kinship with at the school. Graham told me later that I wandered around his room, repeating over and over: "I have met a True Master."

By mid-afternoon, I was back at the ashram to take up residence in a simple room that Baba Ji, in the meantime, had prepared for me. Thus began an extraordinary part

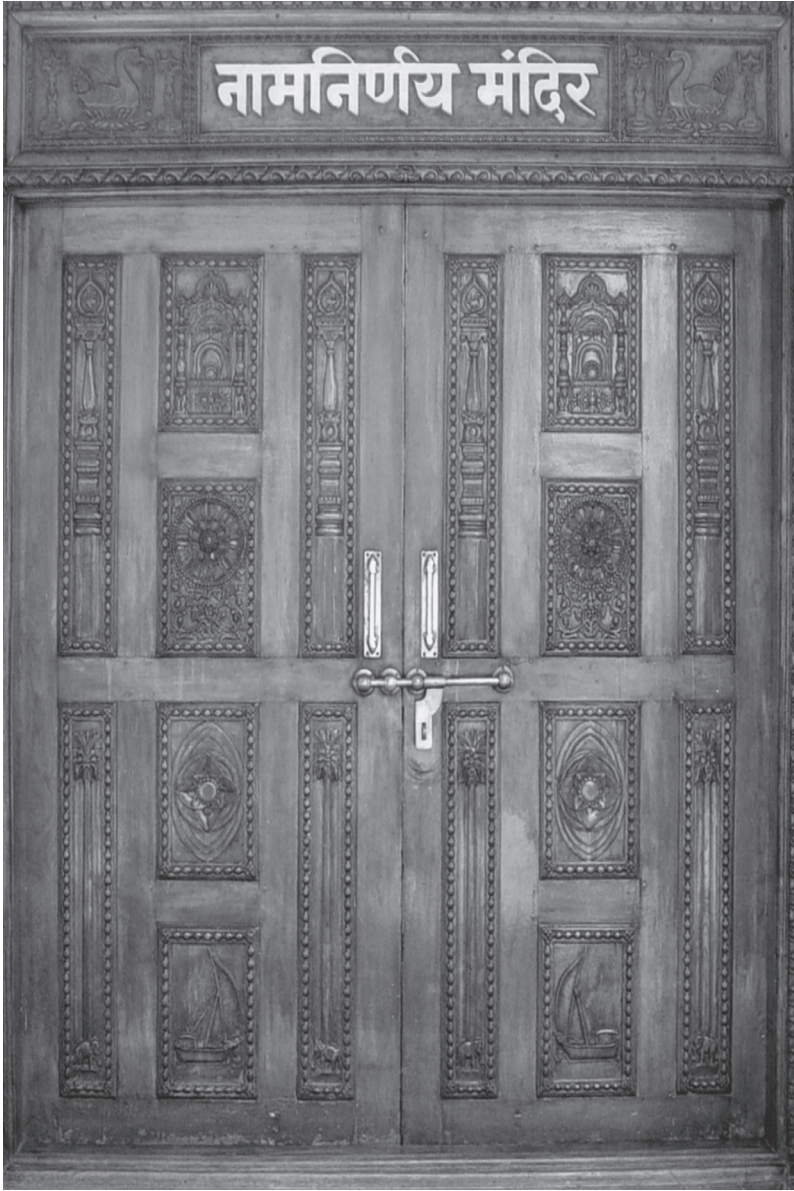
of my life that was to span the years from 1971 to 1976. During that time, I lived in India with Baba Ji six months out of each year. My visits also included extensive travels with him to various Satsang centers located in the states of Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh.

My room in the Residence Hall consisted of a simple iron bed with a thin rug spread on it. There was no other furniture. I had a cabinet in the wall for storing my few personal belongings. It was more than sufficient for my needs. I spent the rest of the afternoon getting acquainted with the basic layout of the ashram, the various buildings, the agricultural fields, and the cowsheds. The ashram itself was situated on a hill, so fine views of the surrounding countryside to the north, south, and west were in evidence.

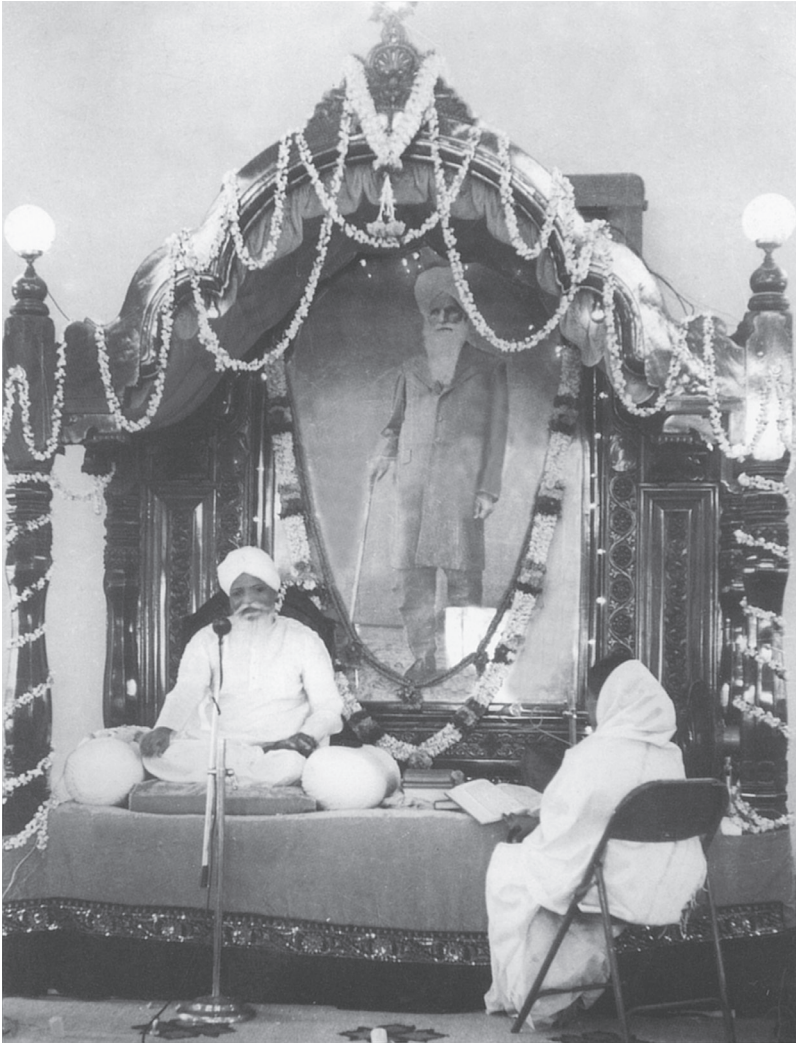
Evening Satsang was held daily at 7:00 p.m., and Baba Ji kindly arranged to have one of his Bangalore disciples, who spoke fluent English, come and do the translation.

Evening Satsang and Darshan

At 6:45, a piece of iron hanging on a tree beneath Baba Ji's room was rung to inform everyone that it was Satsang time; so, along with the 100 or so residents of the ashram, I seated myself on the carpeted floor of the small but pleasant Satsang hall. The hall was large enough to accommodate up to 400 people sitting closely together on the ground. A few pictures of Hazur Sawan Singh and Baba Somanath Ji adorned the walls. Through the open windows flowed the gentle, sub-tropical evening breeze. In the forefront of the room was the elegantly carved wooden dais from which Baba Ji gave Satsang. A life-sized image of Hazur Sawan Singh was just behind the place where Baba Ji sat cross-legged and delivered the evening discourse.



*Namniraya Mandir
The Satsang Hall at Kengeri*



Baba Ji giving Satsang at Kengeri

Shortly after we were all seated, Baba Ji entered the room. He was now dressed in a long, black coat, pure white dhoti, and an elegantly tied turban. The soft, silken, white beard flowed down his chest, and the rich

golden luster of his face and forehead was beautifully set off by the clothes that he wore. His whole appearance was one that I would call refined, balanced elegance.

It was quite a transformation from what I had seen during the first meeting with him. In normal, everyday life, Baba Ji hid this sort of regal beauty as he walked about the ashram or met with people casually in his room—he dressed very simply and comfortably at those times. But in Satsang, his manner was different. At that time, his bearing was powerful and majestic, but it was all coming from within.

Everything about him was simple and natural—yet there was definitely a magnetic power that flowed from every pore of his being that penetrated into the heart and called forth a kind of awe within when beholding such a self-contained, radiant personality.

The evening Satsang routine was in two parts. He would first come and sit in a chair below the dais. Then, everyone would sing together the hymn he had written many years ago—a hymn in praise of the inner glory of Hazur Sawan Singh Ji.

*Santa Satguru Satya Svarūpā
Nitya Nirāmaya Nirmalā*

O Sant Satguru, Form of Truth,
You are ever pure and undefiled.

Those who have heard it can never forget the sweet, yet majestic, melody of this bhajan. It was sung every night throughout the duration of my life with Baba Ji.

All during the bhajan, Baba Ji would be looking into the eyes of everyone present, giving a magnetic and

resplendent darshan. The same beautiful eyes that I described in my first meeting became yet more luminous and powerful in this setting. The unique quality of the Saint's darshan is that it draws the attention of those sitting in his presence up into the center above and between the two eyes very rapidly. Then, at least for a brief while, one will naturally sit calmly at the seat of consciousness and experience something of what it was like to be a free spirit disentangled from mind and senses. At the time, of course, all this was entirely new to me, but the effect was there all the same.

The word "darshan" means literally seeing. But the main thing, at the background, is: what motive? The motive may suggest something blessed, or quite the reverse. Masters came in the world, and those people also saw them who persecuted them, you see. And others drew benefit also, according to the degree of the motives within. If you see him as a man, at the level of man, if you see a learned man, you'll have that effect; if you see him as something higher in man, the spirit in man, you'll have that level, that thing. But "seeing" means when you and the other become one, through the eyes. Eyes are the windows of the soul, through which soul peeps out, radiates, with whatever intoxication it has. So "seeing" means to be quite cut off from all outside; you forget everybody else, no attention anywhere. Whole attention is seeing; where? Into the eyes, which are the windows of the soul. And if you are receptive, you'll have that.

So there is radiation of each man, I think. Those who are developed in a certain way, they have got radiation that way. And the word "darshan", using the terminology of the Saints, is when two become one. No duality

*remains. You are not even aware of your own body. This is the point: you are a conscious entity; and the other is more conscious.*¹

—Sant Kirpal Singh

After the Sangat completed the singing of the bhajan, Baba Ji would rise and ascend the few steps to the dais. Pushpamma would then seat herself in a chair just below and to the right of where he was sitting. Pushpamma had a small stack of books containing the hymns of various Saints arranged before her, and from these, Baba Ji would select something on which to discourse from Kabir, Swami Ji, Paltu Sahib, Ravidas, the Sikh Gurus, or other Sant Mat Masters. Pushpamma would sing the lines from the hymn in a richly-textured, melodic voice, and Baba Ji would comment on each two-line segment.

The atmosphere became even more charged at that time since Baba Ji not only gave open darshan but also further captured the attention through his powerfully charged explanation of the inner meaning of each stanza. It is said that each Saint has some unique gift—some special blessing of his Master. It could manifest in many different ways, but for Baba Ji, Hazur Sawan Singh had given him the blessing of simple, enchanting Satsangs that would powerfully capture the attention of the listeners and work within their hearts, lifting the soul above body consciousness where it could absorb the radiant waves of God's love.

The word "Satsang" means actually uniting the soul with the all-pervading, all-existing God. This is possible only when our soul has been analyzed from mind and the outgoing faculties. When we know ourselves, only

1 Kirpal Singh, *Sat Sandesh*, July 1973, "What is True Darshan?" p. 12.

*then are we in a position to know the God who is pervading all, who is controlling all, in whom we live and have our being.*²

—Sant Kirpal Singh

The daily Satsangs were brief, generally 30 to 45 minutes long, but they always had a profound cleansing effect on all who could be present for them. After the Satsang, Baba Ji would quietly get up and walk out of the hall, leaving one in an inwardly contemplative frame of mind.³

Afterward, Baba Ji called me to his room and asked if I had any questions. Mr. Sharanappa was present to do the translation. I cannot remember if I did or not, but I do remember that I was so happy to be with him—beginning a new life. The hope and aspiration that had arisen in the hospital, that I might one day live in the company of a Sage, as Ramakrishna Paramhansa's disciples had lived with him, was now coming true.

After Mr. Sharanappa had left and I had gone out of the room for a brief while, I was called back, and Pushpamma served a beautifully prepared meal in Baba Ji's room. It was a very kind and generous way of welcoming me and making me feel at home. For the next several days, I was to eat my evening meal in Baba Ji's room. The memory of that time is deeply etched in my heart, for I now see how little I understood about what it meant to sit in such an intimate way with the Master.

But the first day (or should I say the first night) was

2 Kirpal Singh, *Morning Talks* (Delhi, India: Ruhani Satsang, 1970) "True Satsang," p. 157-158.

3 More than 100 translations of these Satsangs from Hindi to English are now available on the Baba Somanath Ji website at: <https://babasomanathji.org/satsangs>

not to end without a grand adventure. Exhausted after a full day of activities, I switched off the lamp and lay down on the thin rug spread upon the iron bedstead. As soon as I had turned off the lights, I heard a soft humming sound. At first, I could not figure out what it was, but I was soon to discover its source. I did not realize that the beautiful, subtropical appearance of the ashram set on the hill amidst coconut and mango groves, fields of grain, legumes, and vegetables in the daylight might have a flipside appearance in one's room after dark.

I began to feel the sharp impact of dive-bombing kamikaze mosquitoes in quest of new blood, that blood being mine. The room was alive with these ferocious, daredevil bombers, and, for the whole night, I lay tossing from side to side unable to protect myself from the onslaught. It is funny to recollect but no joke at the time. Yet, it in no way discouraged me.

With the welcome arrival of the dawn and the quieting down of my "roommates" (since during the day, there were no mosquitoes to be seen anywhere), I asked permission to go to town and get a mosquito net. Baba Ji, knowing what I had gone through, and perhaps himself having administered the first of many tests to come, smiled and said that, of course, I should get whatever was necessary for my comfort. I cannot say that I actually "passed" any test (if indeed tests they were). What I can say is that, despite many protests and squeakings of my mind, when such times came upon me, he held me close to his heart and somehow kept me from leaving when, on my own, I might have been prone to do just that.

4



The Daily Routine

If you go to someone for protection with a sincere heart, putting all your hopes in him after all the disappointment and defeat, he has to accept and protect you on principle.

He is not concerned that you may be a great sinner; he sees only that you are a soul at the mercy of the mind and senses. His work is to release this soul and release also the mind from the sense enjoyments and to give the Nectar of Naam through which the life can be turned into success. He does not care if people consider him good or bad, or if one has faith in him or not, yet he will never leave those who are under his care.

Christ said, "I shall never leave thee nor forsake thee until the end of the world." Hazur used to say that when the Satguru gives initiation, he does not rest until he has taken the disciple to the lap of Sat Naam or Sat Purush.

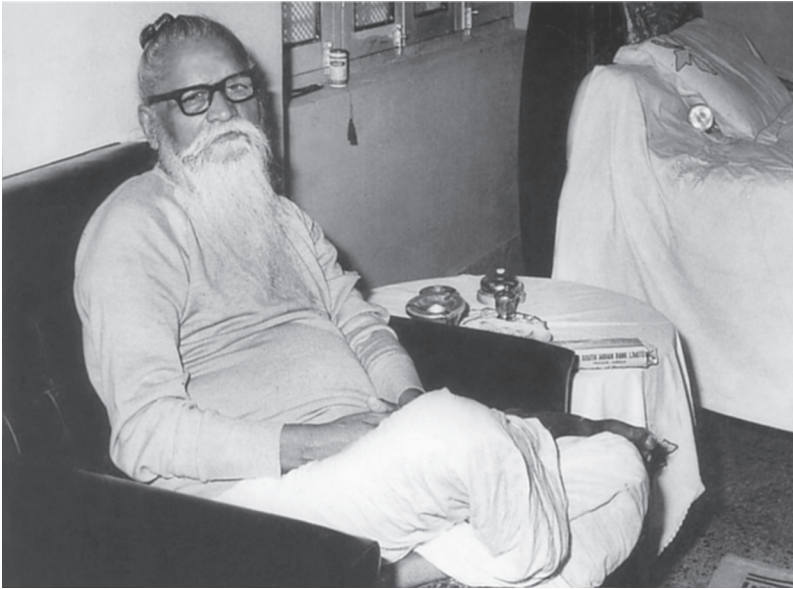
You may leave him and put your attention elsewhere, but he does not forsake you.¹

—Sant Kirpal Singh

¹ Kirpal Singh, *Sat Sandesh*, October 1971, "Mind Replies to the Soul," p. 6.

The Ashram Schedule

When I came to India for the first time, I had a certain preconception of what an ashram was like. I thought it was a place where people sat around and meditated much of their free time, perhaps helped in some minor ashram works, attended Satsang with the Master, and participated in other serene activities. In many places, this sort of tradition does exist, but this was not the case in Baba Ji's ashram, as will now be explained.



Baba Somanath Ji giving morning darshan

Daily life in the ashram did follow a basic routine. At 3:00 a.m., the bell sounded for meditation and during the following three-hour period, known as the "Amrit Vela" or the "Time of the Nectar," people would rise and attend to their meditation in their rooms. John S.

Hoyland, in his book *The Light of Christ*, has given the undernoted description of this special time:

There is an hour of the Indian night, a little before the first glimmer of the dawn, when the stars are unbelievably clear and closer, shining with radiance beyond our belief in this foggy land. The trees stand silent around one with a friendly presence. As yet, there is no sound from awakening birds, but the whole world seems to be intent, alive, listening, eager. At such a moment, the veil between the things that are seen and the things that are unseen becomes so thin as to interpose scarcely any barrier at all between the Eternal Beauty and Truth and the soul, which would comprehend them.²

At 6:00 a.m., the morning meditation would conclude, and everyone would then go up to have Baba Ji's darshan one by one. The setting of this morning meeting was soft and hushed. The air of a subtropical morning is gently cool, fragrant, and clear. And as the ashram sat upon a hill, one could get a glimpse of the surrounding countryside, which was a delight to the eye and solace to the heart.

Far in the distance, one could behold many small farms gracefully adorning the landscape. Each farm represented the love and labor of the individuals owning them and consisted of a variety of trees, grains, and legumes. Single-crop farming was unknown in that part of India at the time, so this intricate design created by multi-crop farming on a small scale was enchanting to behold. The colors of this morning scene were vibrant and electric; perhaps the greatest charm came from the radiation of

2 John S. Hoyland, *The Light of Christ* (London: Swarthmore Press, 1928) p. 8.

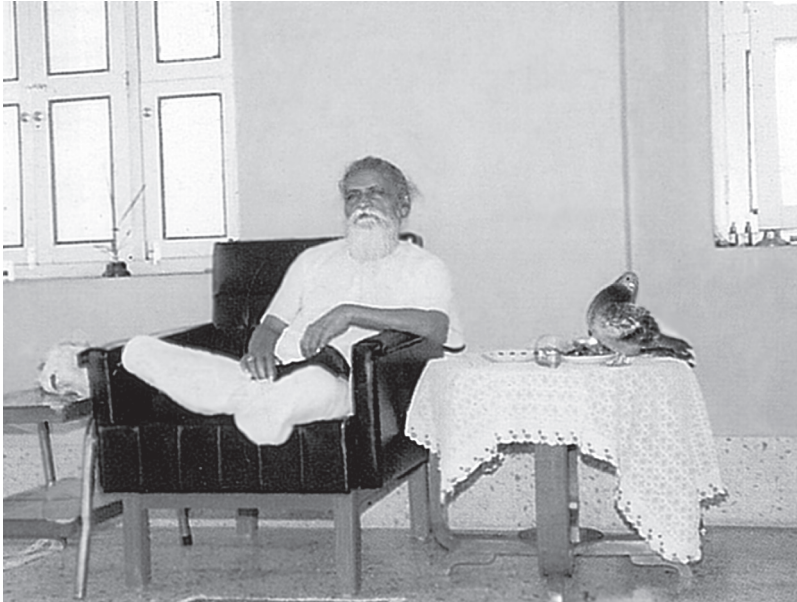
an ancient land suffused with thousands of years of the spirit of devotion. Such things are not perceptible to the human eye but are known only to the heart.

Entering Baba Ji's room was a yet deeper revelation of the spiritual beauty of India, for in the eyes of the Saint is the full manifestation of the Land of Light and Love—the ultimate goal for all those that seek the Truth. Each, in turn, would enter the quiet of his room and look into those clear, deep, contemplative eyes. He would be sitting in his chair, very relaxed and informal, sometimes with his hair down, sometimes tied on top of his head, wearing a simple t-shirt or pastel-colored sweater if the weather was cool, and an immaculate white dhoti. Often, those who were responsible for particular sevas would talk with Baba Ji about the work to be done that day. It was all very natural and low-key, but it made that daily activity all the more powerful.

Another sweet part of that atmosphere was that Baba Ji often had in his room several pigeons, the chief one's name being Raju—who had a proprietary position in the “pecking” hierarchy. He had come in from the wild some years before and had decided that Baba Ji was his best friend. Since that time, he had occupied a position of senior importance over any other pigeons who might have heard of his good fortune and had come to join him. A gentle cooing would often be heard resounding in the room, and sometimes Raju would be seen sitting on Baba Ji's feet or on his chair because Baba Ji liked to feed him and the other pigeons with his own hand.

At around 7:00 a.m., the workday began. There were several types of activities that took place in the ashram. Most of them were directly related to the agricultural side of things and varied from season to season. Planting, weeding, irrigating, and harvesting were at the forefront

of what we did. Other activities included constructing new buildings such as cowsheds or a new entrance gate (both of which happened while I was there) or resurfacing and improving roads.



Baba Somanath Ji with Raju the pigeon

It was all very simple in a certain way yet diverse in another. You might be engaged in several different projects at once, depending on the day. There was always something new to learn, especially for someone like me who had very little prior experience with the agricultural way of life.

At 9:30, work would halt for an hour while breakfast was served in the community eating area. There everyone sat on the floor, and a few sevadars would go around the room serving the food prepared in the main kitchen. The food was very simple but nourishing and plentiful. Most of what was prepared was grown on

the ashram's own property. The basic diet consisted of copious amounts of rice, raggi muda (large, soft, ball-shaped, dense masses of a brownish Indian grain called raggi), vegetables, and a super-hot, spicy soup called rasam. Sometimes, large oversized chapatis made from corn or raggi grains were served.



Sevadars carrying ragi seedlings

Breakfast completed, each of us would return to our specific tasks and work again until lunchtime at 2:00. By 3:00 or 3:30, everyone again went back to their work, and this went on till 6:15 or 6:30 when we would come in from the field work or from other jobs. We would then wash and bathe, often under cold-water spigots, and get ready for the evening Satsang at 7:00 p.m. Satsang was over by 8:00 at the latest. And, generally speaking, there was leisure time after that until 9:00, when dinner was served, after which everyone retired. However, during the harvest season, the latter routine was not maintained

since there was always a lot of work to be done. Often, work would continue after Satsang till 9:00 or 10:00 at night, sometimes later, after which dinner was served.

Integration into an Agricultural Lifestyle



Baba Ji with sevadars working in the fields

It is into this framework of daily activities that all the Westerners who came to Baba Ji were expected to mold their lives. Baba Ji did not have any special accommodations for Westerners nor special programs for them, other than the regular work that needed attending to in the ashram. We were expected to seamlessly integrate into the Indian way of life on every level.

From a dietary standpoint, some concessions were made, as most of us could not digest the heavy grain diet that the farmers of South India were used to. Hence, a lighter version of what they consumed was prepared for us. But as time went on, the difference between the two diets became less pronounced.

Since I was only the second Westerner to ever live in the ashram for an extended period of time (there had been a Swiss man who had stayed for six months or so several years before), I had to integrate without much coaching. I had to learn everything from the ground up, so to speak. If the readers will now endeavor to put themselves in my shoes, it may help to grasp the difficulty of the situation from a pragmatic standpoint.

Besides my lack of background in farm living, I was also used to a certain level of convenience, as most of us are in the West. So suddenly, of my own volition, I entered into an ancient way of life based upon the measured rhythms of nature as they manifested from day to day, week to week, month to month, and season to season. I was, to say the least, in unfamiliar territory.

My adjustment was further complicated by the fact that my lifestyle for a couple of years prior to coming to India had been anything but disciplined. I had indulged in all sorts of habits that are a positive detriment for those wishing to have meditation as the center of their life. My body and mind had been greatly weakened by those activities, and one does not suddenly get over their effects. It takes time to regain one's physical and mental health after leading the type of life that I had led. The first six months at the ashram were the beginning of a rebuilding process that was to prove, at times, difficult—one might say intense.

But in retrospect, the thing that really helped me make the transition was not my own strength but rather the continual support from Baba Ji and all those around him. Left to my own devices, I would have departed from the ashram, never to return, but somewhere deep within, the soul realized that there was only one hope, and that was to become connected to the Power of Love and Light that manifested through Baba Ji.



Baba Somanath Ji

The Transformative Power of the Satguru

During the next six months, many challenges arose—physical, emotional, and mental—that would have proved insurmountable if I had not been living in a

supportive atmosphere of love and kindness. At times, Baba Ji had to adopt some firm means to bring me out of the obsession with my small, ego-bound self, but the lessons were always tempered with a compassion that transcends all comprehension.

As Sant Kirpal Singh Ji used to say repeatedly: “God realization is very easy, but to become a true human being is very difficult.” To this, I might add, it is only a compassionate Saint who can restore one to a life filled with gratitude and appreciation for the grace and mercy that is hidden deep within the folds of the heart—beyond the plane of mind and senses.

Looking back, the greatest challenge I faced was an attitude that physical work was somehow beneath me. In the very beginning, Baba Ji told me: “If you cannot meditate, then you should do seva.” Now, by some weird thought process in my mind, I believed that I was an advanced soul and so could easily meditate. I thought that physical seva was for those who were at the beginning stages of the Path. It was, truly speaking, a very odd thing to think because, of all the people there, I had the least idea of what it was to meditate, but still, the mind is a strange entity, and it convinced me that I was “special.”

Time would clearly reveal to me the error of my ways. So, there were many times in those first six months when I sat for so-called “meditation” while others worked on the different projects. In fact, as I look back, what was really happening was that I was afraid to get out and interact with others and learn to be a quiet worker on the farm, with hands at work and heart towards God. As the years progressed, I at least learned to work with my hands—with intermittent understanding of where to focus my attention within.

This whole story is nothing but an attempt to share with others what it was like to be a recipient of Baba Ji's ever-present help and guidance. In the Will of God, he was sent a soul who had seriously damaged the ethical and moral fabric of his being—the very foundation of the spiritual life—yet he never wavered in the responsibility entrusted to him. It isn't easy to fathom how this all happened because he was doing the very same thing for everyone in his care. In due course of time, and now more than ever, I realize that, inwardly and outwardly, he was there for every single person who came to him, the difference being that with most people, he could attend to their needs by inner guidance. But with folks like me, and I was not alone, he had to be personally and deeply involved with getting them back on their feet as human beings.

In the following pages, I shall be sharing a series of episodes, both major and minor, that revealed Baba Ji's unique ways of clearing out the old patterns of self-centered behavior and replacing them with a broader, more inclusive perception of life based on the simple realization that within all hearts, whether concealed or revealed, the same Light and Love of God is living.

It is important to realize, right from the outset, that this is being told by one who has no genuine knowledge of the higher aspects of the teaching of the Saints concerning the ascent of the soul along the life-sustaining currents of Radiant Light and Celestial Sound, also known as the Music of the Spheres. It definitely means that the sharing of what happened during the years 1971-1976 is from a limited vantage point. Still, it may prove useful to those who have, in one way or another, confronted some of the self-created blockages that prevent one from living in a more open, fluid manner in which love for all

creation is at the forefront rather than an attachment to a small self-centered being. The process of transformation that Baba Ji initiated at that time is still going on. It is far from complete. But the slight change in perspective has endowed life with a luster and beauty that is worth living for. Even the tiniest glimpses of such a life have far more value than all the treasures of the world.



Satsang at the ashram

I hope that in the pages to come, others might receive some solace and a deeper understanding from what happened during my time with Baba Ji. It matters very little that the events happened to me. It could have been anyone. Perhaps it is not very different, in essence, from what happens with all souls who long for Truth no matter what their background. It may be presumptuous to think in that way, but still, I hope that those reading this account might, in some way, share in this experience, perhaps even feel as if they are walking beside me in this adventure.

The Remedy for All Illnesses is Love

I remember once, while I was living in the ashram, that some well-intentioned medical practitioners and philanthropists who were involved in mental health came to the ashram to meet with Baba Ji. They were interested in procuring a piece of land where they could set up a state-of-the-art facility for those who were mentally and emotionally challenged for one reason or another.

After looking over the property and talking with Baba Ji, they expressed the opinion that the land was highly suitable for establishing their facility. They were prepared to pay Baba Ji a large sum of money for it. Baba Ji smiled when they put their proposal before him. In reply, he told them:

Dear ones, I appreciate what you are doing and how you are thinking. It is noble and good. But I would like to explain to you a very simple thing. We are all crazy; we are all insane because we are separated from God. The only way to remedy that situation is love. Here in the ashram, love is taught, practiced, and lived; so, what you wish to accomplish with your modern facility and advanced techniques is already being done here. Hence, I cannot accept your offer, although I appreciate it.

Those sincere souls had nothing to say after hearing his words, and bowing to his wisdom, quietly departed.

Rejoice, Micayon. Yours is a prophet's dream. The Great Nostalgia has made your world too small and made you a stranger in that world. It has unloosed your imagination from the grip of the despotic senses; and imagination has brought you forth your Faith.

And Faith shall lift you high above the stagnant, sti-

fling world and carry you across the dreary emptiness and up the Rugged Mountains where every faith must needs be tried and purified of the last dregs of Doubt.

And Faith so purified and triumphant shall lead you to the boundaries of the eternally green Summit and there deliver you into the hands of Understanding. Having discharged its task, Faith shall retire, and Understanding shall guide your steps to the unutterable Freedom of the Summit, which is the true, the boundless, and all-including home of God and the Overcoming Man.

Stand well to the test Micayon. Stand well, you all. To stand but for a moment on that summit is worth enduring every kind of pain. But to abide forever on that Summit is worth Eternity.³

—Book of Mirdad

³ Mikhail Naimy, *The Book of Mirdad: A Lighthouse and a Haven* (London: Stuart & Watkins, 1962) p. 151.

5



The Gift of Naam

Next comes humility. Water stays in a place which is low. It may be raining cats and dogs, in torrents; but the water will not stay on a steep place. It means that all good resides in a heart which is lowly, in those who are meek. St. Augustine was asked, "What is the way back to God?" And he said, "First humility, second humility, and third humility."¹

— Sant Kirpal Singh

Adjusting to My New Life

To the best of my knowledge, I took up residence in the ashram on Monday afternoon, July 5, 1971. During the next three weeks, a number of significant events took place that I will do my best to narrate here.

As already mentioned, the integration into a new lifestyle was anything but easy for me, as I had no solid background in living in an agricultural community. But aside from the practical issues of finding a way to

¹ Kirpal Singh, *Sat Sandesh*, October 1975, "What is True Living?" p. 3.

make myself useful in a world of which I knew little, there was the added problem of not understanding the language of the people with whom I was living. They spoke either Telugu or Kannada, both being Dravidian languages. Baba Ji was fluent in Hindi, Marathi, Punjabi, and Kannada, and he understood Telugu very well but spoke no English. Pushpamma was fluent in English, but her time was fully occupied with cooking Baba Ji's food and serving snacks and meals to those coming to see him, along with many other duties. And to her regular responsibilities was now added preparing three meals a day for me. So, the language barrier was a real hurdle for me to overcome. Baba Ji, conscious of the challenges of the new life I was entering into, arranged to have an English-speaking dear one, Mr. Sharanappa, come each evening to translate Satsangs and to be present with him after Satsang should I have any questions.



The author with dear brother Ram Ji

But the biggest obstacle for me was, of course, my own mind that, having taken on the color of the Western world, needed to slow down and patiently learn a whole new rhythm. It proved to be a fierce battle, as the reader will come to know through a series of episodes that I will relate, where this wayward mind was compelled to see itself in the mirror of Pure Light.

Fortunately for me, at that time, a mason and his son from Maharashtra State were working on the construction of the new cowsheds. The mason's name was Ram Ji. He was a simple man with a heart of pure gold. He did not speak a word of English, but he somehow understood what it was like for me in those early days. He took me in hand and had me work as one of his assistants on the construction of the new building. Whenever I came near him, I could feel the love and kindness flowing from his heart into mine. It was because of his help that I began to make myself useful in the daily activities of the ashram, and this hard work helped temper, somewhat, the inner turmoil and mental oscillations churning in my within. Physical work is a great blessing when the mind is agitated.

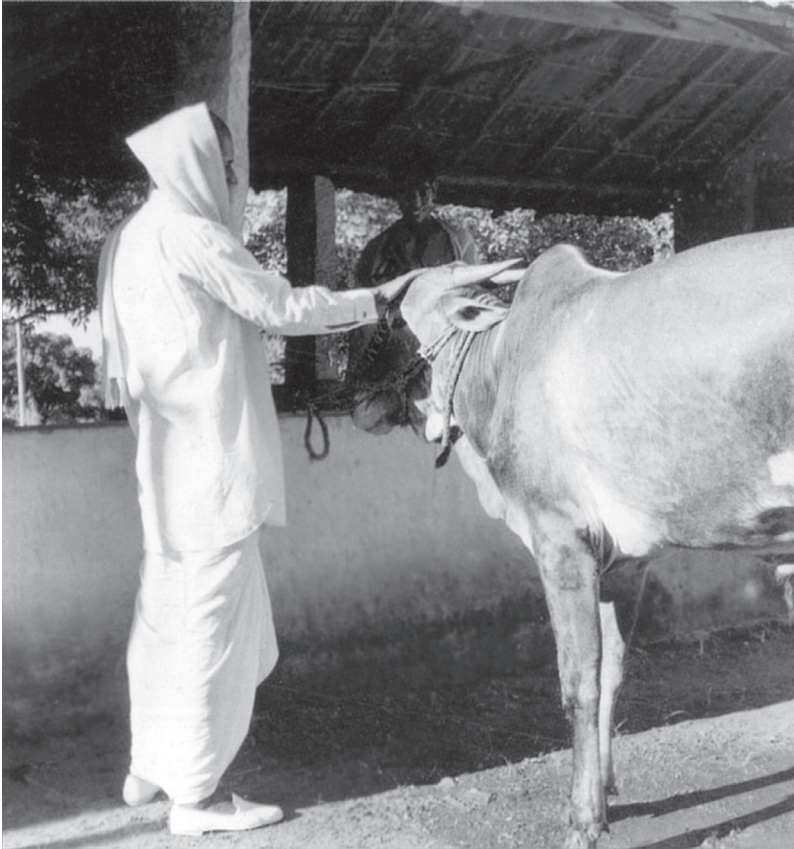
The Day-to-Day Company of an Awakened Sage

Here, I am going to attempt to describe something that may or may not be a part of the reader's experience but, hopefully, will make some sense. The atmosphere surrounding an awakened Sage is very powerful and luminous. One would think that there would be nothing easier than to simply enjoy that radiation, for it definitely has an elevating effect. People often get a rare spiritual boost if they come and spend a short time with such a Saint and then return to their regular lives where they

can slowly digest the benefit derived from that contact. But living on a day-to-day basis in that atmosphere is somewhat different.

What seems to happen, and this is by no means unique to me, is that after some time, our many individual human propensities, both good and bad, tend to rise to the surface in such an atmosphere and become exaggerated in our minds. The mind deceives us into thinking we are either better or worse than we really are. People who come from good backgrounds and have developed good habits in the course of their lives tend to think of themselves as more virtuous and benign than perhaps they really are, and those who have committed many mistakes and fallen into unhealthy patterns of living begin to perceive themselves in a more negative light. And then there is a third category of persons who, having committed all sorts of blunders, simply close their eyes to their own past mistakes and manage, somehow, to perceive themselves to be more exalted and holier than anyone else. God knows why, but it does happen. This was, to a certain degree, the way I viewed myself.

It is strange to look back on this, but we can only be what we are. Thank goodness there are Sages and Saints who understand the complex workings of the mind and have with them a remedy for purifying everyone who comes in their company according to his or her individual needs. All of these dramas go on, in and around a Saint, but the intensity is many times greater than when we are away from his physical presence. In the workaday world, we are often absorbed in our own self-centered interests—mainly concerned with fulfilling personal desires of the ego instead of living a life where love, kindness, sympathy, gentleness, and consideration of others are at the forefront.



Baba Somanath Ji feeding the cows

So, if one does get the opportunity to live in the company of a Sage for an extended period of time, as happened with me, then it is highly likely that, in one way or another, these good and bad self-centered tendencies, hidden deep within the folds of the heart, will come forth and need to be dealt with. As long as one is attached to one's individual viewpoint and fails to see that there is, indeed, only one Light living in every particle of creation, then all sorts of obstacles may appear

in the Path, and one may get buffeted about until they are, of themselves, willing to give up clutching to their vanity-centered perspective. The road to that simple perception may be a very rough one, as I was to learn over the time spent with Baba Ji. In order to shake me free from the many mental trappings I had surrounded myself with—to help me come out of the obsession with the small self—he occasionally elected to use more drastic means than would have been unnecessary with a person of a more refined nature.

Sunday Satsang and the Arrival of Graham Gibson

So let us return to the main story. Wednesday through Saturday passed away in getting used to the new daily routine. Ram Ji took care that I felt needed. Baba Ji had me spend time with him each day. Pushpamma cooked delicious meals that I enjoyed. (In the evening, she often prepared toasted vegetable sandwiches and pudding, things that I was somewhat familiar with. She had a most tender heart.) And the sevadars started getting used to having a Westerner in their midst.

Sunday was the one day of the week that followed a different schedule since at twelve noon, Baba Ji held a Satsang, which was attended by many of the Satsangis from Bangalore. Perhaps 40 or 50 people from outside the ashram would come out for Satsang on that day.

When I went to the school to collect my belongings, I had told Graham that if he wished to see me and meet Baba Ji, he should come out to the ashram on Sunday to attend the noon Satsang. He was sufficiently moved by the emotion I was expressing when at the school that he decided to pay me a visit and meet the Saint that I had talked of.

The night before coming out to the ashram, he

meditated for many hours while practicing pranayama. According to Graham, he beheld many great Sages and Saints who he felt were blessing him and getting him ready to meet Baba Ji. When he arrived at the ashram and sat with the dear ones who were singing "Santa Satguru," he became totally mesmerized by the melody of the bhajan, and, as he looked around the walls of the hall where the pictures of Baba Somanath and Hazur Sawan Singh were hanging, he saw many gods and goddesses manifesting there as well. He was, at this point, convinced that Baba Ji was someone out of the ordinary. Then, when Baba Ji came and gave Satsang, that finished him off. He realized that he had been drawn into the company of an Awakened Soul.

When Satsang was over, we went upstairs to meet Baba Ji. Graham shared with him everything about his visions of the night before, the experience he had while listening to the bhajan, and the impact the Satsang had on him. And then, finally, he told Baba Ji that he wanted to become his disciple.

Baba Ji listened attentively, and when Graham finished, he replied, "I appreciate all that you have said, but I would like you to understand that all these things which you are talking about are a product of the mind. When the day comes, and you are initiated, then you will be able to discern the Truth."

This was a big blow for Graham, as he was inwardly proud about all that he had seen and experienced. Baba Ji's reaction was a turning point in his life, for, up to then, most of the important people he had interacted with had catered to his whims and caprices. (He came from a wealthy family, and his father was a famous doctor who had always procured whatever money could buy to please his son). But good fortune smiled on Graham

in that moment, for, in a flash, he understood what was happening. Instead of being offended, he accepted what Baba Ji said and requested that he be allowed to join me at the ashram. Baba Ji accepted his request, and the next day, he returned with a few personal items (and a mosquito net, as I had informed him that, at night, the room was occupied by a mighty fleet of fearless and reckless, dive-bombing, blood-thirsty, kamikaze insect pilots).

Baba Ji Accepts Us for Initiation

Graham's coming was a great blessing for me as I now had a friend (for we became the best of friends) with whom I could talk heart-to-heart and share the experience of being in the ashram. One can hardly imagine two more different human beings in terms of life experience—him, coming from a wealthy family, with all its attendant advantages, and me from a home where making ends meet was a challenge for my dear mom who raised my brother and myself. With the passage of time, I came to appreciate him more and more, for, hidden behind his veneer of bravado, was a pure heart full of love. I feel it was through him that I began to see that what appears one way on the outside may be far different on the inside and that within each one of us is a spark of divinity that can be fanned into brilliance if nurtured by a True Saint.

Graham had arrived at the ashram on the 15th, and I think it was on the evening of the 17th, after Satsang, that Baba Ji sent for us and said that the time for initiation had now arrived. He told us that we would be initiated the next morning in his room. Hearing his words, we were at a fever pitch of excitement at that moment, and, in the midst of that conversation, I made the first of my many classic bloopers.



Baba Somanath Ji

Before coming to India, I had lived with an initiate of Maharaj Charan Singh Ji, and, although I was not initiated, I used to get up early in the morning to meditate with him. As part of the meditation practice, a special posture was adopted to sit for listening to the Audible Life Stream, and I was aware of what that posture was.

He could easily and naturally sit in that posture, but because of my particular physical construction, I was not able to do so. So, I mentioned this to Baba Ji. When I spoke these words, all of a sudden, the effervescent atmosphere changed to a quiet and solemn one.

Baba Ji looked at me curiously and asked, "How is it that you know this posture that should only be known to those who are initiated?" I was stunned, for I did not think there was anything particularly significant about it since I was exposed to it daily while living with Baden in Arcata. So, I explained how I came to know of it.

But Saints have their own way of removing certain invisible blockages from our within, and he took this opportunity to work on one of my prime weaknesses. I definitely had the feeling that I was an advanced spiritual aspirant and more evolved than those around me. I tenaciously clung to this idea for the next several years. It took a number of severe blows from Baba Ji's unique arsenal of teaching methods for me to begin to realize that this concept of being "advanced" or "retarded" on the spiritual Path is a serious misunderstanding and an obstacle to developing the angle of vision that we are all children of Light. We are one, in spite of our various backgrounds, which tend to convince us that we are this thing or that thing, somehow different, better or worse than those around us.

Baba Ji did not accept my explanation. He told me that he felt someone else must have already initiated me and that he could, therefore, not initiate me. I desperately tried to assure him that such was not the case but without effect. Finally, he said, "OK, we will see about initiation at some future time. For now, you will need to wait and do seva in the ashram for six months. After that, I will reconsider your request."

Graham and I left the room. I felt like my world had come to an end. Graham was cheerful and upbeat. Baba Ji did not say that he would not be initiated, only that I would have to wait. I went back to the room and became lost in despondency, and nothing could shake me out of it. The next day dawned, and I could not bring myself to go out to work on the cowshed. I stayed in the room, mired in gloom. Each moment seemed an eternity.

Evening came, and we went to Satsang, but I was so distracted that I could not pay attention to what was being said. When Satsang was over and the time to be with Baba Ji privately to ask questions came around, I refused to participate and went into my room, turned off the light and sat under my mosquito net, a prisoner of my dark, depressing thoughts. Graham was not perturbed but went upstairs, as usual, to talk with Baba Ji, as he loved that special time dearly. Not long afterward, a knock came on the door with the message that Baba Ji wished to see me.

I dragged my sagging spirit up the steps and into the room. Baba Ji was sitting in his chair with a lovely smile on his face. He said, "Now the time has come for your initiation." I was overwhelmed with happiness and gratitude and spontaneously stretched myself out on the floor before him. He then told us to be ready, for we would be initiated on the 19th of July along with another Indian dear one from Bangalore, Mr. Raghavendra.

Initiation Day

That most memorable of days dawned, and, in the quiet morning hours, we were initiated into the meditation practices of Sant Mat and, most importantly, came under the care and protection of this merciful Saint. What that was to mean is still being revealed, but it has been the

most precious thing that can possibly be imagined because, through all the trials and tribulations of life, some hidden Power has been continually working to loosen the bonds that bind us to this world by showing, in myriad ways, that the True Love of the Master was the source of all that exists.

In almost all the scriptural lore we come across, in one form or another, a term that stands for "initiation," i.e., introduction of a person into the principles of the inner science. The Muslims generally use the word "baet" for initiation, while others call it "deeksha." Among the Christians, the admission to the church is known as "baptism." The Hindus call it "duojanma" or the second birth.

This initiation or introduction into the tenets of a new science is not something formal or by word of mouth only. Its significance is far deeper than is generally understood. It is tantamount to adopting an individual into the very life and spirit of the tenets that are introduced to him in theory. It is conveying a Life-impulse to the initiate and giving him first-hand experience of the source of life. It thus has a two-fold aspect: theoretical as well as practical.

At the time of the initiation, the Master explains to the individuals concerned the theory of the spiritual science or Para Vidya (the Knowledge of the Beyond). It is an admitted fact that theory precedes practice, for a correct understanding of the subject is of paramount importance before one can put the theory into practice. A successful application and experimentation with verifiable results cannot be carried on without a correct knowledge and understanding of the subject.

As spirituality is the science of the spirit or soul—a Living Principle, the very Breath of Life—an adept in spirituality must impart to every initiate a particle of his own Life-impulse (called “Jia Dan”) before the initiate can understand what the “life of the spirit” is, as distinguished from the “life of the flesh” that he has been leading hitherto; for it is the spirit or soul alone that can apprehend and experience the Oversoul, when freed from the trammels of the flesh, the mind, the pranas or vital airs, and all the outgoing faculties, all of which constitute the outer man as engaged in the world and worldly pursuits on the sensual plane

The instruction in the esoteric teachings consists of the exposition of Simran, Dhyān and Bhajan, that is to say, repetition (mental with tongue of thought only) of the words which are charged with the power of the Master; concentration or meditation (fixing consciousness or gaze) at the center of the two eyebrows; and linking the spirit with the saving lifeline within, ever reverberating in the form of the perennial Sound Current, the very life-breath of the Universe, of which the Master himself is the living embodiment. As soon as a devotee is able to transcend the physical body, the Radiant Form of the Master (Guru Dev) appears in the subtle plane and becomes a guiding force to the spirit on the journey into higher spiritual realms, bringing him back to the True Home of his Father. Henceforth the Master-spirit never leaves the soul, but continuously helps and directs, visibly and invisibly, directly and indirectly, in this life and the life hereafter, as the occasion may demand.²

—Sant Kirpal Singh

² Kirpal Singh, *Naam or Word* (Delhi, India: Ruhani Satsang, 1970) p 273-275.

Graham's Return to the USA

Graham's time in India was now coming to an end, for his visa was expiring, and he had to return to the USA. One of his talents was that of a filmmaker, and he put his skills to good use over the next several years. The videos that he took at that time give glimpses of life in the ashram and the different Satsang centers.³ They are time-worn but still beautiful. If they are viewed in combination with the telling of the incidents of this memoir, it will help bring to life the experience that the Westerners had while living with Baba Ji.

One of the most beautiful segments was taken just before Graham Ji left for America. It was perhaps an hour after lunch when Pushpamma called us to come upstairs. Baba Ji was lying on his bed, having just finished his afternoon rest. The pigeons were softly cooing and walking on his legs. The video reveals the profound beauty of this moment far better than words.

With Graham's departure, a new phase in life with Baba Somanath Ji was about to begin. Twice-yearly he went to Bombay for several weeks to hold a Satsang program, and he had kindly asked if I would like to go with him. Of course, I was thrilled to do so. The next part of the story will concern itself with some of the events that took place there and the impact the journey had on my life.

³ You can view the videos on the Baba Somanath Ji website at: <https://babasomanathji.org/videos/>

6



Bombay Bhandara

*Thou art the Pilgrim's Path: the blind man's Eye;
The dead man's Life; on thee my hopes rely;
If thou remove, I erre; I grope; I die.*

*Disclose thy Sun beames; close thy wings, and stay;
See, see, how I am blind, and dead, and stray,
O thou, that art my Light, my Life, my Way.¹*

—Francis Quarles

The first few weeks at the ashram had been filled with many new experiences concerned with learning how to integrate into the daily work routine and generally getting a sense of what it was like to live in the company of a Saint on a day-to-day basis. The highlight of that period was receiving initiation, which I have already described in the previous chapter, but every part of what took place had its own unique significance. My sensitivity to and understanding of the experiences that arose in this new environment was, of course, very underdeveloped as it takes time to adapt to a new life.

1 Herbert J.C. Grierson, ed. *Metaphysical Lyrics & Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921) p. 115-116.



Baba Somanath Ji

Between the time when I arrived at the ashram in July 1971 till the time I departed in 1976, a deeper appreciation and comprehension of the value of being in such a charged atmosphere did evolve, but it took another 45 years to gain a heartfelt gratitude for how much Baba Ji did to change my entire perception of what was important in life. Perhaps the best way to sum it up is to say that everything that occurred while living in the ashram and traveling with Baba Ji was geared towards removing the misconceptions that were hindering my further progress on the spiritual journey. I came to India with an intellectual perception of what it was to be “spiritual,” not realizing that what I most needed to grasp was how to be a good human being. It was not an easy lesson to learn, but Baba Ji was up for the task and stood beside me through the many challenges that arose in the process of developing right understanding.

At the time of the first trip to Bombay, I knew very little about Baba Ji’s life and the role different Satsang centers played in his mission. I was somewhat aware that Bombay was a major axis of his work because he had spent many years living there, both when he was a renunciate Nathpanth yogi and later as a cloth merchant entrusted by Hazur Sawan Singh Ji to give Satsang in the city. This program, though, was to open up a whole new dimension of understanding about Baba Ji’s life and how he was attending to the work of spiritual upliftment entrusted to him by his Master.

The trip from Bangalore to Bombay took approximately two days. There were very few high-speed trains between major cities as compared to now. But this mode of travel gave disciples or seekers at places along the route opportunities to meet him that would not have otherwise occurred if Baba Ji traveled by express train.

A Train Journey and the Spirit of Devotion

For me, it was an intimate exposure to a world of deep devotion, the likes of which I could never have imagined. Along the route where the train stopped, groups of people were gathered, sometimes large, sometimes small, waiting to glimpse their spiritual preceptor, if even for a few moments. Baba Ji would come out on the platform to greet them and sometimes sit in a chair they had brought for him. On several occasions, the local people had prepared delicious home-cooked food, which they brought on the train and served to us while we were stopped. Their joy and enthusiasm in sharing this love-charged offering was heart-warming and enchanting. When we departed for the next station, they would bid farewell and head back to their homes.

The impressions of that journey were many and varied—the slow passage through the countryside of an ancient land, the hustle and bustle and vibrancy of life displayed in the railway stations through which we passed, and the company of the Satsangis traveling with Baba Ji who looked after my every need. As we proceeded, a timeless spirit of love and devotion surrounded me, opening my heart to a new life that would, over a period of years, strengthen into an inner awareness that the Divine Love is the only real food of the soul and the one thing that would ultimately guide one back to the Sea of Light from which we came at the beginning of creation.

Arrival in Bombay and the New Satsang Hall

Finally, we arrived at the Dadar railway terminus, where we were greeted by the local Satsangis, including Naiyar Ji, who had played such a prominent role in Baba Ji's mission since the late 1940s. Amidst the noise and clamor of a busy metropolitan train station, we were

efficiently guided to waiting cars and soon found ourselves being whisked away to the new Satsang Hall, where those of us traveling with Baba Ji were to be accommodated during our stay in Bombay.

Those Westerners who have lived and traveled in India are well aware of what it is like to move through a major Indian city. I remember a comment made to me by one of the professors at Friends World College. He said that a small group of Russian businessmen had come to Bangalore, and, as they were moving through a crowded market, one of them said on behalf of his colleagues, "Now we can believe in the existence of God because only a Supreme Power could sustain such a chaotic, multifaceted scene as we are now seeing with our own eyes."

It was truly like that for a Westerner. There was so much life and vitality packed into each and every centimeter of land—some poignantly tragic and some supremely exalting with everything in between—that one was constantly scrambling to digest what was unfolding before one's eyes.

Just off one of the main arteries of travel through the city, Dr. Annie Besant Road, in the Worli section, very near the prosperous Worli Sea Face housing development beside the Arabian Sea, we entered a quiet lane and arrived at the Satsang hall, located on the first floor of a newly constructed business complex.

Baba Ji accompanied us so that he could observe to what degree the construction had advanced. Then, he and Pushpamma proceeded to his flat in another part of Bombay's vast metropolis. It was about 30-45 minutes, depending on traffic, from where the hall was located.

It was good to reach our destination, where we could sit quietly and relax after the long train journey. After a short rest in the spacious hall (which in the evening

held about 800-1000 people), we walked to a small room in a nearby building where Baba Ji's cloth shop used to be. After the cloth shop was sold, that one room was retained to be used for cooking food for out-of-town guests staying in the hall. It was located in a busy part of Worli Naka. You entered the room—which was equipped with a single rope bed to sit on and all the utensils for cooking food on a portable gas stove—through a narrow passageway and courtyard between two shops.

The Bombay Langar Room

This small room was to become a very special place for me for many reasons, not the least of which was that this was where Baba Ji used to eat, rest, and meditate during the couple of decades when he ran the cloth shop in Bombay. Amidst the constant noise and clamor of the city just a few yards away, it was a quiet, safe haven charged with the atmosphere of a meditator Saint.

Sitting in the room watching Naiyar and others prepare the food with just a few simple utensils was intriguing to behold. Vegetables were chopped on wooden boards, legumes and grains were cleaned and inspected and put on the stove to cook; wheat flour was mixed with water and a bit of salt to prepare the chapati dough and then rolled into small balls that were flattened into round ovals. The chapati cooking pan was then heated, and the preliminary cooking of the chapattis was done, one by one. When they were cooked through and through, the chapatis were deftly flicked out of the pan and directly onto the open flame of one of the stoves for a few seconds, where they puffed up like balloons, which indicated they were now ready for consumption. This was the last step in the food preparation, and while they were still fresh and hot, they were dropped on each

stainless-steel thali, already heaped with steaming dollops of hot rice, vegetables, dal, and yogurt. Everything was done with a free-flowing precision stemming from many years of experience working in a small space, but for a person like me, unfamiliar with this type of lifestyle, it was like participating in a surround-sound culinary symphony engaging all the senses in the experience (the taste buds were given an extra boost with judicious amounts of chili peppers, garlic, and onions—true staples of Indian cooking).

Cleaning the Hall for Satsang

After lunch, we went back to the hall and rested for an hour or so; then, rising at about 3:00 p.m., we had a cup of tea and, afterward, began to clean the hall for Satsang, which started promptly at 7:00 p.m. every evening. For cleaning the floor, we only had hand towels, which we dipped in buckets partially full of clean water. As the rags collected dirt, they were wrung out in another bucket and once again dipped in clean water. It took about two hours each day to clean the entire area, with three or four of us attending to that responsibility. The marble-tiled floors always looked so clean and cool after this daily wash-up.

Once the floors had dried, we spread out thin mats for the sangat. By the time everything was completed, it was nearly 6:00 p.m., so we ourselves quickly bathed before sitting in the hall for meditation prior to Baba Ji's arrival.

Waiting for Satsang to Begin

The time of waiting for Satsang to start in Bombay was another key component of gaining a heartfelt perception and experience of the meaning of devotion. First, those of us who were staying in the Satsang hall would begin

sitting while those coming from outside began to quietly file in and take their seats. This in itself was a sight to see. There were a couple of people assigned the duty of making sure that the seating was done in an orderly, systematic manner. On the right side of the room, all the women and children sat, and on the left, the men. But it was not like people could come and sit just anywhere in their respective areas. No, they sat in single-filled lines, first filling up the front row and then each row behind. So, by seating everyone in this way, allowing for just an inch or two between each person, one could fill the hall to capacity.

It was wonderful to watch the hall fill up with the dear ones seated in neat, orderly rows, thus making maximum use of the space available. The first few nights, the Satsangs were held in the adjacent hall while the final touches were put on the new Satsang hall, which had been recently purchased a few months before Baba Ji's arrival.

With each passing moment, as the dear ones quietly took their seats, the atmosphere grew more and more charged with this incredible feeling of love brought about by a focused concentration on the living Master who was about to come amongst them.

The Sangat was primarily composed of mill workers or people engaged in other varieties of manual labor. There were also a handful of professional people (lawyers, doctors, merchants, etc.). Many of those attending had known Baba Ji since the 1930s when he returned from North India to commence giving Satsang. The general feeling in the hall was one of sincere and profound devotion, and even a person unacquainted with such an atmosphere felt silent awe sitting there.

Singing of Bhajans

Then, at about 6:30 p.m., dear ones from the Sangat—men, women, and sometimes children—would sit at the microphone and sing solo some lovely bhajan from the Sant Mat tradition by Kabir, Mira Bai, Tulsi Sahib, the Sikh Gurus, etc., or lead the Sangat in a song that was well known to all. In the ashram, we only sang the one bhajan, “Santa Satguru Satya Svarūpā,” each night, but in Bombay, the tradition of singing several bhajans before Satsang was well established; the singing heightened the devotional atmosphere even more since it naturally brought the attention of all those present into a unified state of awareness. Sant Ajaib Singh Ji described the greatness of the bhajans in these memorable words from the 1987 Bangalore program:

The Perfect Masters do not write the bhajans or talk only to impress the people of the world. In fact, that is a means of showering grace on all the souls; not only on the human beings but also on other creatures like birds, and animals, they shower their grace. And since the bhajans are the voice of their hearts, that is why they carry a great impact. Those who sing the bhajans written by the Perfect Masters with much love and longing, they get a lot of intoxication and grace from the Master. It has a very great effect on the people. Both those who listen to the words of the Master which are being sung and those who are singing the bhajans get a lot of benefit.²

2 Ajaib Singh, *Sing the Praises of the Satguru: Eleven Short Talks by Sant Ajaib Singh Ji* (Franklin, NH: Sant Bani Ashram, 1993) talk #5, “A Way of Showering Grace,” p. 15.



Baba Somanath Ji at Kakad Chambers in Bombay

At about 6:50 p.m., Baba Ji's Pathi would stand up and sing one of the mesmerizing, intoxicating bhajans written by Baba Ji, that were known by heart to the entire Sangat. Everyone would sing together in a soul-stirring anthem of love, hundreds of voices in unison. One would become absolutely drenched in the power of that radiant atmosphere.

The Power of Darshan

Then, as the singing went on, Baba Ji would quietly enter the room and walk through the crowd—Wow!!! It was something worth experiencing even once in the life. There was a simplicity, humility, yet unmistakable majesty of the Shabd Power in the human form, the Word made flesh as described in the Bible. It was an event happening on the physical plane yet not on the earth at all.

No camera can capture this type of scene, but the heart can remember it vividly. It is not a memory like many worldly memories but the impression of something Divine, which is stored in the heart where there is a timeless place that holds such visions.

Baba Ji would then take his seat on the dais and, sitting in a relaxed cross-legged position, start moving his eyes over the assembled crowd. The beauty and power of this darshan cannot be forgotten; one cannot capture in words how out of the eyes of a Saint flows a type of Celestial Nectar that drenches all beholding it in a refreshing spiritual bath that washes away all worry and concern, all sorrow and strife, giving one a new life, a new vision, and a deep awareness of the Light from which all souls spring.

In his presence, the mind grows docile and feels anchored. How can we get the company of such a One by looking at whom the ever-restless mind gets lost, and Life Impulses swarm upon the soul? The Beloved Master makes a True Friend and bestows God Intoxication.

He sheds around him rays of purity, saturated with dignified humility, which exert a powerful influence upon the jivas. His words are charged with Spirituality and drag the soul into the beyond and administer a kind of living, intoxicating exhilaration.³

—Sant Kirpal Singh

The Unique Beauty of Satsang

Baba Ji would then have the Pathi select one of the books containing the banis from the Adi Granth (the

³ Kirpal Singh, *Godman* (Delhi: Ruhani Satsang, 1967) p. 107.

sacred scriptures of the Sikhs), Paltu Sahib, Sar Bachan (the banis of Swami Ji Maharaj of Agra), Dadu Dayal, Mira Bai, Kabir Sahib and several others. Once the Pathi had opened the book, Baba Ji would start thumbing through that specific text and occasionally have Pathi Ji read out the opening line of that hymn while his eyes moved across the Sangat — then Baba Ji would hear some words he was waiting for and tell him to start singing that specific bhajan. Pathi Ji's voice was magical, lilting, and attractive as he commenced the chanting. One's concentration was deepened, not by any self-effort but simply by the attractive, mystical nature of his voice.

When he completed the singing of the first stanza, Baba Ji would then begin his commentary. If the Pathi's voice held so much magnetic attraction, then what can one say of Baba Ji's? It was simply enrapturing. His way of explaining the deep, inner mystery contained in each line was very simple and direct, understandable by the simplest person or the most highly evolved intellectual, with every type of mental makeup in between. Baba Ji himself was dressed simply in immaculate white, with a flowing silver-white beard, a beautifully tied turban, deep resonating musical voice charged with authority of the Saints of all times and places, and, above all, eyes that glowed with a celestial radiance. Listening to his words, looking into those mercy-showering eyes, and gazing at his luminous forehead was out of this world, literally and figuratively.

Satsang is very pure water, and one who bathes in this water will get rid of all the filth he has within him. That's why Master Kirpal always used to say, "Give up a hundred urgent works to attend Satsang." Guru Nanak says, "Without Satsang, whatever effort we are doing is like taking the pure water from one side and putting in

dirt from the other.” Swami Ji Maharaj says, “We cannot praise Satsang [enough]; there is no other means to purify our mind except Satsang. God says, “No one can attain me through japa, tapa or any other practice; he can realize me only with the help of Satsang.” There is no other way for the liberation of the soul. You cannot be liberated if you will not attend Satsang. Swami Ji Maharaj says, “In the Kali Yuga there are only three means for liberation: Satsang, Naam and the Perfect Master. Those who have the Perfect Master, and those who are meditating on Naam, and those who have made their Satsang, they should understand that now they are redeemed.”⁴

—Sant Ajaib Singh

Each Satsang had some special theme or themes that applied to the lives of all those gathered there in a very personal way. His manner of explaining profound spiritual truths was such that each person felt as if Baba Ji was talking specifically to them. It was a very intimate heart-to-heart style of speaking. It was spellbinding and heart-ravishing while at the same time making one aware of the wily tricks of the mind and how it continually tries to lead the soul away from the way of devotion. Most Satsangs contained both things, an admonishment to wake up from the fascination with the attractions of the outer world that lead one to sleep towards one’s own spiritual awakening and an encouragement to reconnect one’s “self” to the sole purpose of human existence — to know the self and to know God. Drawing upon examples from everyday

⁴ Daryl Rubin, editor, *The Ambrosial Hour: Talks by Baba Sawan Singh Ji, Sant Kirpal Singh Ji, Sant Ajaib Singh Ji, and Others* (Sanbornton, NH: Sant Bani Ashram, 1996) p. 94.

life, Baba Ji would present the many facets of the subject in such a way that, for that time at least, one could both perceive the obstacles and the goal clearly reflected in the mirror of the heart.

For 45 minutes to an hour Baba Ji would, in Hindi and Marathi, deliver a succinct commentary as the Pathi chanted out the verses. On the one hand, he delivered one powerful blow after another to the mind and its ways and, on the other hand, drew the soul within towards the Source of True Light and Love.

Then just as quietly as he had entered, he departed in grace and majesty. After Baba Ji left, everyone not staying in the Hall quietly got up and filed out. A few dear ones would remain in meditation for a short while, but within 30 minutes, the hall would generally be empty.

When I first attended the Satsang, it was evident that many people were curious as to who this foreigner was, for such a phenomenon was new to their experience. In the first few days I was at the Kengeri ashram, many of the farming folk would come into my room and sit on the floor and look at me, which made me nervous, so to avoid the same thing happening in Bombay, I found a spot on the veranda behind a door and would conceal myself there until everyone was gone, and then I would resurface.

On most occasions, I would not go for the late evening dinner but would remain behind to meditate or go out for a walk alone by the Worli Sea Face promenade, which was not far from the hall. It was a great place to get some exercise. In the dim lamplight, I could walk a mile or two on a paved surface, with fresh ocean breezes enveloping me, while I endeavored to digest the experiences flowing into my life each day and also to deal with the loneliness that was upon me.



Baba Somanath Ji

There certainly was no lack of love and concern from those around me, but there was a whole gamut of past impressions that had to be put to rest. For the entire first six months I was in India. I was continually going through this struggle. I think it was the very same struggle that most people go through when they try to

transition from a life lived on the surface of existence towards that inner place where Peace, Contentment, and Love reign supreme.

Early Morning in Bombay

Just as life at the ashram had a set routine, so did a regular schedule evolve in the days after Baba Ji's arrival in Bombay. We would rise at 3:00 a.m. for meditation to endeavor to connect ourselves with that Eternal Truth that permeates the created world yet lies apart from it as well. The air was warm and fresh, as during the night, the monsoon rains often washed the city clean of the previous day's activities. Around 5:00 a.m., one could hear small groups of Hindu devotees walking the streets, singing the popular songs of Krishna and Rama and accompanying their singing on simple instruments. Not far from the hall was a Buddhist temple, and the monks from that small community would add to the beautiful morning as they roamed the streets chanting Sanskrit verses.

At a little after 6:00 a.m., Naiyar and I would walk through the dark streets of Bombay to the langar room mentioned before. I loved those early morning walks through the city, quiet and fresh with just the first glimpses of people rising to start their day's work, the smell of bread being baked at the bakery by which we passed, the glistening light on the dampened streets and the early morning song of the birds that roosted in the trees of the Ayurvedic College across the way. From out of the open windows of homes, one could often hear floating on the air the poignant melodies of sacred songs of the sages of India being broadcast over the radio. The spirit of devotion was so strong in the hearts of the people that the few radio stations that existed at that time had that early

morning slot of time devoted to these wonderful songs of the Saints. They were broadcast over and over again, day in and day out. One could hear the charming melodies and words of the songs of the great Maharashtrian devotees like Namdev and Tukaram, sharing airtime with Kabir, Mira Bai, Surdas, and so many others. It is a wonderful memory of Bombay of almost 50 years ago.

At the time, I was not conscious of the significance of these memories, but in later years, I came to realize that all these things I was experiencing were very precious because they had formed an integral part of Baba Ji's life, both when he was a sadhu and later when he commenced the Satsang work entrusted to him by Hazur. I feel in my heart that it is important to share these impressions precisely because they had formed an important part of his search and his mission. Being there to experience these things myself on those morning walks helped make real for me his life and all that happened before I met him.

Perhaps, for you who are reading this, these musings might also resonate and bring Baba Ji closer to you, for there is a profound law of nature that, if one hears such tales with love and affection, the feeling of the person relating them gets transferred as a living power and opens up the heart to all that is being shared. What I am relating is only a tiny fraction of what Baba Ji actually was and is told by a Westerner with no deep inner knowledge of the spiritual traditions of India. Perhaps the only really important part of it is simply to express something of my gratitude for having the opportunity to be near such a wonderful Being. In summary, this whole book is only that, for if one were to look truly in my heart, the only thing I have is gratitude, which deepens day by day. I hope that by sharing something of the setting in which Baba Ji lived and worked, a glimpse of his radiant beauty might be conveyed.

Breakfast and Setting Out for Baba Ji's Apartment

Upon arriving at the small langar, Naiyar would prepare a delicious cup of chai accompanied by a biscuit. I would then quietly sit on the cot while he prepared breakfast in his usual deft, efficient, and flowing manner. While perched in my place and observing Naiyar prepare breakfast, I could hear the sounds of a city coming to life. Cars, lorries, and rickshaws began honking their horns and chugging through the streets, and neighbors were performing their morning ablutions.

I remember sitting in that simple room watching the breakfast routine unfold, and then would come the thundering sound of the monsoon rain pounding on the roof above. On one side, I could see¹ Naiyar preparing the morning meal while we drank a cup of chai, and on the other, I could look out the open door and see the rain pouring down. What it all means, I cannot say, but it was so perfect and simple, as the atmosphere was permeated by the radiant love of a great and beautiful Saint who had himself sat in that room every day for over 20 years. It was his quiet haven from the busy activities of the cloth shop in front. By the time Naiyar completed the breakfast preparations, the other dear ones from the hall would arrive, and we would all enjoy a simple South Indian dish like chitranna, prepared with rice, lemon juice, peanuts, curry leaves, and assorted spices. We would sit together enjoying this delicious repast, and after everyone was fed and the cleanup was underway, Naiyar and I would walk to the bus stand just opposite the Satsang Hall on the busy Annie Besant Road.

Morning Darshan

At that time of day, around 8:00 a.m., traffic was not yet at the more congested pace it would be later on, so it

was a pleasant time for making the journey to his apartment. Most often, an English-style double-decker bus would be our medium of transportation, and we would sit on the upper deck. I loved watching the life of the city unfold from above. Keepers of small shops would be out sweeping the area in front of their establishments, some people would be going into or coming from one of several temples that lay along our route, and others would be out for a stroll along the uncongested walkways. Garish, colorful, giant billboards advertised the advent of the newest Bollywood sensational movie (when I began to study Hindi, the alphabet became firmly established in my mind by reading the bigger than life letters on these advertisements). All of the above and much more were a wonder and delight for a young Westerner moving through a modern Indian city that was still suffused with the traditional values of an ancient culture.

Bombay was, at that time, in a state of continual growth, but it had not yet entered the computer age when all the modern conveniences would be more accessible to a larger segment of the population. Hence, one could still feel the palpable heartbeat of a people whose lives centered around a reverential attitude toward the mystery of life. That same feeling still exists, but the external veneer of Western culture has grown thicker with the passage of the years and the modernization of the city.

My recollection is that the trip took from 30-45 minutes to bring us to Baba Ji's apartment in Sion. The apartment itself was located along the outer rim of Sion Circle, on one of the many roundabouts that dot the city. It was located on the second floor (1st floor by Indian reckoning). We would go up the stairs, knock on the door, and Pushpamma or one of the other ladies staying with her



Baba Somanath Ji in Bombay

to help her cook and clean would let us in. Even though Baba Ji's room, and the adjacent bedroom as well, opened up to the busy Sion Circle, it always felt as if one was entering a quiet sanctuary of peace. The rooms were kept spotlessly clean, and everything displayed a unique shine and radiance.

When we arrived there, we would proceed immediately into Baba Ji's room for darshan. The significance and power of the word "darshan," which is used here and will be described in other parts of this narrative, is difficult to capture in words. On the outer level, it is a meeting of the eyes of a Saint and the individual who stands before him. About that exchange of the glances, whole volumes could be written and yet not begin to touch its significance. Often, the individual experiencing it feels a certain type of lightening of the heart, a unique lifting of the spirits, very subtle but perceivable, even on the sensory level, but much more so within.

It is a type of spiritual elixir that washes over one and into one's being, producing an immediate positive effect—but it is much more than that. The effect of each and every moment is etched into the heart, and for years to come, its cleansing power goes on working to slowly bring the embodied soul out of the prison-house of the body. With the passage of the years, one comes to know, from within one's own heart, that darshan is not something that one deserves or can gain by one's own efforts. It is purely an act of grace that comes from some high inner place, and if it is ordained, one receives it, and if not, it cannot be purchased for millions of dollars.

Among the Lovers of the Master

After receiving darshan, Naiyar would get busy with his morning activities at the apartment, and I would go

into the adjacent room to meditate. After a short while, a stream of devotees started arriving for private interactions with Baba Ji from 9:00-11:00 a.m. Most of those coming to see him were the cotton mill workers that had known him for many years, at least one of them from the time he was a Nathpanth Yogi. Most had no questions but would bow down, look into his eyes and receive prashad. They would then come; sit in the room with me and start meditating. It was a very powerful time, which I can never forget—sitting in that room with all these simple people whose hearts were aglow with love and devotion. It was only by some good fortune that this opportunity was granted because I did not know much about this deep devotional approach to life that was part and parcel of the existence of these kind people. But one need not know anything at all in order to benefit from the radiant streams of love coming forth from the hearts of those lovely souls. It is communicated heart-to-heart, without words, and leaves an impression that will fructify in due course of time.

Many times, I would find a position where I could squeeze close to the door of Baba Ji's room so that, without being obtrusive, I could watch people come for darshan. It was wonderful to watch the impact on each one who came before him—an instantaneous uplifting transformation reflected on their countenance. Sometimes, if time allowed, they would come and sit in the room with me until it became full of people absorbed within. Occasionally, there would be other people sitting in the room with Baba Ji, and while he gave darshan, he would converse with them on various spiritual subjects in a natural, spontaneous way. As always, he was sitting in a relaxed mode, informally dressed in a pure white lungi and t-shirt, with hair either

tied in a knot on top of his head or lying loose upon his shoulders. His golden skin, flowing silvery-white beard, and luminous forehead were disarmingly beautiful. While conversing in an animated way, his hand gestures and voice combined to create the feeling that you were watching one of the great orchestral leaders of the world conducting some sublime work of Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven. The modulation of the tones of his voice, the movement of his hands, and his beautiful facial expressions were natural and unaffected but powerful and meaningful, creating in the heart an unforgettable vision of something Divine—the expression of that Hidden Power of the Shabd, the Celestial Sound Current as it animated the body of a living Master.

It is to be remembered that all this was totally new to me. On a conscious level, all I could do was recognize the power and beauty of what was before my eyes, but I did not have the capacity to really absorb what such events meant. Yet even though that was actually the case, still the impression lives on after all these years, and to this day, the sweet remembrance of being present is etched in the heart. It was like being in a chamber that is clean, shiny, and pristine, which is illumined by the soft light of the sun and through which blows a fresh and delightful breeze. One could wish for no blessing greater than this—the chamber of the heart clean and fresh, illumined with the light of longing, waiting for the advent of the One, who will fulfill all the longings of the heart.

Generally, in the morning, I would spend two hours or so at the apartment in its devotion-saturated environment and then return to the hall by myself, since Naiyar would remain with Baba Ji up until lunchtime. It was a great adventure learning to catch the right bus leaving from the large central bus terminal just across from

where Baba Ji stayed. As I spoke no Hindi and also could not read the Hindi script, I needed to learn how to communicate without the usual English words. Everyone, though, was always kind and helpful, and I always made it back to the hall without mishap.

Now, having described the daily events of the love-filled Bombay program schedule, I will attempt, in the next few chapters, to present a number of incidents that occurred during the several visits to Bombay that stand out in my mind as being of significance in revealing the profound way Baba Ji brought to life the teachings of the Saints in the hearts of those who came to him. I do not have the type of orderly mind that can fix events in a chronological sequence, so I will share them as I remember them, for they each have a life of their own. The truth is that these external events have little to do with time in a linear progression, although they occurred as specific events in Bombay; rather, they are external events that, to my mind, reveal something of the timeless beauty found in every thought, word, and deed of a Param Sant, who has merged into the state of perfect unity with the Divine.



Incident of the Falling Rice Sack

You must remember that you should not expect spiritual realization all at once. The Adepts call this Path "Sahaj Yoga," that is, a Path on which you can walk slowly, and slowly only. The reason is that, from ages past, our soul has been kept aloof from the Father by the cruel deception of mind and matter. By association with the body and its senses for a long time, the mind's tendency is downward and it has altogether forgotten that its real home is upward.

The mind has acquired so much control over the soul that it keeps the soul always entangled in the enjoyments of senses. This is the reason why a person cannot rise above the world all at once. It is a difficult task, but you need not lose heart. Our Master is all-powerful and certainly one day he will release us from the bondage of mind and senses through his infinite mercy, provided we turn not from his door, and practice Bhajan and Simran to the best of our ability, according to his orders.¹

—Baba Sawan Singh

¹ Sawan Singh, *Dawn of Light: Excerpts from Letters 1911-1934* (Beas, India: Radhasoami Satsang, 1989), letter 2, p. 74.



Baba Somanath Ji

Before I begin relating events that occurred during some of the later trips I made with Baba Ji to Bombay, I would like to remind the reader that Baba Ji had lived there for many years, during the time of Baba Sawan Singh and afterward as well. The Bombay Sangat was of considerable size, and, after he shifted to Sawan Durbar Ashram, he still came to Bombay every year to give Satsang programs.

I was fortunate to travel to Bombay with Baba Ji each year from 1971 onward. As might be expected, I experienced a gradual assimilation into the Indian way of life from my first trip to the last. For me, the first six months in India were the most challenging—a time to confront deeply established patterns in the mind that could not withstand the divine radiation of a Great Soul who had traversed the Godward Path from beginning to end and had become a pure vessel reflecting God's Light. Living in the presence of such a One naturally brought forth those impressions that were blocking that Light from penetrating into my heart. That process was always ongoing, but, with the passage of time, the internal conflicts that arose during my first trip became less pronounced, and, through Baba Ji's grace, I learned to live in harmony with the various environments of India, which now composed an integral part of my life.

Dwelling on my personal confusions, despairs, and difficulties is not a crucial part of the story. I refer to such things now and again to remind the reader that, basically, we are all destined to go through a series of experiences that reveal two powers living within us: (1) The mind, which is ever active in keeping us away from the inner sanctuary of peace, and (2) The Power of Grace, which works to get us out of the continual state of agitation binding us to the world. The aim of sharing these

experiences is to provide, I hope, some insights into the mysterious ways a Saint can adopt to teach the soul the difference between the law of judgment, under the jurisdiction of the mind, and the law of Mercy, which is the domain of the Saints.

The Lorry Trucks Arrive with Unhusked Rice Sacks

The first story I would like to share began at the Kengeri ashram, right before we set off for the 1973 Bombay program. Baba Ji had kindly granted permission for me to go with him, once again, for the birthday anniversary bhandara of Baba Sawan Singh Ji that was celebrated in Bombay each year from the last week of July through mid-August.

In the later part of July, the majority of the people living in the ashram were involved in cleaning the irrigation canals of excessive grass and silt, which naturally accumulated over the year. The canal cleaning actually took place 1.5 miles from the ashram. During this two-week cleaning project, most of the sevadars slept along the dike at night. As a result, perhaps six men in all remained at the ashram during canal-cleaning time.

So, around 3:00 a.m., on the morning we were scheduled to depart for Bombay, those of us who were staying in the ashram proper heard a large transport truck inching up the road and finally coming to a halt beneath the compound in which Baba Ji's residence was located. Below Baba Ji's living quarters was a large godown (warehouse area) where grains were stored, several hundred bags at a time. In India, wholesale grains were bought and sold in large, sturdy gunny sacks weighing approximately 100 kilos or 220 pounds each. These bags needed to be transported to and from the godown one by one—carried on the strong backs of the sevadars.

The lorry contained, as I recall, 150 sacks full of unhusked rice that needed to be unloaded and then stacked eight-feet high in the godown. Normally this type of task would be done only when everyone was gathered in the ashram so that the weight of the work would be spread around to 30 or 40 people instead of just six. But now, the job of offloading the bags was left to us, and we started doing it in right earnest because Baba Ji had come down from his room to supervise the effort. It was sweaty, demanding work. You had to get the bag settled just right on your back, so that you could move forward safely, without tripping or stubbing your toes. I had gradually built up enough strength to do this through being engaged in other ashram activities. Therefore, I also waited in line for the bags to be lowered onto my back, after which I went into the godown, where two people were stationed to help with the stacking of the heavy sacks.

A Falling Sack Strains My Back and Stomach Muscles

Everything went well the first few times, but then on the third or fourth round when I took my position, the workers standing on the top of the lorry who were responsible for lowering the bags lost hold of the bag to be placed on my back. It slipped from a position about two feet above me and hit me squarely in the back. That was not a very great distance to fall, but it was more than enough to put a strain on my entire body, although it did not knock me down. I felt a bit faint but was desirous to continue helping in the seva. Then, I suddenly broke into a cold sweat and felt nauseous, so I left to go lie down in my room. It was only then that I realized that my stomach muscles had been severely strained. I lay awake, feeling increasingly uneasy. When dawn broke, I attempted to rise, but I found I could not stand up

straight. It seemed that every muscle in my stomach was strained to capacity.

Yet, I needed to make myself ready for taking the morning train to Bombay, and I managed to do so. It was not necessary to mention anything about my condition to Baba Ji, for he was physically present when the incident happened, and besides that, I had to walk noticeably bent over. Still, one can manage to function in a limited way in such a state, and I was not about to miss the Bombay program, as it was one of the highlights of my stay with Baba Ji each year.

The train trip to Bombay was memorable for me only in the sense that I was in considerable pain. I did my best to conceal it with limited success. As in previous trips, dear ones would come to the train stations all along the way to have darshan, and, at some stations, they would enter our compartment bringing freshly cooked South Indian dishes lovingly prepared in home kitchens, but I was unable to eat anything and had to just sit quietly in the corner, wondering how I was going to survive the trip.

Baba Ji Entrusts Me into Kaka Ji's Care

Once we reached Bombay, we were taken to the Satsang Hall, where I was glad to have a place to lie down in a semi-prone position (I had to remain curled up because the strained stomach muscles would not allow me to stretch out). When we arrived, there was a short, stocky, muscular man in the hall who had come for the Satsang program from his farm in the Ghats (mountains) above Bombay. His name was Pandu, and his story will come up later in this narrative.

He instantly saw I was in pain and calmly, but deftly, had me lie down as best I could, at which point he began

massaging my feet and gently pulling on each toe one by one. I do not understand the whys and wherefores of such things, but my feeling is that he was trying to get the currents of healing energy flowing in my body. Whatever he was doing was deeply appreciated by me, and it offered a bit of relief. The best part of all was the tenderness and love with which he attended to me. But, as a general rule, such types of strains take a good deal of time to heal, perhaps two or three weeks.



Baba Somanath Ji's hands

Still, it was the beginning of a friendship that, though now long since outwardly concluded, as Pandu has left the mortal coil, remains in my heart for all times to come.

Naiyar and all the other dear ones staying in the Hall were super concerned for my well-being, for I could not eat much nor easily move about. All of this was discussed with Baba Ji, I am sure, but I was certainly not a participant, as I began to withdraw into a world of pain.



Baba Somanath sitting with Kaka Ji

The night passed restlessly, and when the new day dawned and the time came to go over to Baba Ji's apartment with Naiyar, as was my daily custom in Bombay, Naiyar somehow managed to get me up to go with him on the bus to Baba Ji's flat.

When we got there, an elderly gentleman was sitting with Baba Ji. I did not know him well since I had not spent time with him. I certainly knew of him because I had seen him come to Satsang night after night, well in advance of anybody else.

He would arrive, sit down and, within a few minutes, withdraw into deep meditation. He would sit immobile in this position for the entire time, radiating peace and tranquility, and on his face was a beautiful, kindly light. He was an old and dear companion of Baba Somanath. Everyone called him Kaka Ji, and he was an initiate of Hazur Sawan Singh. Baba Ji brought Kaka Ji to Beas during the early days of taking groups of people each year for initiation. One day, Hazur called Kaka Ji and instructed him: "Now, you should serve Baba Somanath Ji as you have served me."

I was brought into the room, and Baba Ji instructed Naiyar to take me, along with Kaka Ji, to Kaka Ji's apartment, where I was to be given a massage. I was only peripherally aware of where we were going, as my attention was mainly focused on simply moving forward, still painfully bent over. (Many apologies for presenting things in this way. It is simply to explain that this was not some passing ache and pain but something pretty intense and long-lasting).

Kaka Ji's Apartment in the Chawls

I do remember driving through the city to one of the chawls, or housing developments, that were mainly occupied by mill workers and their families and friends. This type of tenement housing was intensely crowded and, sometimes, a little run down, but for hundreds of thousands, if not millions of poor people, it was home. It had a unique charm about it, for, even though material comforts were in short supply, the chawls provided a whole world of companionship, support and care.

I remember wending my way through these crowded, bustling conditions as Kaka Ji led me forward. Finally, we came to a small apartment nestled amidst hundreds

of others. I remember to this day what it was like—we stepped into this small one-room place in which Kaka Ji lived by himself. A more beautiful retreat one cannot imagine. The tiled floor was spotlessly clean and cool; the walls were tiled halfway up to the ceiling with a beautiful, muted, polished tile that had a soft glow of its own. In the corner was a rope bed or manji as it is called in India.

In another corner were Kaka Ji's cooking utensils, which were as immaculate as any other part of this tiny, self-contained unit. The outside noise of the bustling community seemed to totally disappear, and it felt like we were in some holy place, in a remote natural setting. Even though on an outer level, I was far from comfortable, I was very conscious of the surroundings I have described above.

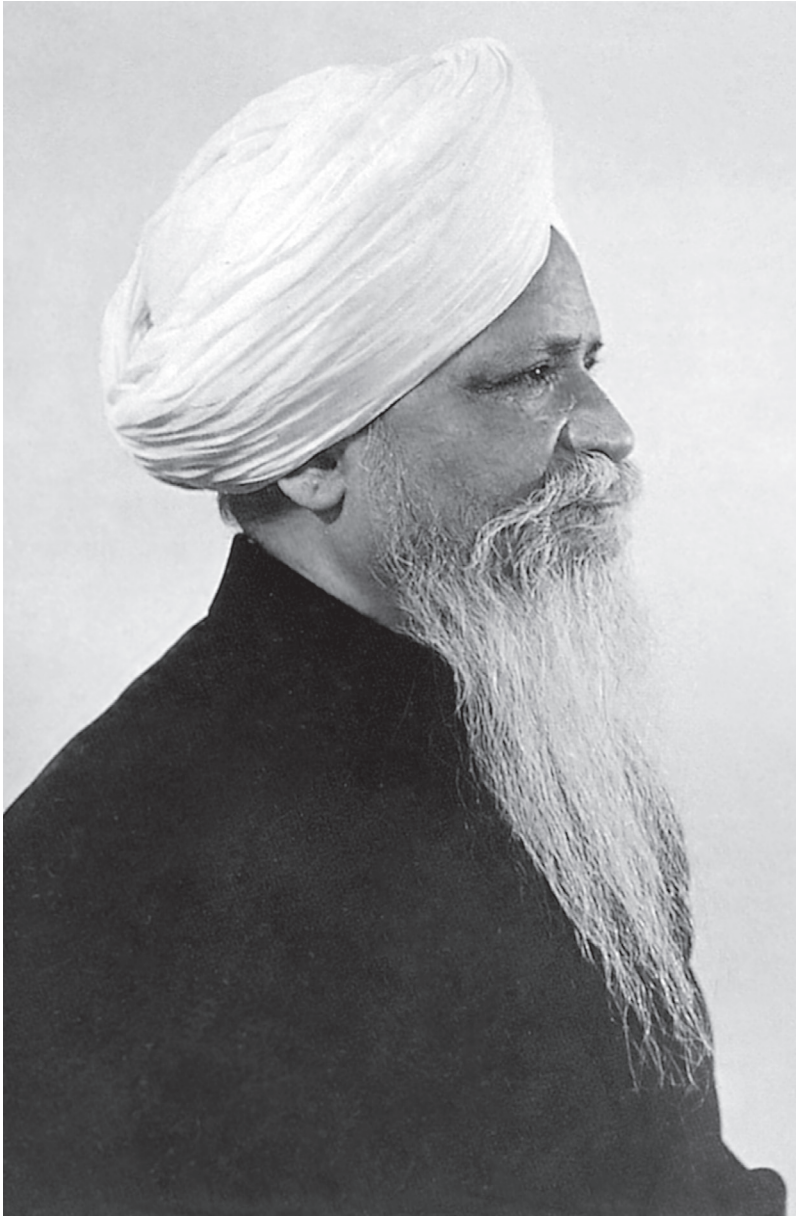
Tea, Massage, and the Healing of My Stomach Strain

Kaka Ji then sat quietly in the cooking area and prepared a warm cup of tea for us. It was the one thing I could still consume, and feeling the warm liquid flow into my body was soothing. Kaka Ji then escorted me to the cot and helped me lie down, ensuring I was as comfortable as possible. After this, Naiyar departed, as he had many other tasks to attend to. Kaka Ji got out a bottle of oil and then gently, very gently, began to massage me. His touch was so comforting and consoling that I began to relax, and after a short time, I fell into a deep sleep. How long I slept, I do not know. All I remember is that, after some time, I woke up feeling much better, and Kaka Ji was standing there smiling.

As I sat up on the edge of the bed, I experienced something incredible. Not only did I feel better, but every single symptom of the strain had vanished—completely. I

could stand up straight and walk about as normal, feeling very, very good. While there may be a scientific explanation, from my personal perspective, it was inexplicable (nor did I need an explanation because I was so grateful to be well again).

That is how I came to be healed from the strain caused by the falling rice sack. Kaka Ji then took me back to the Satsang Hall and left me there and, from that day forward, I was able to enjoy the beautiful Satsang program without any problem. And as was usual with Baba Ji, he never mentioned this incident again. Such extraordinary events would occur, though they were always carried out in a seemingly ordinary manner; Baba Ji had his own way of doing things. For those of us who lived near him, we came to know that, hidden by his quiet ways, many wonderful things took place. But he never wanted any acclaim, not even a thought that something special had happened. It is impossible to speak of such a One in the proper way. I can only be thankful that it was somehow ordained that some time could be spent in the company of One whose every thought, word, and deed were consecrated to the well-being of those who came to him and lived under his guidance and protection.



Baba Somanath Ji

8



Further Stories from Bombay

Following are several stories of people and events that took place while with Baba Ji in Bombay during the five or six trips I made with him. At this point, I would like to mention that the stories shared are not meant as praise of any individual but rather as a way of illustrating how that Power works through other people to teach us lessons that may help us on the spiritual way. Further, I feel that it is important to express appreciation to all those who have inspired me to draw closer to that place where everything becomes luminous and whole. Sant Kirpal Singh has some helpful words on this subject:

One thing more: we should learn appreciation of others. If you learn even that much, I think that it will sweep away all the dirt. It won't add any more dirt to it. Whatever little a man does, appreciate it. If he does more, appreciate it still more. Appreciation, I think, will save you from adding more trouble, more dirt to your mind. We don't appreciate others, I tell you. We all say, "I have done the most. What I can do, nobody else can do." When that "I-hood" enters in, it spoils the whole show. A little poison added even to something sweet will kill you.¹

1 Kirpal Singh, *Sat Sandesh*, February 1975, "Harmony," p. 26.

Story of Pandu, the Wrestler

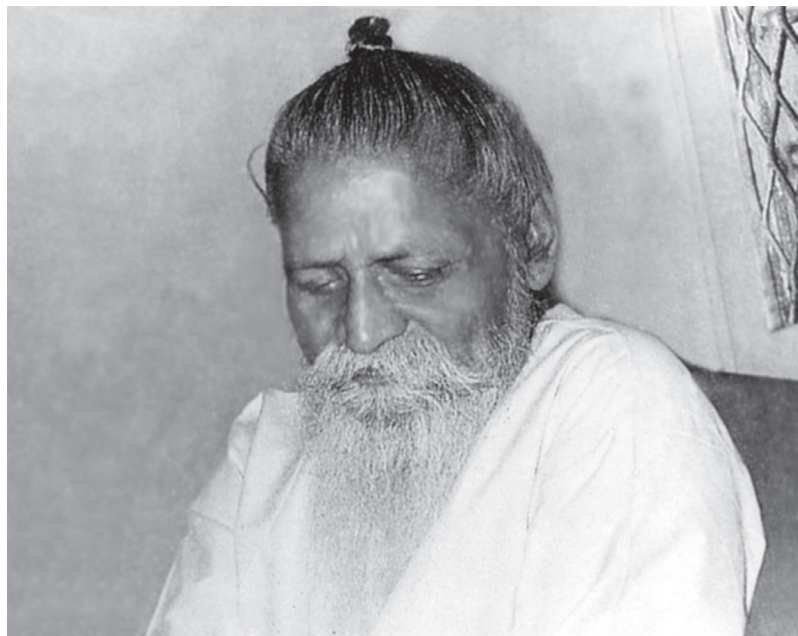
In the last shared experience, I made a brief mention of a man named Pandu. He was the person who did his best to make me comfortable when I first reached Bombay, suffering from intense pain due to severely strained stomach muscles. Pandu was a short (perhaps 5'4" in height), sturdy, muscular man who stayed with us in the Hall. He was a simple farmer living in a district of the Western Ghats called Satara. He had a very unique personality, and, as I got to know him, I liked him better and better.

He was what is called, in India, a mastana—an intoxicated one—meaning that his whole attention was riveted within, and by worldly standards, his behavior was somewhat different than that of most other people. But my experience with him was that he was a very practical man, the difference being that his way of conducting himself was governed by tapping within rather than by reacting to outer events.

At the time Baba Ji came to Bombay in 1973, Pandu was diligently tending his small farm—irrigating the fields, tending to his animals, and engaging in all the other labor-intensive farming activities. Years earlier, he had taken initiation from Baba Ji and had sincerely devoted himself to meditation every day. He was a simple, uneducated man but a person of outstanding physique and willpower, with an ability to engage in meditation like few people I have met before or since.

As he was living away from town on his land, he did not receive news of Baba Ji impending visit until just a day before the scheduled date in late July. By chance, one of his friends came out to the farm and informed him that Baba Ji would soon arrive in Bombay. Pandu left everything at that very moment and headed for the

train station, still dressed in his work clothes and taking with him nothing but enough money for a train ticket and a little extra for immediate expenses.



Baba Somanath Ji

By the time he reached Bombay, Baba Ji had already arrived, and, to the best of my knowledge, Pandu went directly to Baba Ji's apartment. Seeing him in this disheveled state—totally unaware of his outer appearance and just eager to have darshan and attend Satsang—Baba Ji smiled and instructed Naiyar to take Pandu to a cloth shop and have him outfitted in some simple clothes to wear during his stay in Bombay.

Sometime later that day, Pandu arrived at the hall, and we were introduced. Right from the beginning, he saw that I needed someone to take care of me in the rough and tumble city environment, so he assumed the duty

of being my guardian. He was often by my side when we moved between the hall and the place where we ate, or when we traveled on the bus to Baba Ji's flat in Sion. Sometimes he would take my hand and lead me around. It must have been quite a sight: a 6'2" gangly American with a short, stocky Indian, almost a full foot shorter, leading him from place to place. But to me, it felt good. I really appreciated having someone to look after me.

The first night when we all stayed in the open hall, I felt a hand tugging at my t-shirt around midnight. It was Pandu indicating to me it was time to get up and meditate. I thought, "He has got to be joking." (But his serious demeanor revealed that he was not joking at all.) He showed me where to sit, so I sat down. He then sat down himself, no cushions, mind you, just sitting on the hard tile floor. He closed his eyes, which had an intoxicated glow in them, and that was that. He sat for six straight hours without moving a muscle. I was inspired but lasted only about 45 minutes before I toppled over and went to sleep until 3:00 a.m., when I picked up where I had left off. This story was to repeat itself every night for the duration of the program. It was an amazing thing to witness, although I was not capable of doing meditation like that myself.

A few days later, one of the Satsangis told me the story of how Pandu had come to Baba Somanath Ji. Pandu was a renowned wrestler in his area. He was bold and confident. He was so good that nobody could defeat him. He apparently was very proud of his skill, but one day some people of his area met with him, and in the course of their conversation, he came to know of their Guru, Baba Somanath Ji. He was religiously minded, so when he heard Baba Ji's name, he felt attracted to go and meet him. When the next Bombay

program took place, he, along with his friends, came to meet Baba Ji. When he entered the room for darshan, he confidently strutted about, displaying his muscular prowess. Seeing this, Baba Ji laughed and said, “Well, Pandu, this is all very good. I congratulate you on being a great wrestler, but I will tell you one important thing. It is very easy to defeat an opponent whom you can physically engage with but, dear Pandu, there is a far greater enemy with whom we need to wrestle, and that enemy is invisible—it is the mind.”

His words penetrated into Pandu’s heart, and, leaving behind his pride, he went and bowed at Baba Ji’s feet, requesting initiation. Baba Ji readily assented, and from that day forward, Pandu followed his instructions and gave himself over to meditating six hours a day without moving. I learned many important lessons from his example; courage, concentration, truthfulness, zeal, and dedication all flowed through him effortlessly and naturally.

Baba Ji’s Injury and Pandu’s Reaction

One morning, I went to Baba Ji’s apartment with Naiyar, and, as was usual, after having darshan, I found a position where I could sit and watch the dear ones individually enter the room, look into Baba Ji’s eyes, take prashad, and either come and sit in the adjacent room to meditate or leave to engage in their regular daily activities. Usually, there was a line of twenty or so people waiting to enter Baba Ji’s room. Pandu came a bit later with some of the other dear ones staying in the hall, and, as he was ever eager to have darshan but was a bit shorter than most, he was standing on tiptoe and straining his neck to see over their heads and into the room where Baba Ji was sitting. As I watched, he stretched to the full

extent and suddenly fell backward onto the floor, weeping inconsolably. No one knew exactly what brought on this emotional reaction. After a few minutes, he began to calm down, his tears began to subside, and his chest also stopped heaving so intensely. He then looked around as if to say: "Why are you not weeping also? Why are you dry-eyed?" None of us had a clue of what was going on. Finally, he said, "Did none of you notice the bandage on Baba Ji's toe? How can you not weep when you see that the manifested form of the Master Power has hurt himself, for he is protecting each one of us 24 hours a day from the dangers of life in this world."

I felt it was a rare and precious opportunity to be in the company of such a kind and loving person who experienced life through this higher perspective. His simple yet heartfelt devotion to Baba Ji radiated from every pore of his body, yet he never put on any airs as sometimes happens when the Master showers a bit of grace on receptive souls, and they go within a little bit. Not being able to digest that experience, such people sometimes, without realizing what they are doing, wish for others to acknowledge their specialness and, perhaps, even superiority over others, which is the exact opposite of the result from genuine absorption within. Every part of the journey has its own special significance but, even today, I feel thankful that I spent some time with this spiritual giant in a small body who had taken Baba Ji's advice and wrestled with the mind within.

The Story of Kaka Ji

Kaka Ji is the person mentioned earlier who, under Baba Ji's order, gave me a massage which helped relieve the pain I was suffering from after the rice bag was dropped on my back.

Kaka Ji was one of the dear ones who Baba Ji took to Beas during the earlier years when he was giving Satsang in Bombay with the inner support of Baba Sawan Singh. During those years, 1933-1948, Baba Ji took several thousand seekers to Beas to receive initiation. It was perhaps in the late 1930s that Kaka Ji was initiated. From that time forward, he became a close friend of Baba Ji and helped him with many of the Satsang activities in Bombay. And as I mentioned earlier, one time, when he went along with Baba Ji to the Dera, Hazur called him and said, "You should serve Baba Ji as you have served me." He bowed before Hazur gratefully and devoted the rest of his life to the service of the Master Power dwelling within Baba Somanath Ji. He was a very practically minded man, being a Bombay businessman as well as a householder, but amidst his busy schedule, he found time for meditation and seva. He excelled in both.

There came a day though when due to circumstances beyond his control, he suffered a significant business loss. The event was so severe that it imbalanced his mind, and he began thinking of committing suicide. In India at that time, there were no social security or unemployment benefits that could tide one over in such crisis times, and the burden on his mind grew with each passing day.

One day, he came to Satsang and Baba Ji, realizing he was reaching the critical point of no return, asked him to stay afterward. When Satsang was over, he requested Kaka Ji to come for a walk with him along the Worli Sea Face. Baba Ji began to patiently draw out of Kaka Ji all the sorrow and sadness in his heart that had caused him to fall into a deep depression and consider taking his own life. Baba Ji quietly listened while they walked. When Kaka Ji had unburdened his heart, Baba Ji gently reminded him that, by the supreme grace of God, his soul

had been given birth in the human body. He counseled him that he should be patient and not despair. Somehow this time would pass, and once again, he would be back on his feet financially, and all would be well. Kaka Ji listened to Baba Ji's words, but the effect, while definitely felt deep in his heart, did not totally overcome his dark condition. So, for several weeks, Baba Ji had Kaka Ji walk with him in the fresh, night air along the seacoast. Each day, Kaka Ji found his mood improving.

One evening when they were walking, Baba Ji, who himself was a successful businessman, advised Kaka Ji to make a certain business transaction that would be effective in solving his financial problems. Kaka Ji was able to raise enough capital for this last attempt at turning his business affairs around, trusting in Baba Ji's advice. The result was that he totally recovered his losses and was able to pay off all his debts. His business problems were completely solved, and he was again able to comfortably support his family. This event had such a profound effect on Kaka Ji that he decided to give all his life to meditation and to the service of the Master and his Sangat.

By this time, Baba Sawan Singh had left the body, and Kaka Ji wished to serve Baba Ji in every way he could. He quietly called his wife and sons (his sons now being of the age when they could assume responsibility for the running of the business) and explained to them that his worldly life was now over. They must carry on without him. After that, he took a small room in one of Bombay's teeming chawls and made for himself a sort of hermitage where, surrounded by the hustle and bustle of the city, he lived and meditated. It was to this very room that I was taken when I was suffering from having the rice bag dropped on my shoulders.

Baba Ji gave Kaka Ji the responsibility of moving amidst the millworkers on a regular basis to inspire them to meditate and have tape-recorded Satsang. Kaka Ji did not only verbally encourage people to meditate; he would also sit with them for long hours, absorbed within.

One of my most vivid memories of him, which occurred not so long before his death, was him approaching the train compartment I was sitting in when returning to Bangalore with Baba Ji and him looking in my eyes and saying, "Sit in meditation with regularity and dedication." As he was "walking the walk" and not just "talking the talk," his words penetrated into my heart. This event took place to the best of my recollection in 1973 or 1974, and it was shortly afterward that he completed his life's journey in this world.

Naiyar Ji, Baba Ji's Dedicated Sevdar

There have been several earlier references to Naiyar Ji in Baba Ji's life story and in these memoirs that reveal to the reader what an extraordinarily kind and loving soul Naiyar was. His entire life was absorbed in the service of the Master. I had the chance to get to know him, during all the Bombay programs I attended. I also spent a lot of time with him when he came to the ashram, especially towards the end of Baba Ji's life.

The most memorable times occurred in the early morning hours after meditation was over, when he and I would walk together to the langar room where food was prepared and consumed in a wonderfully cheerful and relaxed atmosphere. Just walking with him was to feel protected and cared for. He was such a simple person in all that he said and did. Never a harsh word to

anyone, always thinking of others' welfare and, most of all, being aware of all the practical things Baba Ji might require. He was immediately ready to take care of all requests made of him concerning the Master.

His familiarity with how to move about the city and where to find whatever was needed at any given moment was something to see. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of all the shopkeepers and what they offered and of which shops were the best ones for getting specific items. He understood how to interact with them in a positive business-like way so that everyone benefited but also so he could get things done quickly and efficiently.

He had many duties to attend to each day, so he was a great example of how to organize time in an efficient manner. He was very concentrated but very kind. I never remember seeing him lose his temper, even under the most trying circumstances.

But when he was with me, it was like I was his best friend. I think he enjoyed that time too. We would walk the streets together in the early morning hours, and then I would sit with him while he prepared tea and breakfast. Having finished our repast, we would walk back to the bus stand—just he and I. A whole world of heart-to-heart communication was contained in those moments. I was a young person from the West, quite confused and disoriented in many ways, sincere no doubt, but totally unaware of how deep the spirit of devotion runs in the hearts of the Indian people. He, sensing all this, showered an immense amount of love and affection on me without uttering a word. It was all done in silence, as he spoke no English, and, in the early days, I spoke little Hindi. It was through his loving example that I came to know what it was to be totally dedicated to the Master and his mission.



Early picture of Baba Somanath with Naiyar Ji

A Blind Lady Comes for Darshan

One day, when I was sitting in my semi-concealed position but could still see around the corner into Baba Ji's room, a very frail, elderly, white-clad lady, supported

by two well-built young men, came for darshan . From the way she moved, it was evident that she was blind and that the young men were both there to support and guide her. When she entered the room, Baba Ji immediately sat forward in his chair, alert and sensitive to her every need. When she reached the place where he was sitting, she requested the two young men, who, as it turned out, were her sons, to kindly help her to her knees where she could kneel at Baba Ji's feet.

The entire room was charged with an incredibly beautiful radiance. Baba Ji's face was luminous, soft and tender. This elderly lady then began to stroke his feet and talk to him in a beautiful melodious voice. I could not follow the conversation because, at that time, my comprehension of Hindi was limited.

She continued to talk to him in this tender way and, as she talked, her hands moved up from his feet to different positions on his legs, then to the upper part of his body, till she came to his chest and the silken white beard resting there. Finally, she reached up to his face, and there her fingers went over his lips, nose, and eyes and to the top of his head; then she sat before him still and quiet. All the time this was happening, Baba Ji was smiling and gently laughing as she talked. He would sometimes say a few words, as if answering some question she had or simply making a statement.

As I watched, I became more and more aware that something extraordinary, at least to my eyes, was going on. It was unusual also because I had never seen Baba Ji in this particular mood. He was always attentive to the needs of those around him, for that was simply part of his nature, but his mood was generally more serious and contemplative. He would listen with focused attention while people spoke to him of their problems, worries or



Baba Somanath Ji

concerns or when they asked questions about difficulties in meditation or even while describing the inner experiences they were having. You could feel during those times that it was not the words they were speaking but the inner feelings of their hearts that he was tapping into.

During such conversations, he seldom interrupted but only listened. Then after the speaker had finished and had completely unburdened themselves of whatever they had in their heart, he would reply in a very concise, focused way—giving heart-piercing, illuminating replies not simply to the questions they were asking outwardly, but to what was actually there in their hearts.

These were, sometimes, two different things because the speakers themselves would not realize what was really behind the words they were using. I say this based on my own interactions with Baba Ji, for there were several times when I would be asking one thing, and he would seem to be giving a different answer altogether—and herein lies one of the true mysteries of the Mystic Adepts. They do not necessarily give us the answer we secretly wish to hear but give us the answer we need to hear. This can be hard to bear, but if we pay heed to the Saint's words, it can change the entire course of our lives. Sometimes, as I myself have experienced, the Master's counsel may not be understood till years later, after the soul has passed through certain experiences that make that answer comprehensible. That is why it is said in the East that the words of a Mystic Adept are the Maha Mantra—the transformative words of Great Power.

So, all this happened, as best I can describe it—light-hearted, sweet, and tender from end to end. When the interview was over, the young men lifted their mother to her feet and guided her out of the room, her aged face alight with joy and serenity.

When I had a chance later to ask one of the English-speaking dear ones what had happened, they told me the lady had some years before taken initiation from Baba Ji. At that time, she still could see. She was one of those innocent souls who took to meditation easily, not being burdened with an overactive mind filled with a lot of disturbing impressions. And as is the case of many women in traditional Indian households, she had the lifelong qualities of humility and devotion etched in her being by the good influence of other family members. Then she suddenly lost her sight some time back.

So, first of all, while she was caressing Baba Ji's body, she was asking if he might initiate the two young men who were her sons. Baba Ji, from his side, told her that she should not worry because they would indeed someday receive initiation, but, at that moment, they were not ready, and their time had not yet come. Then she told him that she could, regrettably, not look into his luminous eyes as she used to be able to do, but that, at least now she had the comfort of beholding the radiant form of the Master, day and night within her heart. It was at this point that Baba Ji had begun to laugh, and he replied to her, saying, "Dear Mother, what else is required? It is for this very experience that people have to work so hard in meditation, and you are having it all the time. Now your work is complete, and the rest of the inner ascent will be taken care of by the Master Power itself."

Many years have passed since that day, but I have not forgotten it. Now, having passed through certain phases of the journey that have been helpful in making the heart a bit softer, the feeling that was in the room that day has returned with even greater force. It is, I think, a real and vivid reminder of how beautiful and sweet, such child-like innocence and purity are. In due course of time, by

his grace, this part of our being will be restored to us all, and what a glorious day that will be.

The Young Man Who Broke His Dietary Vows

As is well known, the teachings of the Saints are very strict concerning the dietary commitment to living on a lacto-vegetarian diet for those seeking initiation. They do not impose the diet on anyone, but it is required that all who wish to follow the Sant Mat teachings should agree to live on a vegetarian diet, earn their livelihood by honest means, meditate 2 1/2 hours a day, and abstain from drugs and alcohol. The seeker is asked to carefully consider these requirements before they ask for initiation, but once they have introspected their hearts and found that they are willing to adopt the lifestyle prescribed by the Saints, only then should they request initiation. Regarding the lacto-vegetarian diet itself—a diet wherein one abstains from meat, fish, and eggs, and products derived from them—the Saints do not get involved in the many permutations thereof, like raw foods, macrobiotic, vegan, gluten-free, etc. They leave it up to the individual to figure out what best works for them.

One day, I was sitting by the door peering into the room when suddenly a young man pushed through the line of those waiting for darshan and went directly up to Baba Ji, fell at his feet and lay there weeping. Baba Ji waited for the emotional storm to pass, and when, finally, the young man regained a bit of composure and was able to speak, his story gradually came out.

At the time of initiation, he, along with all the other seekers, agreed to follow the vegetarian diet, along with the other basic vows as mentioned above. But, after receiving initiation, he did not remain true to the promises he had made, and, falling into the company of other young

people who were consuming alcohol and eating meat, he soon drifted away from the Path altogether. Then one day, waking up and realizing what a debauched state he was in, he suddenly remembered the Guru who had initiated him. With this awareness came a state of deep remorse because he knew that he had lost contact with the only truly important thing in life—the innate purity of heart through which one can regain one’s true spiritual heritage. In Baba Ji, he had seen that purity revealed, which was why he was inspired to receive initiation. By good fortune, he heard that Baba Ji was in Bombay, and so, he had come to ask forgiveness so that he might once again resume his spiritual journey within.

By fits and starts, the whole story of this young person’s fall came to light. Baba Ji calmly but seriously listened to all the young man had to say without interrupting him. When he finished, there was quiet in the room for some time. The atmosphere was now calm but very charged. Then Baba Ji spoke but a few words (by the time this event occurred, I was gaining a fairly good knowledge of spoken Hindi, so I could follow to some degree what was happening, but other English-speaking dear ones who were there filled in the parts I did not comprehend).

Baba Ji’s voice was kind but very firm and serious as he explained the reality to that young man:

“Dear one, I appreciate that you have realized your mistake and have come to me to ask my forgiveness. My forgiveness is there, of that you can rest assured.

But my forgiveness is not enough—you must ask forgiveness from the entire Sangat. I will now explain why this is so; therefore, listen attentively. You see, you are a young person, and there are also many other young

people like you who are sitting here—your brothers and sisters on the Path of Love.

You need to understand the responsibility that you and all initiates have to act as custodians of this precious gift of Naam. It is expected that your life and theirs should reflect the beauty of the Path that you are walking upon. Your ways should be different from the ways of the worldly people. We cannot blame those who have no awareness of the inner way and are lost in the pleasures of the senses. Their time of awakening has not yet come, though it will one day. But you do know the Truth, hence your mistake is a serious one, for through your behavior other young people like yourself who are initiated may think that it is okay to act as you have done.

Therefore, although I forgive you, I would like you to come to the Satsang tonight, and when I have completed the discourse, I would like you to stand up and request the forgiveness of the Sangat, for your actions have offended them, not me."

By this time, the young man had recovered his composure. He sat at Baba Ji's feet, listening to the timeless teaching of a wise and revered elder and great Saint of India. He bowed his head before him and promised Baba Ji that he would do as requested. That evening, Baba Ji came for Satsang as usual. I have already described the inexpressible beauty of this daily event—a moment of timeless perfection when, in pin-drop silence, everyone's attention was united and absorbed in listening to the teachings of the Saints—each word a drop of liquid gold, filling the heart with beauty, courage, and inspiration, bringing the soul within each one up to the center between the two eyes where all knowledge is perceived, and the desire to follow that radiant Path is strengthened.

The young man was sitting in the very front, near to where I was located. Few of those in attendance knew what was about to take place. Baba Ji sat there like a king of ancient times, regal and beautiful in his simplicity and purity. When Satsang was completed, all were silent. He did not get up to leave as he might normally do. Then he turned his beautiful eyes—filled with divine love—on the young man sitting near me. He motioned for him to stand. The atmosphere was electric—very, very powerful. Baba Ji requested him to turn around and face everyone assembled there and to explain the reason for which he had come.

I wish I had some words to tell what it felt like. It was like the whole room was supercharged with a supernal light flooding from above; everything seemed luminous and ethereal. We all listened attentively as he, in simple words, told his story. And then he began to weep, tears flowing from his eyes and voice choking with emotion. He was surrounded by waves of love coming in from all of us as he made his plea for forgiveness. I think we each looked in our own hearts and saw that we too were in need of forgiveness. Perhaps we had not erred in the same outer way, but certainly, in thought, we had all departed from the Saint's teachings in one form or another. It is difficult to capture the profound nature of such times, but it was a real blessing to be part of that moment.

Baba Ji's face became more and more beautiful as the young man spoke. The whole thing took but a few brief minutes. When he had finished and stood there weeping, Baba Ji raised his hand in a gesture of blessing and forgiveness—a stirring sight to behold. Then Baba Ji quietly got up to leave, and when he came down from the

dais, the young man respectfully approached him and fell at his feet weeping. Baba Ji stood there with a hand of grace over his head. Then a couple of dear ones gently loosened the grasp of the young man's arms from around Baba Ji's feet so the Master could depart into the Bombay night and back to his apartment.

Baba Ji Falls Ill in Bombay

One year in the midst of the Bombay Program, Baba Ji fell ill and was not able to come for Satsang. A disturbing part of that sickness, other than the overall debilitating aspect of it, was that he could not speak. Even then, he did what he could to ensure that the hearts of the dear ones in Bombay would continue to derive whatever benefit he could provide. This was accomplished by having a one-to-two-hour period each morning when dear ones could come for darshan while he lay in bed. I remember the beauty of that time very well. Several hundred people would come each day. During the week-long period of his absence from Satsang, dear ones came to look into his eyes for a brief moment, and, after receiving a unique type of intoxication that reached into the depths of their being, they then left for their daily activities.

He would lie very still, resting on his right side, with his crystal-clear eyes open, through which the Light of Divinity radiated out to all that came to see him. It was something I had never seen before nor have I since. I remember thinking at the time, and this awareness is still etched in my mind, that when we regular human beings become sick, we just want to be left alone to gradually regain our health once more. Baba Ji, though, was doing the exact opposite; He, while being unable to even sit in his chair due to the weakness induced by the sickness,

would spend a couple of hours each day elevating the consciousness of those who came to see him.

The eye-to-eye contact was just for four or five seconds, yet it was more than enough. It is not easy to explain the power of that time if one has not experienced it, as we did during that program. It truly does not take a Saint very long to purify the hearts of those who cherish and appreciate his company.

If one could capture on film the look on the faces of those who came for morning darshan , they would be astonished to see how the mask of suffering that most came with fell away and was transformed into a countenance of soft glowing serenity.

It is said that there are two major benefits of having the darshan of a Saint: (1) the attention is instantaneously drawn up to the seat of the soul above and between the two eyes, and, in that moment, we receive the blessings of the Most High; and, (2) one such divine glimpse burns up a vast storehouse of karmic impressions lying hidden within the folds of the mind. I watched this transformation take place over and over again, not just once but hundreds of times, over the course of his illness.

Even though my level of perception of Baba Ji's nature and power was highly undeveloped, still I couldn't help but think that there was some secret charging that comes out of the body of a Saint during such a moment and that one should never think that it requires a certain amount of time for any real benefit to arise from being in his company. It is said that one second of a grace-laden glance of a Saint is enough to liberate the souls of those who come in his benevolent sphere. It was during this time that a genuine appreciation of those words began to dawn in my heart.



Baba Somanath Ji

The beauty of the experience of darshan is captured in the haunting words and melody of the bhajan written by Guru Arjan Dev Ji.

*Darshan dekh jīvāñ Gur terā,
Pūran karam hoi prabh merā.*

O Master, I live by having Your Darshan.
O Lord, may my karmas be completely paid off.

*Iha benantī sun prabh mere (2x)
Deh Nām kar apne chere (2x) Darsan dekh ...*

O my Lord, listen to this prayer:
“Give me Your Naam and make me Your disciple.”

*Apni saran rākh prabh dāte (2x)
Gur parshād kinai virlai jāte (2x) Darsan dekh ...*

O Giver, O Lord, keep me in Your refuge. Rare are the ones who get the grace of the Master.

*Suno bino prabh mere mītā (2x)
Charan kamal vase merai chītā (2x) Darsan dekh ...*

O my Lord, my Friend, listen to this request:
“May Your Lotus Feet dwell within my heart.”

*Nanak ek karai ardās (2x)
Bisar nāhī pūran guntās (2x) Darsan dekh ...*

Nanak makes one request:
“May I never forget your perfect qualities.”

One memorable event occurred during this time that captures its sweetness. Shri Damu Shinkar and his family were very devoted to Baba Ji and always eager to be near him whenever possible. At that time, Damu's daughter, Prabha, was perhaps four or five years old. She was a total delight to be around. Sweet, free-flowing, and natural. On this day, she was dressed in a lovely, frilly frock and, as usual, was in the back room with Kumud, her mother, who helped Pushpamma with the cooking. The time had come to close the door to Baba Ji's room so he could rest.

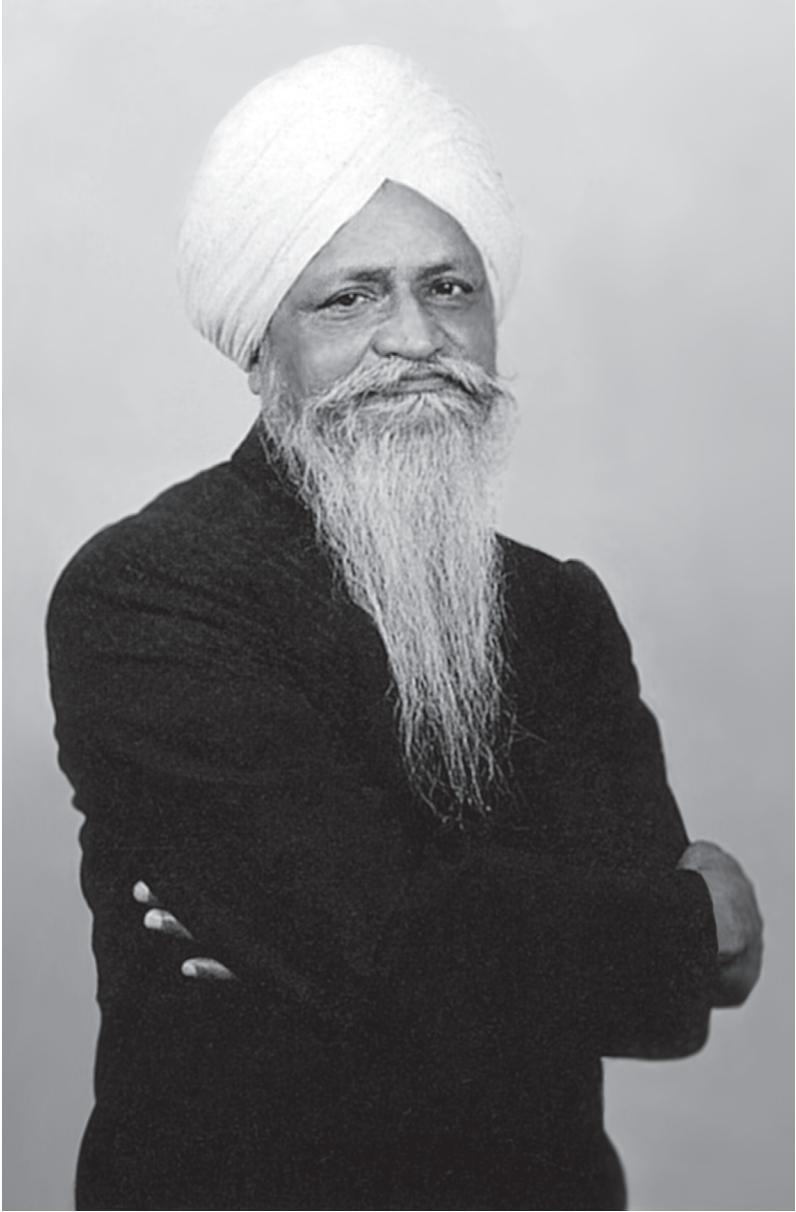
Just as Naiyar was about to shut it, Prabha came dancing down the hall, just like a butterfly flitting through the air on a gentle spring breeze. Because of her innocence and pure heart, she did not feel any reserve or constraint in her relationship with Baba Ji. She ran right up to the bed where Baba Ji was lying, and instantly, Baba Ji's face was animated with delight. She threw herself right next to him and gently scolded him saying, "But Baba Ji, you have not yet given me prashad today." His entire countenance was flooded with a divine light. He had Naiyar bring a banana, which he then gave into her hand. Taking the banana, she floated out of the room just as she had come in.

The Bombay Program, for me, was always a very special time. It was quite different from living in the ashram proper, where our daily lives rotated around the seasonal agricultural work. In Bombay, the only real task I was able to participate in was the cleaning of the Satsang Hall floors each day. The rest of the time was spent in meditation, going to and from Baba Ji's apartment, walking back and forth to the room where we took food, getting ready for Satsang, and, of course, in attending Satsang itself.

The most memorable part of it for me was being

saturated with the love and devotion of the Sangat, the majority being mill workers or common laborers. Their links to Baba Ji extended back all the way, in some cases, to his days as a wandering yogi, and if not that far back then to the days when he was engaged in the Satsang work entrusted to him by Hazur Sawan Singh Ji. There were, of course, numerous professional people, lawyers, doctors, merchants, etc., who helped form the sum total of the family of initiates, many of whom I came to know personally over the years. They, too, were cast in the same mold of love as the laboring folk. There was some special feeling in the atmosphere there that helped in perceiving the real nature of devotion—something totally beyond social status, religious affiliation, education or caste of the people absorbed in it. On the conscious level, my understanding and comprehension of subtle matters of the heart were minuscule, but at least I could feel the deep love between Baba Ji and the people coming to him, and that for me was a starting point in understanding the link between the soul and the protective power of grace fully manifesting in a Mystic Adept.

I feel really thankful that this rare opportunity to be with a Saint in those intimate surroundings was possible. There are many other stories that could be told, but perhaps what has been shared here about Bombay is enough to give some idea of what it was like to be there and, more importantly, how Baba Ji manifested the timeless teachings of the mystic family of those great souls who come on the earth to draw us back to our True Home. Hence, it is now time to return to the Kengeri ashram to relate a number of stories that reveal something about the wonderful ways of this hidden, relatively unknown Godman.



Baba Somanath Ji



What is the Mind?

Fresh Challenges to Overcome

The next collection of stories that will be shared relates to experiences that took place in Sawan Durbar Ashram, Kengeri, near Bangalore. I hope that the reader may be able to relate to what happened during this time. Some of the stories are quite humorous in retrospect. Some are pretty serious throughout. But in each case, Baba Ji's deep wisdom, kindness, and compassion were revealed in a profound way.

So, now try to place yourself in my shoes. My transition from living in the modern Western world to participating in the activities of a rural farming community was quite rapid. I was used to the many modern conveniences we have in the West like washing machines, hot water, showers, grocery stores and air conditioning. Life in the ashram bore little resemblance to the above. Every aspect of life in the ashram was reduced to the bare outer essentials for day-to-day existence. We needed to take care of washing our own clothes; we bathed in cold water; we ate the food that was grown on the farm. The pace was much slower than I was used to since it was based on the various activities of plowing fields, planting crops, weeding, irrigating, and harvesting them.

Daily life centered on the cycles of the seasons and how they crop rotations, etc. There was nothing in my background that prepared me for this, and the adjustment took some time. It was not just the physical change in lifestyle that proved difficult, but the mental and emotional one as well.

The speed at which life moves in the modern world and the effect it has on one's perception of reality had no significance in the ashram. In order to survive in the simpler agricultural environment, one had to bring body, mind, and emotions into a slower-paced existence that focused on farming activities that were being done not for amusement but for survival. It sounds like it should have been simple to do, but, in fact, it proved very difficult for me, and on numerous occasions, save for the patience and kindness of Baba Ji and those living on the farm, I would not have survived it. I would have left to return to a way of life more familiar to me but far less meaningful.

When we returned to the ashram from Bombay, the full impact of the change began to manifest itself. The first few weeks in the ashram, during which I had the company of Graham to help deal with this new life, followed by the trip to Bombay, had presented enough novel experiences to keep my attention engaged in the exotic aspect of living in India but, once back from Bombay, I was alone, with no one to help soften the transition into the new routine.

As a result, I passed through numerous difficult challenges that compelled me to realize how little I really understood about the most basic principles of living together in harmony with others and realizing that within the heart was a precious mine of spiritual gems that could only be accessed if I was willing to sacrifice egocentric

desires and aspirations on the altar of love. The following story describes how Baba Ji helped me begin to practically turn my life around so that something of value could be made out of it.

Baba Ji Asks Me: “What is the Mind?”

One evening, I went up to Baba Ji’s room after Satsang, and with him was one of the Indian devotees from Bangalore who spoke perfect English. While we were sitting there, Baba Ji turned to me and asked, “Christopher, what is the mind?” It was asked in a casual way, seemingly on the spur of the moment.

I had read a considerable amount of literature on the subject, and, according to my understanding, I replied to his question. In the Sant Mat literature, one finds extensive mention of mind as having three major aspects—physical or *sthul* mind, astral or *suksham* mind, and causal or *karan* mind. There are many other intricate aspects of mind discussed in this connection, and I spoke of what I had read in the books. In reality, I did not have genuine inner knowledge of the subject—my answer was all a product of my intellectual grasp of it. At that time, I felt rather proud of myself for being able to answer Baba Ji’s question.

Baba Ji sat quietly and listened to my reply. After I was done, he remained silent and did not make any further comment. I was a bit puzzled that he did not say anything, but what could I do? In retrospect, I realize that I definitely had the feeling that I was a “spiritual person” and somehow had a superior understanding to those with whom I lived and worked. I was hardly aware that this attitude pervaded my within. There was no reasonable justification that it should have been present in my

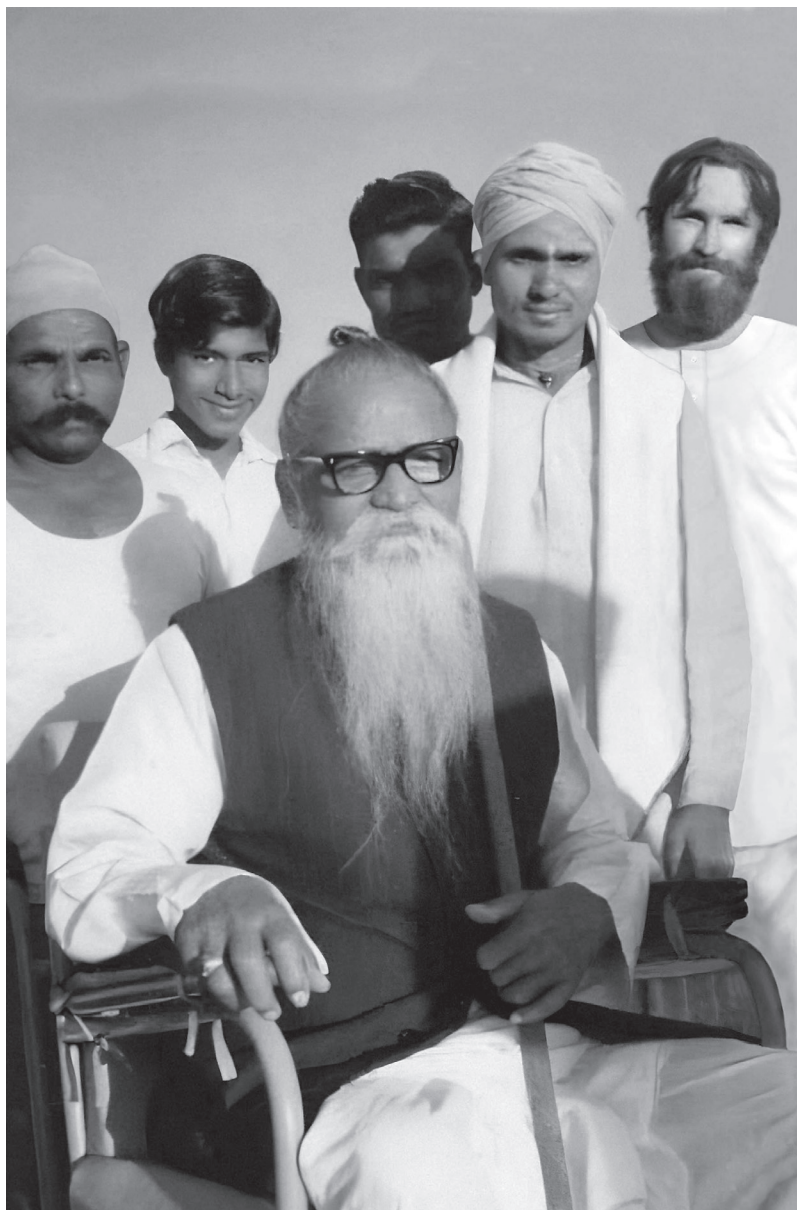
heart because my background before coming to India was definitely not a spiritual one.

It is true that I had come to a point where I saw clearly that the reckless life I was leading was positively harmful for a person wishing to pursue a spiritual discipline. I had outwardly stopped doing some things which were detrimental to leading a better life and started doing a few more positive things like studying literature pertaining to the spiritual quest, performing yoga asanas, meeting with gurus, roshis, and other spiritual luminaries.

In my mind, that somehow elevated me to a higher position. I did not realize that there is a vast difference between an intellectual grasp of the teachings of the Saints and a practical one. The former leads to vanity and the latter to true humility. Baba Ji wished that I should come out of this illusion, and all the events that are now to be described relate to this gradual awakening as to the difference between the world of the mind and the life of the spirit. What happened during the next few months was indeed harrowing on every level of my life, but I was under the care of someone who truly loved me—a love that transcends time and space. It is only because of that love that the unbearable torments of the mind became bearable. Through the experience that took place at that time, a glimmer arose within of what it means to walk on the Path of Truth.

How the Saints Reshape Our Distorted Fate

I think everyone who comes to a Saint brings with them their own unique mental makeup that, in due course of time, by one means or another, is dismantled so that the spirit within can break loose from the internal shackles which bind it and keep it from going free. In



*Baba Somanath Ji with Kengeri sevadars,
the author is standing far right*

fact, this process goes on throughout life with layer after layer of impressions scrubbed clean by the grace of that Power that manifests itself through the physical form of an Awakened Soul. For the most part, inner transformation occurs quietly, almost without notice, until some event happens where one finds oneself reacting in a more compassionate way to certain situations than one might have in previous times — when events would have pushed all the “buttons,” so to speak, and caused one to act in such a way that would have been binding rather than liberating.

But this process goes on gradually, for if one was suddenly forced to confront all the deep-seated roots of anger, greed, lust, attachment, and ego, one would not be able to bear it. The fact is that, in most cases, we have a very unrealistic picture of who we really are. Our mind is an expert in portraying us to ourselves as either the ultimate villain or ultimate hero (usually the later but the former is equally nonproductive) so the Master has to take us through a series of mini-awakenings so we can move toward the center of our being which is pure consciousness manifesting as divine Light and the celestial Music of the Spheres. Saints have described the gradual process of awakening like this:

Suppose a silken cloth is spread over a thorny bush. If you drag it, that cloth will be torn. But if by daily practice you try to remove the cloth from the thorns slowly, the first day you might take a longer time, but after a week or ten days that can be removed quicker. Then it is very easy.¹

—Sant Kirpal Singh

1 Kirpal Singh, *Sat Sandesh*, September 1975, “Your Most Personal Work,” p. 6.

This is the general process that the Saints adopt for helping us to regain our natural equilibrium arising out of being re-established in the Divine Ground. They ask us to engage in a process of self-introspection so that we can begin to perceive those patterns of behavior that are blocking the Light and earnestly pray for the grace to be free of them because such ingrained tendencies not only cause pain to our own self but to everyone in the environment in which we dwell.

But there are other means that a Saint can use, which are more radical, and they usually happen in their company, meaning the place where they dwell. For if they are not physically present, one may not come through mentally and emotionally intact. This more intense, radical method of awakening is used, I think, as a last resort. It may be the person who it is used on is not going to awaken in any other way. In retrospect, it seems this must have been my case because Baba Ji needed to adopt this more intense cleansing method on several occasions—this being the first major one. On this particular occasion, he said very little but waited for the appropriate time to reveal what was behind his question, for he knew that unless I gained first-hand experience of the ways of the mind, I would not be able to begin to comprehend what he wanted me to understand.

Meeting with Baba Ji in the Garden

The first major event that happened sometime after he asked this question was that I became sick with either an advanced case of diarrhea or perhaps dysentery. I had begun to feel the stress of being alone in a foreign country with no one to talk with, and that loneliness translated into a general neglect of my physical well-being. But as my physical condition began to deteriorate, resulting

in a significant weight loss of 20 pounds or more (I was at that time already quite thin), I became even less receptive to anyone trying to help me out with medicine or medical advice.



Baba Somanath Ji in the Peacock Garden

Baba Ji did, in fact, reach out to me in many ways, both personally and through others, including giving me medicine for my ailment, but I would not take it. Pretty crazy in retrospect, but I think I was feeling sorry for myself, at which point the solicitude of others seems

distasteful. By this time, I could no longer participate in the regular ashram activities of building construction, field work, etc., and took to spending the majority of my time in my room absorbed in my own gloomy thoughts.

One day, in a desperate attempt to reconnect with the outer world, I took it into my head to do some weeding work. There was a small, enclosed garden with a peacock house in the middle in which resided a couple of peacocks. They were not confined there but could roam about the garden at their leisure. For some reason, that garden had been abandoned with the result that it had become overgrown with weeds. It was not large, perhaps an eighth of an acre, but, in that space, there was an abundance of lush foliage that needed clearing. I went to the tool storeroom and got out a short-handled digging tool that was ideal for weed removal and began at one corner of the garden, commencing the clearing process.

As I went on digging, a storm of emotions broke upon me—all my sadness, frustration, feeling of alienation, etc., boiled over, and I began pounding the earth with the tool in my hand. Suddenly, I felt a presence behind me, and I slowly turned around. I can never forget what happened at that time. No words were spoken, but Baba Ji was standing there, very simple, as always, in his outer appearance, and as he looked at me, he drew my eyes deeply into his. The compassion and love flowing from them were so deep, so profound, so powerful that all I could do was stand there in silence, absorbed in and surrounded by a love that flowed from some place beyond all human reckoning.

How long it lasted, I cannot say, but then, when he had done what he had come to do, he quietly walked on. I was at that time incapable of processing what had

happened, but through all the intervening years of my life, I have remembered that look, and it has meant more and more to me with the passage of time.

Mr. Anand Solves the Problem of My Sickness

Within a few days of this event, Mr. Anand, the retired Inspector General of Police, and his dear friend Mr. Munivenktappa came to the ashram, as usual, to do translation of the Wednesday evening Satsang. Apparently, Baba Ji talked over my condition with Mr. Anand. I did, for some reason, totally trust Mr. Anand. He was a man of great integrity and character and, because of his career in the police force, he spoke immaculate English. He was well-read and had a good grasp of Western psychology (he sure needed that in my case), and, along with this knowledge, he also had a truly kind and loving heart.

He came to my room and sat with me. He did not press me to tell him what was going on in my mind but rather took the practical approach and asked me about my health and what physical symptoms I was having. By this time, I was on the point of being emaciated and had gone down to perhaps 135 pounds, which for a 6'2" frame was pretty spare.

He listened carefully. He reflected on what I had related to him for a brief while, and then told me, "I know how to cure this problem. Will you take the medicine if I bring it for you?" In my desperation, I said I would. It was the first sign that I was coming out of my self-created hell (although there was still a long way to go). He said, "OK, I will come tomorrow evening."

The next day, as promised, he showed up at the ashram. He had with him a small container holding ashes from chili peppers. He had gone home and instructed

his wife to take a bunch of red chilies and carefully heat them till they were reduced to ashes while he sat observing the process. This was the medicine that he requested me to take, and I readily agreed. I was to take something like a teaspoon every few hours till the problem passed. By the evening of the next day, the difficulty had totally resolved itself. My stomach and bowels settled down, and I could begin eating again without any severe consequences.

The Power of Satsang and the Sea of Fire

Now at the same time, all this was going on, another equally disturbing event was taking place. It is pretty evident that I was far from being balanced on any level. Physically speaking, I was undergoing a radical meltdown. That was perhaps a secondary effect of the mental disturbance that was troubling me from within. All throughout the physical sickness and accompanying mental and emotional disturbance, I continued going to Satsang in the evening.

Satsang was always a very powerful event, not necessarily easy to bear Baba Ji's incisive admonitions to the mind, but very uplifting to the soul. On one level, at least for me, both then and now, the most exalting thing that can possibly happen is to attend the Satsang of a Saint.

Without any effort or exertion from me, the attention would be drawn up to the seat of the soul above and between the two eyes where the knot between the mind and soul exists. Many have shared this experience, so I think it is easy to understand. It has nothing to do with spoken words, intellectual philosophy, normal thinking processes or anything of this world that one might equate with it.



Baba Somanath Ji giving Satsang at Kengeri

There is a Power there that radiates into the core of one's being. It acts as a cleansing fire to free the cluttered mind of its dross, and lifts the soul to shine, at least for a brief time, in her pristine glory. During this phase of my life with Baba Ji, the cleansing effect of Satsang seemed accentuated by the setting in which it took place. The

Satsang Hall at the Kengeri ashram was quite small—perhaps big enough to accommodate 400 tightly-packed Indian dear ones who were accustomed to sitting on the floor close to one another. But except for special times of the year, there were never that many people in the ashram. There were generally 60-100 men, women, and children residing there. So, the Satsangs were very small intimate events where we all sat quite close to Baba Ji.

When Baba Ji entered that room to give Satsang, something really unique happened. Outside of that room, he might be taken for any handsome Indian gentleman of advanced years, but not much more than that, for he kept that power within him veiled. But when he stepped into the Satsang Hall, the veils lifted, and out of him poured some extraordinary pure, radiant, immaculate Power. It was so “present,” so tangible, that one could feel it both within and without. No doubt each person perceives that Power in their own way, but this is the form it took for me. This awareness only increased in intensity with each trip to India.

But this experience of Satsang underwent a change in the depths of this phase I was passing through. There may be some other explanation for it, but since I can only draw upon my own limited perception, I will explain it in those terms. Baba Ji would come and sit in his chair below the dais, where he would remain while those of us present sang the beautiful bhajan Baba Ji had written in praise of the inner radiant form of Hazur Sawan Singh—*Santa Satguru Satya Svarūpā*. After that, he would take his seat on the dais and commence Satsang. All concealment of that Power was removed, and Pure Radiance issued forth from his forehead and eyes, indeed from every part of his body.

But what started happening to me at this point was

terrifying, disconcerting, and upsetting. The distance between where he was seated and where I sat was only 15-20 feet but, from the time he commenced Satsang until the time it was over, I could hardly see him. Rather, I saw a sea of burning flames. Sometimes, for a few moments, I could see his form through the flames, but that quickly passed and once more, the flames leapt up and occupied my attention in a most agonizing way. I did not know what to make of it. After Satsang, I would go back to my room, very tired and exhausted. The combination of the physical ailments along with the mental and emotional ones became unbearable. Even when, under Mr. Anand's treatment, the physical difficulties were softened and made manageable, still, the mental and emotional disturbance persisted.

The Beginning of the Introspective Life

Now, as I look back at that time, I think that the intensity of that experience was simply Baba Ji's way of getting through my first line of defense against the power of love. The patterns of behavior that had governed my life had to be dealt with before any further work could be done. He decided, as only a Saint can decide, when to do some serious cleansing and how to accomplish it. In every pore of my being, I now know that, however serious and disturbing all this sounds, it was the ultimate act of compassion on Baba Ji's part to take this rather rough approach to the cleansing process. I know with inner certainty that, as hard as it might have been for me, it was far harder for him because Saints seldom like to put their disciples through this type of process. They prefer, for the most part, gentler means whereby the disciple is nudged along day-by-day, through the everyday experiences of life towards the understanding that the

untrained, undisciplined mind is not one's friend in the Spiritual Quest, but rather is the source of a lot of confusion and disturbance!

Perhaps the hardest thing to grasp and admit in such a strange state of affairs is that we ourselves are the cause of all our difficulties and disturbances, and until we see this fact, in a practical, straightforward manner, it is not possible to tread successfully on the Inner Way.

A Letter to Ron Gordon

Sant Kirpal Singh Ji once wrote an amazing letter to a man named Ron Gordon; I did not know him personally but saw him once at a meditation program of Sant Ajaib Singh Ji in New Hampshire. Ron took initiation from Master Kirpal Singh in 1964. Not long afterward, a serious car accident that left him paralyzed and in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Master Kirpal sent him the letter included below in 1969. Ron would read the letter regularly, and he made the Master's instructions the model for his life. He was an exemplary sevadar, working the spread the teachings of Sant Mat both in the U.S. and in Ghana. Ron left the body in August 2004.

I am including the letter because it explains, in fine detail, what was at the source of my own disturbance. (This letter was sent to *Sant Bani Magazine* by Ron's wife, Ann Gordon.)

January [1,] 1969

Dear Ronald,

If you have failed in thought, word or deed, on any of these questions — make a check mark on your diary sheet.

What you do each day is either for you or against you.

Weed out the "weeds" that "choke" our Spiritual Growth and Light!!

“The mistakes of last year are not to be repeated!”

Have you hatred within? Do you have aversions?

Have you malice towards anyone?

Do you wish for another’s suffering?

Do you have dislike for people, foods, weather, etc.?

Have you hated anyone?

Are you resentful of others?

Are you envious of others?

Do you rejoice in their misfortunes?

Do you carry grudges against anyone?

Are you suspicious?

Are you greedy?

Do you indulge in self-pity?

Do you grumble and complain?

Are you fearful, worried or afraid?

Are you critical of others?

Are you after name and fame?

Are you conceited or egotistical?

Do you carry ill-will within you towards another country, color, religion, etc.?

Have you shamed anyone—in their presence or in the presence of others?

Without faith and faith in Master, one cannot advance on the Path:

Do you have faith?

Do you have faith in the Master?

Are you faithful to the Master?

Do you have love for the Master?
Do you talk about Master in doubtful ways?
Do you talk against Master?
Are you looking for miracles from Master?
Are you happy in spite of troubles?
Are you grateful?
Do you have forgiveness?
Do you give service before self?
Are you giving Selfless service—physically?
Are you giving Selfless service—financially?
Do you attend Satsang regularly?
Do you have excessive attachment or possessiveness?
Are you kind and loving?
Do you have self-control and discipline?
Do you stay in the required diet?
Do you have daily periods of Simran and Bhajan?

Let us live a new life of peace, harmony and love. The essence of religion is love, peace, humility, service and sympathy. Love all, not merely your relatives and friends. Love the sinner, too. Bless them that curse you. Pray like Guru Nanak:

"Peace be unto all the world, under Thy Will, O God"

*With all love,
 Kirpal Singh²*

2 Kirpal Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, January/February 2005, "With All Love," p. 16-17.

Baba Ji Reveals the Nature of the Mind

Even though the physical problem was solved by Mr. Anand's kind efforts, yet the mental and emotional one persisted until there came a day when my whole world fell apart. It was a Wednesday (four months or so from the time Baba Ji had posed the question "What is the mind?"). I was in such mental torment that I lay on the floor of my room for a good part of the day, rolling from side to side with my head in my hands. I was, in short, having some sort of breakdown, nervous or otherwise. In the midst of this turmoil, I wrote a letter to Baba Ji explaining how I would need to leave the ashram so I could go somewhere and pull myself together. I tried to explain how I was feeling and why.

My intention was to give the letter to Mr. Anand so he could translate it into Kannada when he came for Satsang. Mr. Anand was very punctual. I never remembered him missing a single time on Wednesday. He also understood the Western mentality quite well and could explain what I was feeling. Pushpamma also spoke very good English, but it was not in her experience to understand such a complex mental tangle as I was caught in since she had grown up in a simple devotional atmosphere from childhood. But, on this particular Wednesday, Mr. Anand did not come. I was tied up in knots, totally and completely. Finally, I resolved to go up to Baba Ji's room and do whatever I could to convey, through Pushpamma, that I needed to leave the ashram and, to my way of thinking, recover my sanity.

I managed to get up the steps (even that seemed a struggle) and enter Baba Ji's room. He was, as always, sitting quietly and thoughtfully, indeed serenely. When I walked into the room, he looked at me with his deep

radiant eyes. Such profound love and compassion were in that gaze—his eyes were so clear and beautiful. I did not utter a word but simply looked in his eyes. He then called for Pushpamma. No word escaped my lips to tell him of my plight. When she entered the room, he said to her, “Tell Christopher that now he is beginning to understand the nature of the mind.” In those few words were healing and rest, and I left the room cleared of the torment I had experienced during that four-month period of time. With those few words, he helped me to realize that this power called the mind is no small force and that only through steady, patient effort in meditation and right living, coupled with the grace of one who had himself conquered it, could it be subdued and made a servant of the soul and the Will of God. Over the years, numerous such episodes have come into my life. And at those times, his words have always been before me and, more than that, the love that was in his eyes. This was one of my first experiences of the tremendous wisdom and compassion of this Sage and Saint and how much he cared for me.

The Arrival of Paul Young

Sometime after this experience regarding the mind, another student of FWC came to visit me at the ashram. His name was Paul Young. Paul was one of the small group of students (20 or so of us) admitted to Friends World College in January 1971. My first trip to India corresponded with his first trip as well, but he and a close friend of his, being adventurous sorts, had ridden their bicycles across Europe, through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and finally into India. Having reached India, the two of them continued down to Bangalore on their bikes from North India. All of this was unknown to me,

as we had not been in touch since parting ways in June. But when he reached Bangalore, he came to know that I was living just a few miles away, so he rode out to see me one beautiful December morning. At the time of his arrival, I was just coming out of my room and saw someone walking his bike up the road. Meanwhile, Baba Ji was out for his morning walk to see how the various seva projects were progressing, and he waited for Paul to approach to see what he required. Paul indicated he wanted to see Christopher. Baba Ji smiled and pointed to me, so Paul continued on his way to greet me. Baba Ji, as was his custom, was dressed as a simple country gentleman so Paul could have no clue of who he was.

It was very nice to see him, as I was still dealing with loneliness, bearable compared to what I had been through the past several months, but still, it was wonderful to be with a fellow countryman.

Paul was curious to know what I was doing at the ashram and who my Guru was. We had become friends at FWC because of a shared interest in the spiritual quest, and he had, in fact, come to India with that very purpose in mind—to find someone who could guide him on the Inner Way. So, we talked and enjoyed each other's company through the afternoon. I showed him around the ashram and acquainted him with the basic Sant Mat teachings. He listened respectfully and attentively to what I was saying and enjoyed the beauty of the place where I was living. He stayed up till Satsang time, and when Baba Ji walked into the hall—powerful, simple and majestic as always—Paul was amazed to see that it was the same person he had interacted with earlier in the day, only now revealing something of his inner splendor, which he kept concealed during his daily routine. By good fortune, it was a Wednesday, so Mr. Anand was

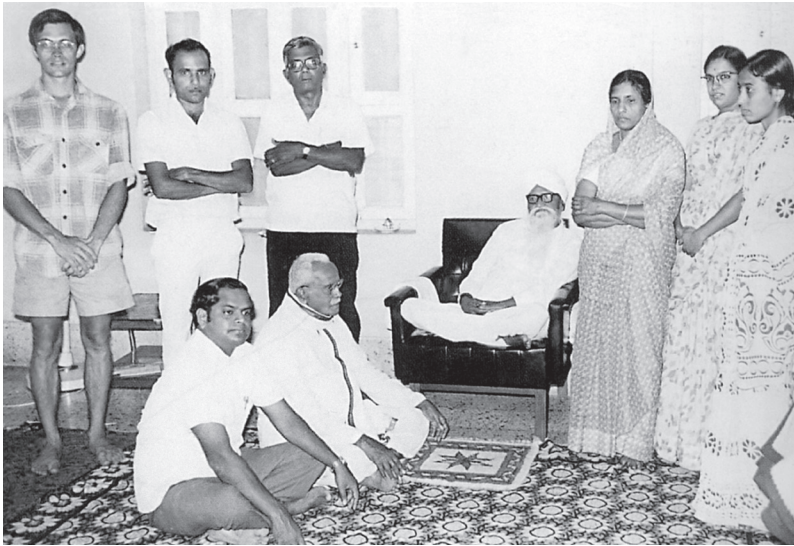
there to give the English translation. Paul felt the beauty and power of Baba Ji's words, but as he had not yet experienced anything else in terms of Guru-disciple relationships, he felt he should continue his search in other parts of India. I understood the sincerity of his search but was sad to see him leave because it meant a lot to me to have someone I could talk to. I watched Paul pedal off on his next adventure, not imagining that he would ever return. But, in fact, he did come back a month or so later. It happened like this.

His exploration of Eastern mystical traditions eventually led him to the ashram of a renowned yogi living in Pondicherry whose name was Swami Gitananda. Paul felt that he was a competent Yogic Master who not only understood the traditions of the East but had a good grasp of how to bring the ancient teachings of the East to the West, as he himself had lived and studied there. Paul received guidance from him in the practice of hatha yoga and also in the more esoteric pranayama practices. Paul was very fit, very athletic and also possessed good powers of concentration.

He quickly started advancing on the way that had been shown to him. He started having good experience of Inner Light and also began hearing the Celestial Sound Current reverberating within. When he told his experiences to Swami Gitananda, the Swami kindly told him that for further guidance on the practice of Nada Yoga, the yoga of the Sound Current, he should go to Sant Kirpal Singh of Delhi.

When Paul heard this, he remembered the Satsang Baba Ji gave the evening he was at the ashram because Baba Ji had discoursed on that very subject. So, bidding the Swami Ji a grateful farewell, he rode his bike back to the ashram, stayed with me and, after a short time,

received initiation from Baba Ji. He devoted himself to meditation with enthusiasm and no less to seva. He was much liked by everyone for he had a kind, outgoing nature, and he was tremendously strong as well. He could take on the heaviest tasks with comfort and natural ease. As with all the Westerners who came to Baba Ji, I benefited a lot from his company. Each person who comes to a Saint reflects some special dimension of that divine radiance, and Paul was, to me, an embodiment of freshness and focused dedication to one's ideal.



Baba Ji with Kengeri sevadars, Paul is standing far left

He proved to be of great help to me and many others over the months we spent together, off and on until 1976, when Baba Ji cast off the mortal coil. I do not remember how long Paul stayed the first time, but I do not think it was more than a couple of weeks before he returned to the USA. It was before I departed towards the end of December.

Even though the following story is a bit out of sequence, I would like to narrate it here, as it is a fond memory of Paul and Baba Ji, in which I also played a part.

One particularly memorable event took place on a day, perhaps in 1975, when Baba Ji had sent us into Bangalore to the vegetable market to buy carrots. We entered the teeming bazaar together—a colorful, vibrant, and zestful place to be. Each vendor artistically displayed his fresh vegetable wares. All were vying to get our attention as it was something quite novel to see Westerners in that part of the vegetable and fruit wholesale market. We decided to approach one of the vendors and duly haggled for a better price as was expected. We secured a large gunny bag of carrots weighing something like 75 to 80 pounds. Paul easily hoisted the bag onto his shoulders, and off we trotted to the nearby bus stand to return to the ashram. From Kengeri to the ashram was perhaps one mile, mostly uphill. Paul, without any problem, carried the bag the whole way without breaking a sweat. I was very grateful, as I was not that strong.

When we returned, we were a bit dusty and tired, but Pushpamma immediately called for us to come upstairs as Baba Ji wanted to go out for an afternoon circuit of the ashram. He had not been in good health at that time, so we helped him downstairs and got him seated in a wheelchair. Another young, strong Indian sevadar joined us at that point, and we started up the long corridor of coconut trees, a pleasant place to pass through for fending off the heat of the afternoon and enjoying the breezes caressing the land. Baba Ji then started asking us about the details of the trip. I told Baba Ji how Paul had carried the bag all the way back to the ashram and how strong he was. Baba Ji smiled. Then Paul chimed in: “Well, I may be stronger, but Christopher is smarter.” Then Baba Ji laughed and

said, “Both qualities are good, and it is best if one has them both together for a smooth passage through life.” It was a magical moment—very simple, very beautiful, kind, and sweet. Such times are etched in the heart forever. The beauty of the Saints’ words in those natural surroundings is worth experiencing. They never utter any word that does not have far-reaching consequences.

My Departure from India

By the time Paul came to live in the ashram, I was nearing the end of my first six months in India. I had applied to the Indian government for an extension of my visa so I might stay on for another three to six months. Baba Ji had requested that I try to stay longer because he wished to take me to the Betta ashram in Andhra Pradesh for the celebration of Baba Jaimal Singh’s birthday in the latter part of December, but the Indian government did not give their permission, and thus I had to leave India before Baba Ji departed for the program.

A memorable last interview occurred the day before I left. After the incident where Baba Ji revealed to me something of the nature of the mind, I had calmed down a lot and was feeling in my heart that I was a very lucky human being to have such a Friend and Guide. Like everyone, I still had my ups and downs, but that feeling of being cared for is one of the most precious that exists, and that awareness had definitely established itself in my heart.

So, when I went up to see him for what I thought was the last time before I departed, I had several questions about meditation that were purely theoretical and had little to do with my actual practice. When I presented them to him, he patiently advised me to devote more and more time to the simple practice of Simran or

Remembrance as I had been instructed at the time of initiation. He lovingly explained that if I was to attend to this simple means of controlling the mind and senses—and I was to develop it so that it went on automatically 24 hours a day—then all my questions would be answered without any need of asking questions generated by my mind. I quietly bowed before his wisdom and prepared myself to leave.

Early the next morning, a dear one from Bangalore came to take me to the train station. It was before sunrise, so everything at the ashram was quiet. Pushpamma, the kind and loving mother of mothers, had gotten up very early and prepared some special food for me to take on my journey. She called me upstairs to receive the package. It was dark and quiet in Baba Ji's room but, as I was receiving her loving gift, a beautiful voice came from his room. He asked what was taking place, and Pushpamma explained, "Christopher is leaving."

Baba Ji replied, "Open the door and let us see each other one more time before he goes." When I went into the room, Pushpamma pulled back the mosquito curtain from his bed. Baba Ji—with his hair down, flowing onto his shoulders—was sitting in meditation wrapped in a beautiful blanket. His eyes were glowing with Light of Truth and Love, more powerful than I had ever experienced before. I looked deep into them and, quietly bowing before him, departed with the hope that one day I might return to this place that had become more than a home to me.



Baba Somanath Ji



Christopher's Plan to Marry an Indian Girl

An Inspired Idea

I believe this story took place in 1973—my third trip to India. This is another of the major incidents where Baba Ji used a more radical cleansing method to awaken my sleeping soul. My usual port of entry was Bombay, and, on this occasion, I could not get a connecting flight to Bangalore on the same day. Therefore, I decided to take advantage of the open invitation from my dear friend, Damu Shinkar, to stay with he and his family in the flat they had in there in the city. In the past couple of years, I had drawn very close to Damu. He was the most gentle, kind, and loving soul, and he and I seemed to have been friends from times beyond reckoning. Whenever we met, it was a time of great happiness for me. We would talk deeply and intimately about whatever came in our hearts, and seldom in my life (up to that time) had I felt such a strong spiritual kinship with anyone as I felt with him.

When I arrived at the flat and was greeted by the whole family, my mental gears completely shifted out of my life in the West and back to India. It was pretty simple to do as I had been leading a reclusive life before

returning and had little relationship with the activities of the Western world. I had been staying with my mom and writing my journals for the final school year with Friends World College.

During that resting period at Damu's flat and the subsequent dinner, which was a veritable vegetarian feast prepared with exquisite care and refinement, the thought came in my mind that: "Hey, why don't I just marry an Indian girl, and then I would never have to leave India. I could stay with Baba Ji for the rest of my life." In my mind, it seemed so practical and brilliant; it was the very solution to my problem of having to leave India every six months because of visa regulations and then stay out of the country for six months until I could return again.

The only problem was that there was no part of the idea that was practical or brilliant. I did not in any way grasp what it was to have a firmly established occupation (I was still in school); I did not have any financial stability (and no prospects of establishing said stability); I did not have any background in understanding the qualities required to maintain a human relationship of that magnitude (because I was single and never even had a girlfriend in my life); I did not understand and appreciate the way people in the East regard marriage (far different in many ways from Western practice); and a host of other major issues. And then, perhaps of equal significance, even if all the above issues could be resolved, what chance was there that, after marriage, the girl would consent to living in the ashram for the rest of her life (as this was part of the plan I had hatched in my head) and, even if she were willing, would Baba Ji have consented to my proposal (highly unlikely for the ashram was really meant as a place where people freely came and went for various lengths of time to help in the

agricultural work going on there)? Lastly, just how long did I suppose Baba Ji was going to live, as he was approaching 90 at that time. To say the least, the plan had some rather glaring holes in it, but in my innocence, I felt that the plan was a solid one, and all I had to do was find the right girl. Yes!!!! There you have it—the quintessential pipe dream if ever there was one.

Confiding My Plan to a Bangalore Satsangi

So with this plan firmly ensconced in my mind, I headed off to Bangalore to spend the next six months (and perhaps longer if my plan succeeded). Within a few days of arriving at the ashram, I explained my whole idea to the son of a wealthy Bangalore Satsangi who was very Western in orientation—smart, progressive, definitely in the mold of a new generation of forward-looking Indian young people who appreciated all the attractive features of Western culture while still maintaining a respect for their own. Lal Mangaram was this delightful Satsangi's name, and he, along with his family, came each Sunday for Satsang. They were wealthy merchants from Sindh, in what used to be part of India but was annexed into Pakistan during partition; his family had then migrated south to Bangalore, where they established a highly successful business selling cassette tape recorders.

Lal was perhaps seven or eight years older than I. He was a married man who enjoyed a high position within his community and was someone who could “get things done” if he put his mind to it. He listened to my idea till its completion, and, when I finished laying my cards on the table, so to speak, he simply said, “Let me think it over, and I will see what I can do.” It is important to note that I never presented this idea to Baba Ji, or things might never have come to the pass they did.



Baba Somanath Ji at the Kengeri Ashram

After Lal left, just as the thought of marriage had come into my mind, so did it vanish, which is to say I simply forgot about it. My attention became fully absorbed in the day-to-day life of the ashram. By this time, I had begun to feel somewhat familiar with the routine of agricultural lifestyle, and I also enjoyed the occasional travel with Baba Ji to the different Satsang centers in South India for Satsang Programs. To say I was comfortable with the lifestyle would be a stretch. Living with a Saintly soul is never as easy as one might think.

In fact, it was downright challenging on a daily basis, for there is a unique radiance that comes out of such a

One, that brings to the forefront all of one's shortcomings in a particularly intense way. And as has already been mentioned, the ashram was not like any fantasized place where people drifted about in a sort of spiritual reverie, gently absorbed in divine contemplation from morning to night; no, it was not like that with Baba Ji. It was, in fact, exactly the opposite—very nitty-gritty, hard, honest, physical work that went on from dawn to dusk, done totally in harmony with the cycles of the seasons as had been done for thousands of years

How Saints Teach Us Lessons Through Our Daily Lives

Even though my body had now changed and, in a sense, I could keep up, for the most part, with the Indian dear ones living there, still my mind was a total hash of emotional instability and conflict; the only thing that held it at all in check was the ever calm and pure radiance of Baba Ji's presence. He was an absolute rock of calm stability. There were many times in the course of living in the ashram, even in the span of one day, when I felt that I was coming to pieces (and in fact, I was), but one glance at Baba Ji as he roamed about in the fields when we worked—and particularly at Satsang—would give such a penetrating, momentary insight into the fruits of genuine meditation and how it affected every aspect of life, that the courage to carry on was granted.

Why the turmoil? God only knows. Each one of us has our own unique makeup that evolves from impressions of past lives, and in the company of a Saint, these impressions arise into the field of one's vision with tremendous power and vigor. It is these very impressions that form our personal likes and dislikes, our prejudices and follies, indeed the whole complex of what makes us each what we are from an individual level. These veils tend to

obscure the Divine Light that is at the core of our being, but once that Light is realized, all this duality ceases to be, and we truly come to know that we are all one. In the company of a realized Soul, who has manifested that pure Light, and indeed is that Light itself, this sense of separateness naturally ebbs and begins to dissolve, and clarity of vision is eventually established in the heart.

Clarity of vision means seeing the One Light animating the whole creation. Intellectually, it is very easy to say, but in practice, the transformation of consciousness can be a real trial by fire. I know I cannot describe this properly, so I can only hope that there is enough meaning in the words I am using to build a framework to understand something which is actually going on every day of our lives, in every single event that is taking place, once the desire to solve the mystery of life has arisen within our hearts.

In short, if at heart of hearts we are truly longing to become whole and pure once again, and if we are really keen on realizing that we are all one, then we may consider strapping on our seat belts because what may unfold can be far different than what we read about in romanticized stories of spirituality. Before the natural inner ascent takes place, the personality, as we know it, is going to need to be consumed in the fire of love. That process is only going to happen in the very small details of our everyday life. In order to follow the Path where all the virtues—compassion, humility, kindness, generosity, and sympathy—come into play, one will need for them to become real in everyday existence through a complete transformation of one's reaction to the world and the immediate circumstances of one's life. One does not go somewhere else to become "spiritual." The whole thing is right before us day to day and can be very

painful—but that type of pain is the highest blessing if we understand it correctly. God or Truth or Light, or whatever one wishes to call it, is hidden in the midst of life as it presents itself to us every day.

Baba Ji Summons Me to Discuss My Marriage “Plan”

Now comes the crux of the story. One day, perhaps two months after I told Lal about my great idea, a sevadar came to our room after lunch, informing me that Baba Ji wished for my presence in his room. Graham and I were once again at the ashram at the same time, and, as was his custom, Graham had passed into a deep sleep, as he usually did after our mid-day meal.

By this time in my relationship with Baba Ji, I had some awareness that a call to Baba Ji's presence might be for any number of reasons, including being confronted with some aspect of one's being that needed some work. In retrospect, such incidents were often humorous in nature, although being personally involved in the process was sometimes a bit rough.

So it was with some trepidation that I approached Baba Ji's room. I noticed on my way there that several cars were parked underneath the mango trees not far from our room. That in itself tipped me off that something out of the ordinary was happening, for, during the week, it was not common to see such a sight. Occasionally, some Satsangi from Bangalore might come out for one reason or another but seeing several cars was definitely not normal. Still, I did not have a clue of what was to take place (it is important to remember that I had long since forgotten about the marriage issue, and it had never come up again between Lal and myself since that day). When I entered the room, all was quiet. I looked at Baba Ji, who, as usual, was looking beautiful

but today had a rather stern aspect to his countenance. Then I looked around the room, as I was a bit puzzled. There, standing along the walls, were some of the prominent Bangalore Satsangis. With every moment, the bewilderment grew, for I sensed that, somehow, I was being called “on the carpet.” Then my gaze happened to alight on the face of Lal Mangaram—who was standing just to Baba Ji’s left. I still did not quite get it, but I was definitely feeling uneasy. I didn’t have to wait long to find out what was afoot.

Baba Ji opened the exchange with a direct question. He spoke in a very calm but powerful voice with a lot of pop in it, and when Baba Ji adopted this tone, one began to shiver to the core of one’s being. This is what he asked: “Christopher, have you come to India just to think about women?” I stood there stunned. Then in an instant, everything was clear. Lal had told Baba Ji about my idea to marry an Indian girl. Still, I was shocked and bewildered. I could not speak. “Well?” Baba Ji demanded. My blood froze at this point, along with my vocal cords. (Here, I hope the reader may be enjoying a cosmic chuckle at my expense.) Baba Ji awaited my answer, and the gaze of everyone in the room was fixed on me. There I was dressed in my khaki work shorts, a simple cotton shirt, disheveled hair, bare feet, and a mind gone blank.

Finally, I managed to stutter that it was just an idea that was in my mind when I arrived at the ashram but that I had totally forgotten about it. This excuse did not impress Baba Ji at all. His penetrating gaze upon me deepened, and when Baba Ji looked into one’s heart in that way, it had a very pronounced effect. Baba Ji had, as mentioned in his life story, been a Master of kundalini and even to see a picture of his eyes at that time, of which there are several, is to know what pure Power is.



Baba Somanath Ji

On such occasions, his eyes would take on the brilliant intensity of the Mahayogi. He said, "Ok, so you have come to India to think about women, isn't that so?"

I became more confused with the repetition of his question. Baba Ji continued, "I don't think it is a good idea that you should wish to marry an Indian girl. I don't approve of it at all. But now I think you should go back to America and marry some nice girl there. Yes, I think that is what you should do. But then there is no need for you to come here to the ashram and do seva. You can stay over there, be happily married, meditate and follow all the things I have taught you about the proper way to conduct your life, but there is no reason to come here and live in the ashram."

Baba Ji Asks Graham About Marriage

By now, all my fuses were totally blown. I tried to reply, but Baba Ji dismissed me and told me to go get Graham and send him up to his room. What could I do? I was totally disoriented and shaken. My whole world had been turned upside down as I staggered off to wake up my good friend, Graham. And from past experience, I knew this was to be no small feat. Graham was in a deep sleep. No normal means were of any use in getting him to wake him up. Even if one spoke very loudly, it was not enough to rouse him from his nap. Instead, I had to hammer on him with my fists until, finally, one eye popped open and then the other.

"Baba Ji wants to see you." I stammered. "Now."

"Baba Ji wants to see me? Why?"

"I don't know; just go find out," I replied because, in fact, I did not know.

Now, please realize that I had to the best of my knowledge, never discussed the marriage issue with Graham. I think Graham came some weeks after I had reached the ashram, and by that time, the question of marriage had disappeared from my consciousness.

In my already addled state of mind, I followed Graham up the stairs as he meandered into Baba Ji's room. Past experience had taught me that it took a full 15 minutes for Graham to be cognizant of his surroundings after waking up from a nap. I watched Graham go into the room and approach Baba Ji while everyone stood around the walls looking on. I stayed on the balcony outside the room, simply observing what was unfolding. I was so distraught that I did not know what else to do.

Graham halted a few feet from Baba Ji, and, when he stopped, Baba Ji said to him, "Graham Ji, do you want to get married?" Graham stood there for a brief moment registering that Baba Ji was talking to him, and then he said, "Are you kidding? Me? Get married? Not possible. You are all that I have in life. I have nothing else."

Baba Ji smiled broadly at his reply and then said, addressing all the Satsangi's standing in the room, "Just see what a clear mind Graham has. He has got the real spirit of devotion. And just see what a confused person Christopher is. He could not even answer a simple question." He had a few more comments on the subject, which I cannot recall. Graham went and bowed down before Baba Ji, got a nice handful of prashad and departed, beaming from ear to ear.

Damu Intercedes for Me with Baba Ji

After all this took place, I went to my room and wept. Not a very mature thing to do, but I was not very mature then (nor even now truly speaking). In my despair, I tried to think of what to do. Now, as fortune would have it, my dearest friend Damu, the person at whose house I was visiting when this idea first took root in my mind, had come to the ashram for the Diwali celebration.

After I got over the worst of the storm of tears, I went

and sought him out. I told him my plight. I asked would he kindly come with me up to Baba Ji's room and see if we could straighten things out. Damu, as always, was the essence of kindness and sweetness. He readily agreed to the proposal. Damu had been with Baba Ji for a long time and was, in fact, very close to him in a heartfelt way. I thought Damu's intercession might be helpful in softening Baba Ji's stance toward me. I was terribly afraid that he was going to send me back to America, then and there, which was unbearable for me.

That evening after Satsang, Damu and I went up to Baba Ji's room. If I thought Baba Ji might have softened his attitude toward me, then I can say for sure he was yet sterner when he saw me enter the room with Damu. I think it was Damu who suggested we sit down on the ground against the wall so we could relax and talk things over with Baba Ji. I could hardly "relax" since every nerve in my body was stressed out, but it was a lovely idea. Then I tried to explain to Baba Ji, as I had earlier, that it was all an innocent mistake. Baba Ji was not convinced that this was true. Then, in desperation, I said, "I will try to remain single."

That was it!!! Baba Ji became yet more stern and said, "Don't talk to me about trying. Trying doesn't mean anything. Trying is an empty word with no meaning. Either you are going to do something or not."

Jimmy the Watchdog Appears on the Scene

Then I stammered that I would remain single. Baba Ji was still not buying it and told me that I should think it over very carefully and then give him a firm decision about the course I wished to take.



Baba Somanath Ji with his good friend Jimmy

He said that both ways were equally fine; I could either go back to America and get married or stay in the ashram and do seva—that was totally up to me. I managed to tell him that I did not have anywhere else to go,

that life with him was the most precious thing to me. He quietly nodded and then something totally unexpected happened. Jimmy came bounding through the door!!! Jimmy was a dog who lived in the ashram, and he was a watchdog's watchdog. Anything that moved and breathed, except Baba Ji and one or two other people responsible for caring for him, were fit, in his mind, only for having their jugular veins ripped out.

Now generally, Jimmy was kept on a long chain, so he had space to wander about. And those who cared for him would also take him for walks about the ashram. But by some unknown magic (or so it seemed to me), he would occasionally break loose from his chain, and when that happened, he would immediately bolt for Baba Ji's room. He would then rush through the door, run right up to Baba Ji and put his paws on Baba Ji's crossed legs. Baba Ji would then caress him and talk to him and give him some prashad to eat. By then, one of the people who took care of him would run in the room, put his chain back on and return him to his normal place of residence.

Well, this was one of the times when he got loose. Damu and I were still sitting on the floor but getting ready to leave when Jimmy burst on the scene and ran up to Baba Ji as usual. After he did this, he cast a glance over his shoulder and saw us sitting there. This did not bode well. It got his hackles up, and he charged towards me with jaws wide open. Terrified, I backed up against the wall as far as I could, fearing my doom was at hand. Then Baba Ji called him off, and one of the trainers arrived to take him back to his place. Damu and I then crept quietly out of the room, thus ending another powerful (for me at least) event in life with Baba Ji.

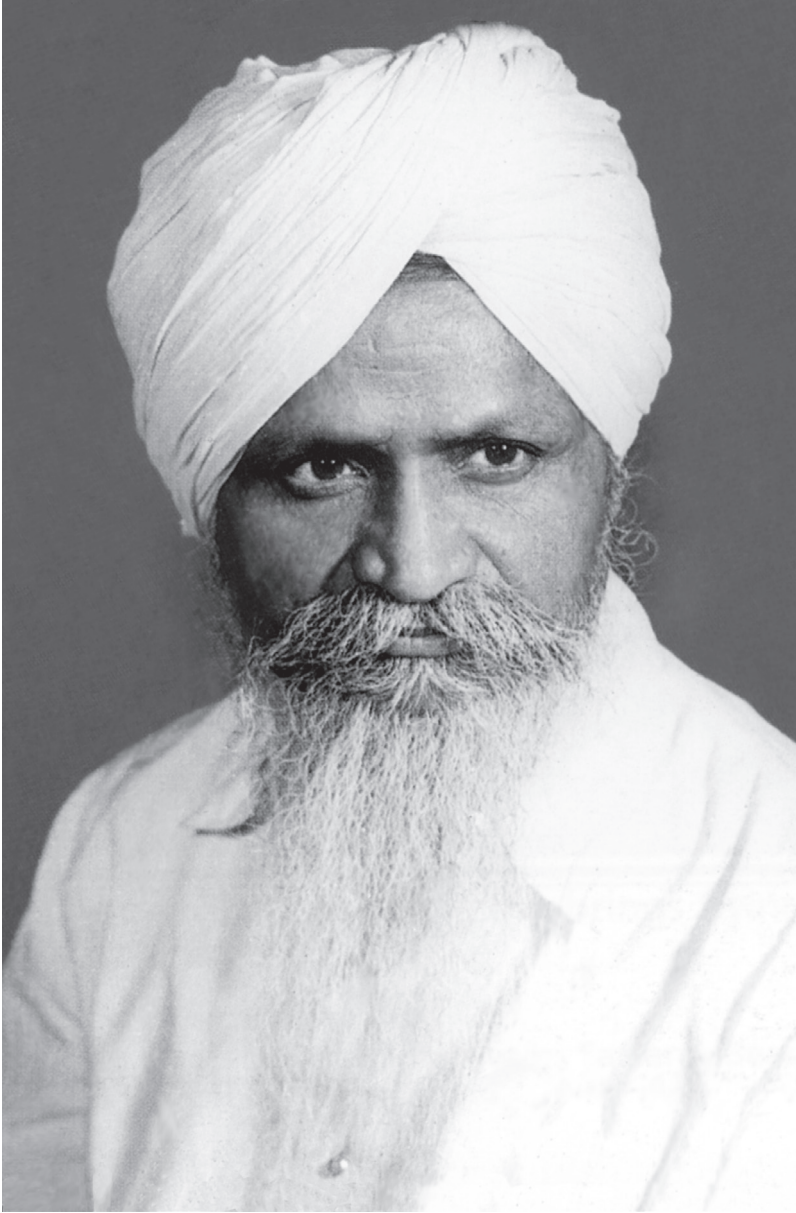
I cannot tell in words the real meaning of such events. In fact, I think my personal feelings are often an unreliable guide. What the full significance was I also do

not know other than it has drawn my heart deeper and deeper into a grateful love for this Wonderful Being who was and is still my Best Friend.

The Ways of the Saints Are Unique

I do understand a few things about that time now, but certainly, there is much that I do not perceive. First and foremost, a Mystic Adept is not far removed from us. Such great souls know every part of who and what we are and also know the exact means of helping us become free of the things that bind us to the world. If we look for some pattern in their outer behavior that applies to one and all, then one may not find it, for it changes as the situation demands. It can be sweet and gentle, or it can be super stern and challenging and then everything in between, but whatever the externals of the interactions are, there is some great good behind it—something that is going to prove immensely helpful in developing love and compassion for oneself and the entire creation.

At this juncture, Baba Somanath Ji's mission on this earth was drawing to a close, and he wished for me to take full advantage of the remaining time with him on the physical plane. In every way, the Saints are always striving to open our hearts to the gentle influences of compassion, love, forgiveness and kindness so that we can become fit to tread the Inner Way back to our Real Home. Baba Ji knew very well that the time would come when I would need to marry because I do not have the temperament to lead a solitary life. This, in fact, forms a part of another very funny story that I may write about some other time, and which happened many years later when, with the grace of Baba Somanath and Sant Ajaib Singh Ji, Suzanne and I got married during Sant Ji's Bombay program.



Baba Somanath Ji



Kengeri Collage, 1972-1974

Return to the USA and a Hindi Course at UC Berkeley

When I left India in December of 1971, I returned to America to stay with my mom. I lived a quiet life doing research on the spiritual traditions of India while helping mom with household chores, including taking care of her garden, shopping, and cleaning. It was a nice experience for us both. She was happy that I was home. I was happy to be with her and have a place to study and prepare myself for my next trip to India. I still had another couple of years to go at Friends World College, and, as I was able to devise my own course of study, I could do so in Davis, where she lived. I had access to the fine library at UC Davis for research purposes, and I had a nice home environment to meditate and study in.

In the summer of 1972, Paul Young and I took an intensive Hindi conversation class at UC Berkeley that was to prove a critical part of my India experience and continues to have many applications to this day. I was fortunate to have as an instructor Mrs. Usha Jain, one of the finest teachers of Hindi imaginable. When I first stayed with Baba Ji, he one day told me that I should learn Hindi since it would be an invaluable aid to me in the years to come and would allow me, in the future, to

travel throughout India in a more understanding way. Little did I realize the importance of what he said, but indeed his words came true, as I later had the opportunity to spend a good deal of time with Sant Ajaib Singh Ji in Rajasthan and enjoy the company of Sant Sadhu Ram Ji as well. Neither spoke English, but both understood Hindi. Now also, Hindi is a precious gift as Suzanne and I can directly converse with Baba Ram Singh Ji in his own mother tongue. Furthermore, Suzanne and I started White Lotus Aromatics in 1998, and as part of that enterprise, I traveled many times throughout the length and breadth of India to meet with farmers, distillers, and scientists where Hindi played a key role in my understanding of the ancient and modern dimensions of India's fragrance industry.

But the main purpose for understanding Hindi was to be found in my deepening relationship with Baba Ji and his Sangat. Even though there were few Hindi speakers in the Kengeri ashram itself, I could still talk with Baba Ji directly, and when I traveled with him to Bombay, I could then immerse myself in Hindi completely. Also, on Sundays at Sawan Durbar Ashram, there were two afternoon Satsangs, one in Hindi and one in Kannada, and, with the passage of time, I began to directly understand and appreciate the beauty of the Satsangs given in Hindi. Towards the end of Baba Ji's life, I was even allowed to do some translation of Baba Ji's taped Hindi Satsangs for the Westerners living in the ashram. It was at that time that the longing to do a careful translation of his Satsangs arose, but that was to remain an unfulfilled desire until 2019 when Suzanne and I met Baba Ram Singh Ji, and he gave permission for us to commence this work. It was a fortunate thing that it waited so long because, over time, our understanding of the language had

deepened so that we were able to pursue this work in a more accurate way.

Harvest Season at the Ashram

When I returned to the ashram in August of 1972, I was coming with a much better understanding of what kind of life to expect in terms of the daily routine. My health had improved since the first trip, and I was more prepared to engage in the agricultural life of the community. I was no longer as shy as before, and I had realized that I was not quite the spiritual stalwart I imagined myself to be.



Sevadars during harvest season

Graham Gibson, with whom I was initiated, had already returned to the ashram a month or so before I arrived. Life in the ashram was beginning to hum, as the harvest season was fast approaching. The rains had been good, and the crops of ragi, corn, and peanuts were robust. The following is a description of what the harvest season was like.

During the fall season, we would bring in the harvested grains, legumes, etc., from the fields and spread them out on the large open verandas to dry in the heat of the sun. At the end of each day, the ragi, corn or peanuts, etc., would be stacked up and covered with tarps to protect them from rain or heavy morning dew.

Once the sun rose, the various grains, would again be spread out to dry. One of the great challenges of that time was when the monsoon clouds would swiftly approach during the daylight hours. Bangalore's rainy season was considerably longer than other parts of India as it caught the tail end of both the Western and Eastern monsoon rains. The season was not as intense, in terms of the amount of rain, as was found in other parts of the country, but it spanned almost five to six months and could happen just about any time, even in November and December.

Tall, billowing storm clouds would suddenly appear on the horizon and then, with incredible swiftness, rush towards Kengeri and the surrounding area. Normally, in the evening, it took about 45 minutes to an hour to collect all the grains and get them underneath tarps, but when the clouds appeared during the day, everyone in the ashram would converge on the verandas and, with special wide boards to which ropes were attached, would pull the drying crops into several large heaps. Baba Ji would often come down at such times to inspire us on to new heights of intense activity to be sure everything got safely under cover. It was a thrilling experience to be amidst this concentrated swirl of activity as the clouds approached with lightning flashing and thunder rolling over the countryside. With Baba Ji standing in our midst, an elderly Sage in simple white clothes, directing the movement of the grains into the various piles—well,

it was a grand experience of the life. And often, just as we were pulling the last tarps over the piles of grain, the rain would be upon us.

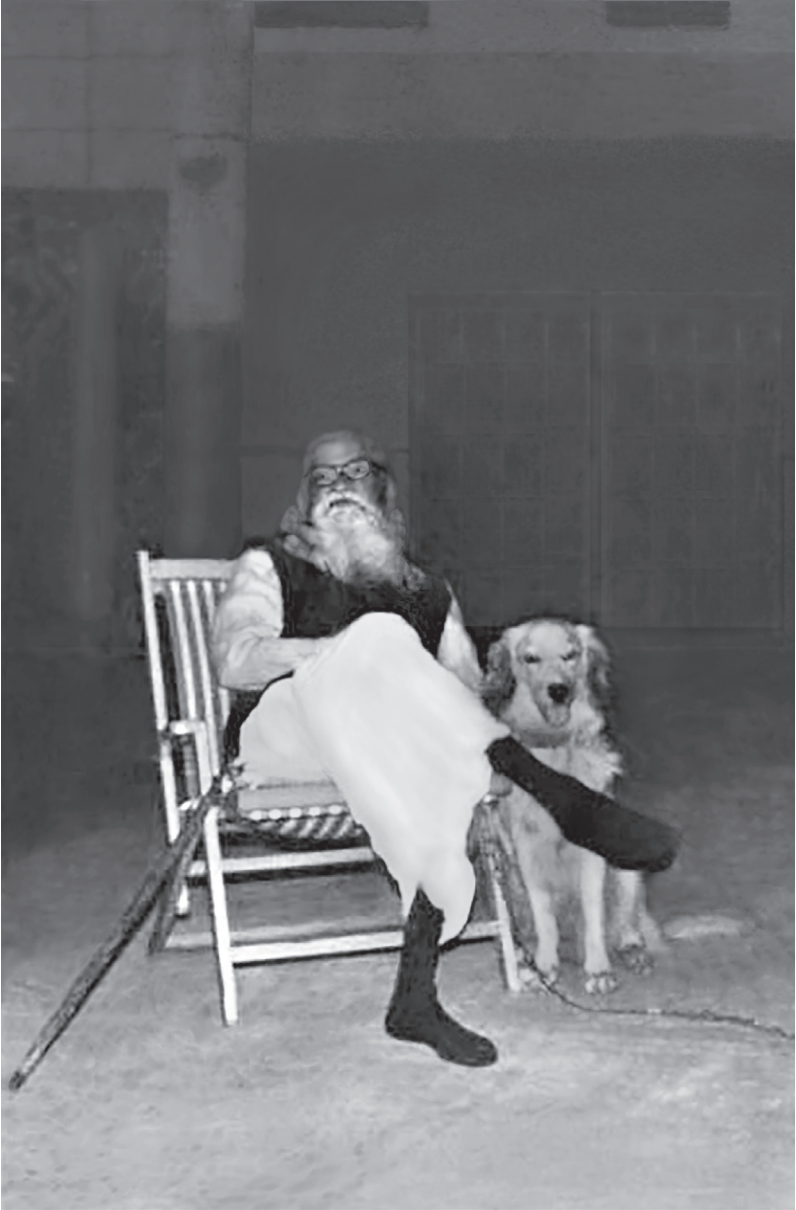
Evenings Sitting with Baba Ji Under the Stars

In the evenings after Satsang, the whole community would sit out on the veranda to shuck corn or pull peanut clusters from the mother-plant, which was harvested whole. As we were in the subtropics and Bangalore was at a higher elevation than most parts of the Deccan Plateau, the evenings were intoxicating—with gentle, cool, fresh breezes wafting all about us while we worked (for some odd reason, the mosquitoes that were found in abundance in the rooms after nightfall did not seem to trouble one when outdoors). The sky overhead would be luminous with stars, and sometimes Baba Ji would come and sit with us with a gas lantern by his chair. It was a very relaxed atmosphere, and he would always joke with the sevadars about one thing or another. There were times when someone would lead one of the sacred songs of the Saints, but often there would simply be silence. Every possible variation of these evening community work parties was wonderful, and this type of activity would, during the harvest season, go on every night for four to six weeks straight.

At the end of the sessions, Baba Ji would call us up to his room and distribute big paper cones of puffed rice and roasted peanuts. When one lives simply, as we did, such events are filled with a heart-touching beauty.

Stacking the Gunny Sacks Filled with Grain

The concluding event for this season came when the grains, like corn and ragi, had been dried and winnowed and were ready for putting into gunny sacks and stored



Baba Somanath Ji supervising evening seva

in the godown. Then the energy level would really start to amp up. First, the bags would be filled. The standard bags, as they were packed at that time, weighed approximately 100 kilos or 220 lbs. When the bag was filled, it would then be stitched at the top with strong twine. Several big iron drums would be standing on the veranda, and teams of people, two people for each team, would join arms to make a sort of cradle into which the bag was tipped and then lifted up onto the barrel. One person would then get underneath the bag, and it would be tipped forward so that it rested right on the person's shoulders and back. They carried the bags 50 yards or so to the godown (there was at the time a giant of a man, Hanuman Ji, who worked with us and who would literally run with the 220 lbs. on his shoulders). At the godown, another team of people was waiting to stack the grain sacks up to the ceiling in eight-foot-high piles. Once the project got underway, it became more and more intense, for one had to fully focus one's attention on each task. The weight one was dealing with was significant, and everything had to be done by hand. Sweat would be flowing in abundance, and there was a general sense of excitement as 100 or more grain sacks were brought in and stacked one by one. All the while, Baba Ji would stand in the godown, encouraging us as we worked.

The Blessings and Lessons of Seva

All such everyday activities, while not particularly exciting to outer eyes, were far from ordinary for those of us who lived there. It was, in fact, the field on which Baba Ji chose to bring the practical aspects of the teachings into our lives. It showed me how important it was to have some common work to share with others, and how, at that time, one had to set aside one's individual

needs and concerns and petty likes and dislikes for a larger good; for me, it was a real gift to be able to share in that experience. There was another special blessing—this type of practical work demanded one's full concentration. There was no opportunity to get lost in the complexities of the mind and intellect; and, in that simple, focused awareness, the teachings of the Saints on the real values of life became clearer—very simple, very direct, very down to earth, yet at the same time uplifting.

The Sickness that Commenced with the Rising Sun

One time, when Paul Young and I were together at the ashram, we were given the responsibility, along with several others, of guarding the cornfields from the flocks of invading green parrots who considered corn on the cob a great delicacy. That year, Baba Ji had decided to try some new varieties of corn that promised to give a big yield; and, in fact, the crop grew abundantly since we had timely rains that kept the moisture in the soil at an optimum level for rapid growth. Approximately 20 acres were planted in this golden grain. In order to protect it from the parrots, several platforms were built throughout the area that rose above the maturing crop. Those of us assigned the duty of keeping the damage of the parrots to a minimum would ascend our respective platforms just before daybreak, and, armed with pans to bang on with a metal ladle, firecrackers and cherry bombs to explode, and mirrors to flashlight into the parrots' eyes, we would constantly scan the skies awaiting their swift and sure advent.

But after a few days of this new, early-morning routine, something strange began to happen to me. Just as the sun rose, when its first rays illuminated the landscape, I was overcome by a fierce headache. I could barely manage

to get down from the platform and make it back to my room. Then, for the next nine or ten hours, it felt as if someone was plunging a dagger into my brain over and over again. I lay on the floor twisting and turning, moaning and crying. I know this may sound dramatic and perhaps exaggerated, but the fact is that I cannot begin to do justice in writing to the intensity of the suffering I was going through. When Paul came in from the fields at 9:00 a.m., he found me in this condition and said my face was very red and puckered up. He had good, practical, holistic health knowledge and sought for some remedy, but nothing was of any avail.

On the evening of the first day, the malady subsided, and so I thought that perhaps it was just a passing phenomenon that would not occur again. The next morning, I went out to my platform above the sea of corn, not giving much thought as to what had transpired the day before. But it proved not to be a one-day occurrence, for each morning, with the rising of the sun, the very same pattern emerged once again. Then every day, toward evening, the pain would totally subside, almost coinciding with the setting of the sun, and I would return to normal consciousness, totally exhausted from the process that had taken place. For seven or eight days in succession, I went through the same experience.

Finally, one morning while in the grips of this mysterious illness and the pain it was causing, I went to Baba Ji's room and, with Pushpamma doing the translation, related my tale of woe. I concluded by telling Baba Ji that this malady was so debilitating that I was unable to engage in seva.

His reply and the events that followed reveal something about the unique way a Saint addresses the specific problems of those who come in his company. If

one thinks that there is any particular type of behavior the Saints will reveal in any specific situation, then, at least in my experience, they may wish to readjust their thinking. Be that as it may, Baba Ji displayed very little external sympathy for my condition. He sternly told me, "Christopher, there is no place in the ashram for one who cannot do seva." I was already an emotional basket case, so all I could do was stand there in stunned silence.

Then, within moments of Baba Ji's making this pronouncement, the sound of a car approaching Baba Ji's bungalow could be heard. Yes, it truly happened, exactly like I am describing. Perhaps hard to believe, but it is so. Baba Ji said, "Now go downstairs and get in the car. Mr. Menon will take you to the shop of the Mangaram family (they were the prosperous Sindhi initiates of Baba Ji, who I mentioned earlier in this account). When you get there, have Mr. Mangaram take you to the dispensary of a homeopathic physician we are familiar with. Tell him your problem. I think he will be able to help you."

So off we went, I sitting in the backseat absorbed in my illness and Mr. Menon driving me to Mr. Mangaram's shop. (Mr. Menon was the same person who was there at the ashram the day I first came into Baba Ji's company.) How he happened to drive up to the ashram precisely at the time I was talking with Baba Ji, I never found out.

Arriving in Bangalore, everything unfolded just as Baba Ji had said. When I entered the dispensary of the homeopathic doctor, he looked at me, chuckled and exclaimed, "I know what is wrong with you. Sit down and relax. I will be back in a few minutes." He went into his compounding room in the back of the shop and emerged shortly thereafter with a bottle of blue liquid in his hand. He gave me a dose of it right away and said, "This should be sufficient to cure you, but here are a few more doses

to take for the next day or two that will protect you from further occurrences.” I took the dose as requested, and within ten minutes, the pain was totally removed—I mean totally—not a trace remaining. And after that day, the problem never manifested again.



The author at the ashram, seated on a heap of ragi.

After I returned to the ashram, Baba Ji never referred to this incident, and I also didn't bring it up. I was simply grateful to be on my feet and participating in the activities of ashram life, so that I soon forgot that I had ever been through such turmoil, but in later years, I have remembered that time repeatedly. It may not be possible to comprehend what was actually taking place. It was not a small thing for me to endure that type of pain—truly like having someone plunge a knife into one's

brain over and over again for hours on end—and then to have the whole episode suddenly alleviated in such a curious way. But it did open my eyes to the fact that Baba Ji had his own special way of dealing with the karmic complexities of each person that came to him. When we look at ourselves honestly and ponder the mystery of our life even a little bit, we cannot help but conclude that we know very little about the whys and wherefores of the events that unfold each day of our lives. Those who go very deep within can see the background, the very source of each incident, and what they themselves have done that is producing the external events that are actually taking place, but that type of knowledge was certainly not in the sphere of my experience.

In *The Book of Mirdad* by Mikhail Naimy, there is a chapter entitled: “The Holy Omniwill: Why Things Happen as They Do and When They Do.” The portion of that chapter reproduced here describes, as well as can be explained in words, what lies behind each and every event of our lives:

MIRDAD: How strange that you, children of Time and Space, are not aware as yet that Time is the universal memory inscribed on the tablets of Space.

If you, being limited by the senses, can yet remember certain things between your birth and death, how much more so can Time, which was before your birth and lasts indefinitely beyond your death?

I say to you that Time remembers everything at all—not only that of which you have a vivid recollection, but that as well of which you are entirely unaware.

For there is no oblivion in Time; no, not of the slightest movement, or breath, or whim. And all that is kept in

the memory of Time is graven deep upon the things in Space.

The very earth you tread; the very air you breathe, the very houses you dwell in can readily reveal to you the most minute details in the records of your lives, past, present and to come, had you but the stamina to read and the keenness to grasp the meaning.

In life as in death; on the Earth as beyond the Earth, you never are alone, but are in constant company of things and beings, which have their share in your life and death, as you have yours in their life and death. As you partake of them, so they partake of you; and as you seek them, so they seek you.

Man has a will in everything; and each thing has a will in Man. The interchange goes on uninterrupted. But a woefully bad accountant is the failing memory of Man. Not so the faultless memory of Time which keeps a most exact account of Man's relations with his fellow-men and all the other beings in the Universe, and forces him to settle his accounts each twinkling of an eye, life after life and death after death.

A thunderbolt would never strike a house except that house draw it to itself. The house is as much to account for its ruin as the bolt.

A bull would never gore a man except that man invites the bull to gore him. And verily that man is more to answer for his blood than is the bull.

The murdered whets the dagger of the murderer, and both deliver the fatal thrust. The robbed directs the movements of the robber, and both commit the robbery.

Aye, Man invites his own calamities and then protests against the irksome guests, having forgotten how and when and where he penned and sent out the invitations.

But time does not forget; and Time delivers in due season each invitation to the right address, and Time conducts each invitee to the dwelling of the host.¹

— *The Book of Mirdad*

It is from this vantage point that the Saint sees the disciples' entire karmic background, and since he has to liberate those who come to him from the tangle of their own actions and move them along the Path that leads to freedom, he takes an active role in the process, often behaving in mysterious ways. But when one undergoes such experiences in the company of a Saint like Baba Ji, the heart of that person can never forget what happened, and, more importantly, they remember forever how tenderly they were cared for in an inner way. The impression of such events is lifelong and creates a sort of bond of spiritual friendship that transcends time and space—a friendship that builds an inner confidence that in life, as well as in death, one has a true Protector who will be with one forever until the soul returns to the True Home.

Giving Baba Ji My Money and His Response

One day, at a time when I was living in the ashram with no other Westerners present, I devised a scheme, which I thought would allow me to stay in India for the rest of my life. It occurred to me that if I gave Baba Ji all my money, I would have no funds to return to the USA, and he would have to let me stay permanently. Practically speaking, it was never a real possibility because the Indian government seldom grants citizenship or permanent residency to people of other nationalities. But I was passing through one of my emotional rocket

1 Mikhail Naimy. *The Book of Mirdad: A Lighthouse and a Haven* (London: Stuart & Watkins, 1962) p. 99-102.

rides that occurred while living in India, and I had a remarkable capacity to imagine all sorts of things that were in direct conflict with reality.



Baba Somanath with Naiyar Ji at the Kengeri ashram

I had heard Baba Ji say in Satsang that, in order to progress spiritually, one should completely surrender body, mind and wealth to the Guru, but I had little grasp of the depths of what he was saying. The inner meaning was far deeper than I could possibly understand; there are probably few who can. Nevertheless, at my level, I thought I could accomplish two things at once: firstly, I could stay with him for the rest of my life; and, secondly, I could obey Baba Ji's instructions from the Satsang to surrender everything to the Guru. My intention was definitely sincere, but my plan was lacking in sound thinking and the realistic ability to carry it out. The execution of my plan was further complicated by one more

interesting fact—I was very fond of Indian glucose biscuits, which I consumed in large quantities, enjoying them with morning and afternoon tea.

Therefore, when I piled up my rather meager amount of money to take to Baba Ji, I also set aside a separate share for biscuits, somehow thinking that the biscuits were outside the domain of surrendering body, mind, and wealth to the Guru. It is not that the intent was insincere; it was very sincere. But it takes a long time and a lot of life experience to fathom what the Saint is talking about and then, having understood it, to really be able to follow his instructions.

My perception of Baba Ji's words was filtered through my unsteady emotions and volatile mental framework, with the result that my actions were not always strictly in keeping with the Guru's real meaning. But one thing is sure, a Sainly Soul appreciates even such imperfect strivings, and they also like to see a person trying to apply the teachings to their lives. If we are making efforts, then the Saints can point out our shortcomings and, through their infinite grace, help us to overcome any obstacles in the way and move forward a bit on the Path.

So, I neatly packed up all my funds in an envelope and headed off to Baba Ji's room. It was mid-morning, an hour or so after breakfast. Baba Ji's door was open, so I quietly entered the room. It was such a lovely scene: the gentle cooing of the pigeons, the morning light filtering in through the translucent windows, the soft pastel green of the walls, the small clock steadily ticking off the time, Baba Ji's wooden bed in a nook, neatly arranged with the mosquito curtain tucked back up over the supporting framework and an elegant oriental carpet running the length of the room. Baba Ji was seated in his armchair, cross-legged with just a lungi and light pastel

blue sweater adorning his frame, his elegant silken-white beard flowing down his chest, his long hair tied in a knot on top of his head and—most noticeable of all—his eyes very deep and fathomless, calm and compassionate but also alert to the needs of anyone who might come to talk with him for any reason.

He looked at me as if to say, “Well, Christopher, why have you come?” He called for Pushpamma to translate whatever it was I wished to say. When she arrived, I asked her to tell Baba Ji that I wished to donate all (well, almost all; I made no mention, of course, of the reserve biscuit fund I had secreted away) that I had in his service. I then handed him the money in an envelope.

He was, at this time, in a very serious mood. He did not laugh at my offering but took it at face value. He sat quietly for perhaps two or three minutes with eyes closed. When he opened them, they were gleaming pools of liquid light. He then motioned for me to please come forward to receive back the money I had given him. Through Pushpamma, he said, “Dear Christopher, I do not want your money. I want your heart.” That was all. I stood there stunned; all my plans had fallen to pieces. I walked quickly back to my room, closed the door and wept and wept and wept. But, in the end, quiet came within my heart. I realized, at some level, that even though I was far from the inner goal, still I was so fortunate, so very fortunate, to have such a Spiritual Mentor who cared for me in every way, not only inwardly but outwardly as well.

The Story of Complaining About the Food

Food often plays an important role in our attitude toward life. In the ashram, since we were an agricultural community and consumed what we grew, food was

naturally of great importance. The people who did the majority of the work were simple farmers from Andhra Pradesh, and they were used to a grain-based diet that centered on rice and ragi (a type of millet grown in South India, especially in Karnataka and Andhra). Though short in stature and lithe in physique, they were capable of consuming large amounts of these two items, so long as they were liberally spiced with rasam, a flavorful soup in which garlic and red chili peppers played a major role. It was very basic fare, but they thrived on it. Coming from the West, I could not digest it very well, but the farmers of the South had been eating this type of diet for generations, and it suited them beautifully. Most of them could put away a thali heaped high with the above items at each meal without any problem. Many even required refills. It seemed almost impossible considering that the average weight of these dear souls must have been around 130 lbs. They were not so keen on large amounts of vegetables or what might be considered tasty dishes, but if there was any shortage in their basic fare or if some mistake was made in its preparation, then it could cause a problem, which is what this story is about.

For a two-week period each year, most of the sevadars living in the ashram were sent off to clean the canal that provided the dry-season water that irrigated the crops. We had several wells that supplied a good deal of water, but it was not enough to irrigate all the fields. That seva was a tough one since the working conditions were very damp and smelly. The water itself was carrying the pollutants of certain Bangalore enterprises that paid little heed to the long-term effects of their questionable manufacturing processes. Further, the hours were long, and most of the people working on the project would spend the night resting beside the canal so that work could

commence with the break of day.

One of my jobs was to periodically transport the morning, afternoon or evening meals to those working on the canal-cleaning project, carrying the food out in buckets to feed those sevadars engaged in this hard and heavy work. I would dutifully trek the two miles out to the worksite, drop off the covered stainless-steel buckets, and then return to the ashram to attend to whatever duties might come up in the everyday life of the community.

On one particular day, as it turned out, there had been some mistake in how the grains were prepared, rendering one of the dishes almost inedible. When the food was served and the mistake was discovered, it produced a heated reaction on the part of some of the people working on the project. A couple of sevadars, who had come with me to deliver the food and who had stayed behind to serve it, received the full brunt of the verbal tirade.

When the sevadars returned to the ashram with the empty vessels, they told the ladies cooking the food of the comments made about their preparations. There is nothing more hurtful to a cook than to hear that the food they have prepared has become the source of discontent and unrest. Soon, Baba Ji became acquainted with what had happened. Experience had by this time taught me that harsh words spoken at the ashram often became the source of some important lesson, though in that we all needed to learn. In this instance, though, I was blissfully unaware of the problem unfolding.

As the day proceeded towards evening, the atmosphere in the ashram began to get tense. There was an uneasy feeling that a storm that was going to prove uncomfortable for us all was drawing near. Baba Ji sent word to all the sevadars to return to the ashram that

evening, as he requested their presence in his room at around 6:30. This was an unusual thing to happen, so it was evident that something of importance was about to reveal itself.

I noticed all the sevadars filing up to Baba Ji's room at the appointed time. Everyone was quiet, absorbed, and thoughtful. I also slipped into the room, although I was not directly involved in what had happened and was only peripherally aware that some of the sevadars had vented their anger at the poorly prepared food.

When I entered the room, everybody was quiet and tense. Pin-drop silence prevailed. Then Baba Ji asked, "OK, let us hear from those who registered the complaint. I would myself like to hear from those directly involved in what happened." A couple of sevadars stepped forward and told Baba Ji about the problem with the food; they were upset about the carelessness of the cooks in sending something to them that they could barely eat. There was definitely a note of righteous indignation in their voices, and it appeared that, for the most part, they were speaking on behalf of all assembled.

Baba Ji was silent for some time. Then he began to speak in a measured but stern voice. He said that perhaps everyone present had not grasped the meaning of having such a place like the ashram in which to live and work. (There is, unfortunately, no way for me to capture the power that was contained in his simple but incisive words—suffice it to say that with each word uttered, the atmosphere became more and more charged). He said that the whole purpose of being together like this was to learn to live in love and harmony, which meant to practically incorporate the life-illuminating qualities of forgiveness, forbearance, contentment, simplicity, and kindness. He reminded us that we had been attending

Satsang for many days and, in most cases, for many years. He was sad to note that it seemed we had given his teachings little consideration in terms of molding our day-to-day behavior according to the principles of Sant Mat. Rather, it appeared that each person was intent on remaining trapped in a world of personal grievance and petty squabbling.

He then stated flatly that the purpose for which he brought the ashram into existence had not succeeded and that he had now decided to close the ashram down and return to his life as a wandering sadhu. In his metal trunk, he still had the loincloth and few belongings that were his in that earlier era. He had been a free man when living in that most basic of ways, and he would be glad to be free of the responsibility of dealing with the complexities of ashram life.

Then Pushpamma, the lady who served Baba Ji in his elder years, stepped forward in the room and began speaking. I had never seen her in that mood before. She was like a mother to me, very loving, very soft and gentle, always doing whatever she could to see that I was cared for as much as she could manage. And she extended the same solicitude to everyone in the ashram, as time and occasion permitted.

But at this moment, she raised a powerful, emotion-laden voice, admonishing all those gathered there to try to grasp what Baba Ji had been through in his own search for Truth. At that time, there was no question of him having regular food to eat. He would not lower himself to begging for food as he traveled through India in search of a Godman who could open up the inner way for him. He would only accept food if someone, of their own accord, offered him something to eat. As a result, there was even a period of almost six months when he

subsisted only on dry flour and water. Where was the question of complaining that the food was not prepared to his liking? Sometimes he would go hungry for days. Having spoken her mind to the assembly, she stepped back and became silent.

By this time, everyone was feeling a bit sheepish and, more than that, flat out scared that Baba Ji, who was the life and support of the ashram community, might be thinking of leaving us. We were all full of countless faults, but all of us felt deep love and devotion towards Baba Somanath Ji, and we were aware that in his heart dwelled something very precious beyond comprehension. Even though we did not understand him, we knew that he was our only hope. He possessed a dignity and inner majesty that radiated through everything that he did, and although we could not fathom the depth of his words, yet we could not help but love him with a deep inner reverence.

Then the tension broke. The two sevadars who were at the core of this disturbance quietly stepped forward, approached Baba Ji, bowed before him and quietly asked his forgiveness, requesting him, on behalf of everyone there, to please not abandon us—as he was the very life and spirit of the community. Baba Ji, in turn, accepted the apology and gently requested that each of us should strive with a sincere heart to love and appreciate each other and if some mistake was made to practice forgiveness and forbearance. Thus, ended another of the memorable teaching episodes in our life with him.

The Consequences of Injuring the Feelings of Others

As mentioned at the beginning of the section, when I returned to the ashram in 1972, Graham Gibson had already arrived. Having Graham there was a huge blessing

in my life. We had spent only a few short weeks together on the first trip to India in 1971, but it was enough to create a deep bond of friendship between us that continued through the years of living with Baba Ji and beyond.

On a personality level, we were quite different. Graham had a more gregarious nature than I did. The people of South India dearly loved him for his warm, engaging, sometimes rather zany personality that somehow connected with the hearts of the simple country ashram residents. I was, in many ways, more reserved and serious. (I was just as zany as Graham but in a different way). I learned a great deal from Graham because his devotion to Baba Ji was far more heart-felt than mine. Because of being with him under many different circumstances, I too was able to learn something of what it was to love the Master in such a warm way. There are many wonderful things I could say about Graham, a few which will naturally be described in future ashram incidents but the one to be related here is very meaningful and may prove helpful for others to know about.

We shared a room at the ashram, and it so happened that one day the room that was adjacent to ours, in which some ashram grain provisions had been stored, was emptied out, and the thought came in my mind that if I moved into it, I could have more solitude. This craving for solitude has been with me through most of my adult life, and it once again re-emerged when the room became vacant. Part of that desire to have my own space was that I was not used to talking as much as Graham liked to talk. I, unfortunately, did not understand what it meant for him to have a friend to confide in. He was certainly that friend to me, a really good friend, but my level of development in that way was far behind his.

So, without further ado, I shifted my bed into the next

room, not at all realizing how it might affect Graham—and the impact on him was devastating from an emotional standpoint. Almost immediately after I moved my things, Graham disappeared from the ashram. I really did not have a clue of what was going on, not an inkling of the consequence of my actions. I definitely had this idea that it was a good thing I was doing because I could “meditate” more and remain in silence. My attitude was based on what I considered a correct perception of what a real devotee should be like.

The thing is that one can almost always justify whatever behavior one adopts and even point to certain things that Saints and Sages have said on the subject. I think it happens quite commonly, but at that point, I did not have much awareness of this because I was intent on becoming the “real deal” in terms of someone who was correctly following the instructions of the Master. Many times (and I can say this for sure in my own case), such type of behavior is simply a mask for not confronting the core dilemma of one’s own existence—that one is just a human being like everyone else with all the good and not so good parts of one’s makeup. In order to conceal the skeletons in one’s own mental closet, one erects a smokescreen of righteous behavior centered on a romanticized spiritual version of oneself that simply does not exist.

It is a deep subject, but in a very basic way, one can say that very few people who adopt any spiritual teaching want to go through the actual process of becoming a good human being. Ironically, there is no question of awakening to the more refined dimensions of the spiritual life while such a mentality persists. Going through the humanizing process is anything but pleasant because there is a whole storehouse of various forms of greed,

anger, jealousy, and all the things that we complex human beings are made of. Those negative qualities have to be purged by slow degrees in order to have genuine love for one and all—the very first step on the spiritual way. When we have traveled down the road of deep suffering arising from our own shortcomings, then out of that blossoms forgiveness, kindness, and sensitivity not just for humans but for all beings, i.e., birds, insects, animals, etc. This cannot happen by adopting the veneer of a “spiritual person” but must come out of genuine life experience. If anyone had told me that 50 years later, I would still be learning these simple life lessons, I would have thought they were crazy because at that time, I thought I already was a real disciple.

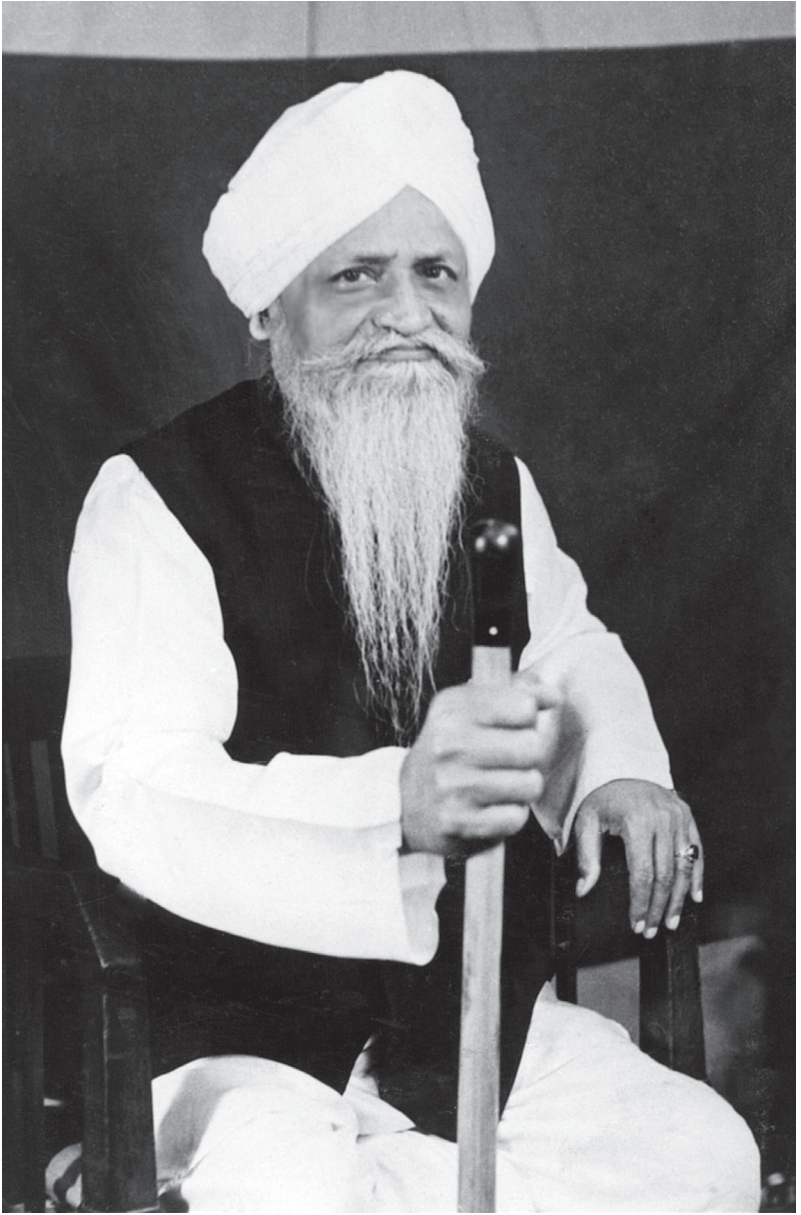
When Graham did not come to breakfast and then did not appear for lunch, Baba Ji himself enquired as to where he was. None of us knew because no one had seen him anywhere on the ashram grounds. Baba Ji then instructed the people living in the ashram to fan out into the surrounding countryside to see if they could locate him. This search went on for several hours before someone finally found Graham under a tree perhaps a mile or two from the ashram. He was sitting there wrapped in deep sorrow and despair, and it was apparently difficult to rouse him and bring him back to the ashram. When he did return, Baba Ji called both of us to his room, as he wanted to find out what was disturbing Graham so much. And I can say honestly that I did not have a clue myself. All I knew was that when Graham came back, there was a dense, dark cloud of despondency surrounding him.

I hope I can describe this event so the reader may have some sense of what it was like. I had been in a number of situations like this before where I was the person at

the center of the lesson that was about to unfold. And, in other cases, I had been present when it had happened, with others being the center. But each time it happened, I was deeply touched by the way Baba Ji became personally involved in moving the person or persons into a place where they could actually accept responsibility for their actions and, in doing so, begin to move forward on their spiritual journey. I cannot pretend to understand the real greatness of a Saint, but I can say that I have never experienced such love as was revealed at these times. These scenes were often quite difficult, intense, and explosive, and there was no predicting what Baba Ji would do, for it was all based on something only he could see. But whatever the outer manifestations were, it would always lead the participants to a deeper compassion for themselves and for others—an elementary but vital step on the inner journey.

First of all, Baba Ji said: “Graham, tell me, what is bothering you.” But Graham was so deep in his despair that he could not answer. Perhaps five or six times, Baba Ji repeated this question. He was loving but firm, and it was evident that he was staying with the process until Graham opened up. Finally, Graham began to mutter a few words. He could hardly speak. But gradually, with Baba Ji’s encouragement, the story came out. First, Graham explained that he was on heavy medication for asthma, which was a long-standing problem for him (and I, while knowing this, did not realize the impact that it had on the mind). He told Baba Ji how he and I had been such good friends, and then I had moved into the next room, leaving him by himself. It had hurt him so much that he simply fell into despair, for he had lost the only person he could talk to and chum around with.

As I was sitting in the room watching all this, just



Baba Somanath Ji

beginning to get a small glimpse of what was going on, a chink in the armor around my own human heart was gradually opening—not much, but some—and it has had long-term ramifications. The process of opening the heart to the sufferings of others is not, in most cases, accomplished in days, months, weeks, or even years, but if one is lucky, perhaps progress can be made over the course of a lifetime. There are, no doubt, people who come with a lot of spiritual background and, since they are bringing with them good impressions of many past lives, for them, the process may appear to happen faster. But in either case, a person with a heart that melts on seeing the sufferings of others is not far from the goal of awakening to a Higher Life.

I often noticed that an incredible thing happened when Baba Ji was talking with a particular person—everyone present at that time was also being given the lessons and support that they needed, even if they were not receptive to it or conscious of it at that moment. I wish I had the words to explain all the things that I feel in my heart about this experience, the immense gratitude to have seen and been part of such incidents, not because there is any significance in my own perceptions, but because I wish that others might feel the power and majesty and beauty of what it was like to be in the company of a Perfect Being with the human touch, One who had himself passed through all that we were going through and much more. It may seem strange to say this, but Baba Ji was the most human of human beings I have ever met. He was, of course, the embodiment of Divinity, dwelling far beyond the realm of human suffering, but he also felt for each of us in this really incredible human way, suffering with our suffering and supporting us on our Homeward quest.

Graham, at one point, began to weep, and Baba Ji sat quietly, waiting for him to bring out all that had happened and why he was feeling the way he was feeling. When all was said and done, only then did Baba Ji begin to speak. Neither at that time nor in the future did Baba Ji address my role in this whole thing. He did not reprimand me or anything of the sort. I was not ready for it at that moment, being only peripherally aware that I had done anything at all to contribute to what was unfolding. In fact, I remember thinking, at the time, that Graham was making quite a show out of nothing. There were some feelings of friendly concern but not at a very deep level.

Then Baba Ji explained to Graham some very important points because, while sympathizing with his suffering (and one could feel the room fairly exuding this tremendous love and compassion), he had to point out a higher way to him so that he would have before him the road that all souls need to travel in order to come out of the cycle of suffering, which is our inheritance as human beings enslaved by our mind's desires.

He said, "Dear Graham, first of all, I understand that these medications are very strong, and they do have an effect on the mind. I appreciate that." But then he explained what role the gift of initiation plays in this whole process of moving forward on the spiritual way and overcoming the tendencies of the mind that lead us into these dark sinkholes. He explained that he too had suffered many moments of dark despair in his search for Truth, to the extent that he could hardly bear to live, but finally after a long, long search, he came into the company of his Master, Baba Sawan Singh Ji and when he beheld him, he saw in him the Light of God that he had earnestly longed for all the years of his adult life. And

then, when he was initiated by him, he was given the key to the inner life, a treasure beyond all compare.

He then told Graham, “Dear Graham, you have been given the most priceless gem in all the universe. This gem of initiation is to be treasured above all other things—if you will develop the right understanding regarding this gift, then it will help you overcome all difficulties in life. This is the first step, but in order to truly appreciate what you have been given, you need to make meditation the center of your life because the method shown by Saints, if practiced correctly, will reveal to you the vast storehouse of love, mercy, and compassion that is in your heart but hidden behind the veil of the mind. It is only through meditation that you can pierce through this veil and uncover the fountain of joy within you.”

Baba Ji’s words captured the essence of everything that happened that day. It helped soften my heart a bit, and, as it turned out, I moved my bed back in the room with Graham. We picked up where we left off, good pals helping each other along the way. We were learning to laugh at our own follies while trying to apply ourselves to gradually improving through a meditation practice, which helped us to become more loving and kind to all because the inner and outer life are part of one and the same thing.

In concluding this story, I can say that the things that happened that day are still with me now; the lesson that he etched on my heart cannot be forgotten, but I cannot pretend to understand the depths of it. Still, one thing has become apparent—every time my mind has passed judgment on the behavior or actions of others, I must, in one way or another, go through that very experience myself so that I can see things from the other person’s perspective. But a wise person avoids criticism in the

first place. A wise person simply looks at things carefully and, instead of judging anything or anyone, realizes that at the core of every person is the same Light and Love; to believe and trust in that one simple reality is the height of wisdom and understanding, while to become involved in condemnation and criticism, which is always based on our own distorted angle of vision, is the height of folly. It makes our own journey longer, brings on unnecessary suffering, and causes a lot of disturbance in the environment as well.

I often hear you say that Love is blind, meaning that it can see no fault in the beloved. That kind of blindness is the height of seeing. Would you were always so blind as to behold no fault in anything.

Nay, clear and penetrating is the eye of Love. Therefore, it sees no fault. When Love has purged your sight, then would you see nothing at all unworthy of your Love? Only a love-shorn, faulty eye is ever busy finding faults. Whatever fault it finds is only its own faults.²

—Book of Mirdad

The Man Who Became Possessed by Evil Spirits

In the ashram, Baba Ji had created a place where every type of person could come and just be themselves—old and young, men and women, children and adults, Hindu or Muslim or any religious denomination (or none at all), high or low status, learned or illiterate, in short, a refuge open to all, including people that had mental instabilities (which when looked at from an inner perspective included each and every one of us). It was quite a

² Mikhail Naimy. *The Book of Mirdad: A Lighthouse and a Haven* (London: Stuart & Watkins, 1962) p. 64-65.

wonderful thing, although I did not realize at the time what it meant to be living in a place where such a range of backgrounds and behaviors could co-exist harmoniously in one place. There were a few instances, though, where Baba Ji had to draw the line as to what was acceptable, and this incident strongly illustrates that point.

One day when I was sitting in my room, upon hearing a great commotion outside, I went to investigate. Several strong sevadars were trying their best to keep under control another Satsangi who had recently come to stay in the ashram to do seva. The scene was quite extraordinary, for the poor fellow was obviously in a deeply disturbed state of mind. Honestly, I had never seen anyone so agitated before. First of all, his eyes were glazed and upturned in their sockets, with only the whites showing. He was totally unaware of what he was doing or where he was. Second, foam was issuing forth from his mouth, and every part of his facial features and general demeanor revealed that he was not only a danger to himself but to those around him as well.

From what I could gather, everyone had gone out to the fields to work as usual, and all of a sudden, in the midst of the normal routine of weeding and watering the crops, all which was done by hand, he suddenly began shouting and ripping off all his clothes. The sevadars were astonished and, at first, did not know what to do. They did not understand what was happening because his behavior was so strange and abnormal; and they feared to approach him because of his extremely erratic actions. Nonetheless, a few of the heartier types drew near him with some gunny bags in hand, hoping first to wrap him up to cover his nakedness and then to bring him under control, so they could escort him back to the

ashram proper and present him before Baba Ji. They felt sure that Baba Ji would know what to do in order to bring him back into a more normal frame of consciousness.

In attempting to accomplish this, there was quite a struggle, for his strength, in this altered state, was enormous, and he struck out vigorously at anyone who tried to approach him. Finally, enough of the sevadars became engaged in subduing him that he was brought under semi-control, but in order to prevent further damage both to himself and those around him, they had to bind his arms to his sides with ropes and guide him back to the ashram as he cursed, shouted, and foamed at the mouth. This is the scene that presented itself to me when I stepped out of the room.

A sevadar, meanwhile, had rushed up to Baba Ji's room to inform him of what was going on. Baba Ji instantly ordered that a plate of food be brought from the langar and placed in a shady spot on the veranda. Baba Ji then came out and stood before this disheveled and disturbed man. Exuding clarity, strength, and calmness, Baba Ji commanded him in a stern voice, using his given name, to come back to himself—this he repeated several times in succession with great intensity and strength. Then suddenly, the man totally collapsed, and whatever had been causing this state of mind vanished. His face resumed a more normal expression, he stopped foaming at the mouth, and his eyes resumed a natural position in their sockets, revealing that he was now aware of his outer environment. He was, of course, totally exhausted from his ordeal, so Baba Ji instructed the sevadars to take him to the place where the food had been kept for him.

Baba Ji gently but firmly told him to sit and eat, which he began to do since he was now hungry and weak from all that had happened. As he ate, Baba Ji began to tell

him in a quiet but stern voice that he should never again allow this type of behavior to dominate him, for if he did, he would not be allowed to stay in the ashram. There were no two ways about it—he was to either collect himself and understand that he had a responsibility, both to himself and to others, to act in a decent manner, or he would have to leave. The man listened attentively to all that Baba Ji said and agreed to his counsel. When he had finished eating the food before him, Baba Ji told him that now he should go and sleep, which he did.

I, of course, did not comprehend what had brought on this attack or what might cause such a display of abnormal behavior, but over the next couple of days, as things settled down and work resumed at the ashram, I was able to gain some perspective on what had touched off this episode. The person who was at the center of this event had recently lost his wife in some tragedy. He was perhaps 35, and she was of the same age, so they had spent enough years together for their relationship to deepen, and they were, as a consequence, very attached to each other. When she died, it seriously unhinged his brain and opened him up to the negative energies that exist around us all the time. When we have a more or less sound physical, mental, and emotional constitution—at least enough to maintain some sense of direction in our lives—we do not fall prey to these forces. Such forces may be called by a variety of terms, but in India, Saints and Sages usually describe them as spirits who, while on earth, had a very poor character and were subject to base and abhorrent activities throughout their life. When they died, because of their evil ways, they were sent to the astral hell worlds connected to the earth. Those tormented spirits then prowl about the lower astral worlds in search of any person who (having suffered some

calamity) may be in a weakened mental condition that allows these spirits to “possess” their mind and body, resulting in such scenes as we just witnessed.

The Saints are on the opposite end of the spectrum. They have come into their true spiritual heritage through leading a life of focused, conscious devotion during which all the physical, emotional, and mental impurities of lust, anger, greed, attachment, and egoism have been converted into the spiritual virtues of compassion, mercy, forgiveness, humility, forbearance, etc., so that every pore of their body radiates a spiritual fragrance and a Divine Light. Thus, when anyone under the influence of the negative powers comes into their contact, those negative spirits depart from that body, whereupon that person returns to normal consciousness of the world under their own will power.

In the years to come, I was to personally witness at least one more such case. These events are disturbing to be around and have a sobering effect on the mind. We may think we are beyond such behavior, but if we look in our hearts sincerely, then I think we might discover that the seeds of this type of event are within us also and given the right circumstance could lead us to manifest traits which are quite alien to our normal patterns of behavior. If we let down our guard by forgetting that we are children of Light, who must live our lives in accordance with the teachings of Saints and Sages, any of the five passions will rapidly make inroads into our lives and cause ever-increasing problems for us.

So even if we cannot meditate a lot, we should be grateful to be able to try to sit in the remembrance of some noble soul who has traversed the inner way from beginning to end. By doing so, we may win their grace and protection and avoid falling prey to the cunning wiles of

the mind. Great rishis, munis, and sages—who earnestly practiced meditation for long periods of time but who did not have the protection of a Master soul—were deceived by the wily mind. So, for those of us living in the depths of the Kali Yuga, what recourse do we have other than taking shelter in the refuge of the Param Sant, who protects his disciples here and hereafter, till he brings them safely to the throne of the Sat Purush in Sach Khand, the True Home?

The Passing of Timappa

Timappa came to Baba Ji many years before I met him. He used to take care of the cows. When he got older, Baba Ji had a thatched hut made for him in the coconut grove so he could stay there and protect the grove from monkeys and other possible invaders.

He was a very simple man. His sole possessions were a blanket and a few clothes that Baba Ji had given him. He used to come to Satsang in the evening and sit towards the back, wrapped up in his blanket. After Satsang was over, he would go back to the grove. Even though I was not very sensitive to the more refined aspects of devotion, I could feel the sweetness and gentleness radiating from him. Beyond that, I was not aware of what a great soul he was. It was the same with Jamal Bhai. Jamal Bhai was the gatekeeper for the ashram. I always knew that he was one of the most humble and kind people I had ever met, but God only knows, I never had a clue of what spiritual greatness was concealed within him. I think there are many great lovers of the Saints living amongst us, but we may not be aware of them because they protect that sacred love with their life. They realize it is a gift that is meant to be kept hidden from the eyes of the world.

So, when I arrived in India on my second visit, I

found that Timappa had become ill. He was no longer able to stay in the coconut grove. Baba Ji had him moved to Jamal Bhai's room at the entrance of the ashram gates, which at that time (before the Mahadwara was built) was on the right-hand side. Even though he was very sick and could not move by himself, still he would manage to come and lie out in the sun near to where the corn was drying on the veranda. He would do his best to scare away the birds who would try to come and peck at the corn.



Baba Ji with sevadars, Timappa standing far right

Eventually, he could not even do that. One day, I believe it was in October, Baba Ji went down to see him in Jamal Bhai's room. He was lying on a mat on the ground. He looked at Baba Ji with eyes full of love, and Baba Ji looked into his eyes with the Love of all Loves.

Baba Ji asked him, "Well, Timappa, would you like to have us move you to a hospital where you can be properly taken care of." Timappa folded his hands and said,

"Beloved Master, kindly let me remain here near you. You have given me everything, and my heart is filled with you and you alone. I wish to remain near you and die in peace." Baba Ji was very happy with his answer.

A few days later, we were all working in the fields outside the gates near the big ponds. We were just finishing our work and getting ready to go to wash up before Satsang. It was around 6:00 in the evening. Suddenly a great peace descended all around. It was one of those things one felt in the heart. As we came through the gates, Jamal Bhai was there and told us that Timappa had left the body. Just before leaving, he made an upward motion with his hand. He did not speak, but then closed his eyes and departed.

That evening Baba Ji gave a beautiful Satsang. He was very, very radiant. To the best of my knowledge, the Satsang was on seva. At the end of the Satsang, he spoke briefly about Timappa and his lifelong devotion to the Master. He then described him thus, and I remember the words exactly, "Timappa was a Maha Punya Purush (A great soul, drenched in devotion)."

After Satsang, we went down to the room where Timappa's body lay. We carried him up the road and placed him on the ground in the courtyard below Baba Ji's room. Baba Ji came downstairs and stood over his body. It was an incredibly beautiful scene. Someone picked a sunflower and put it on Timappa's chest. Timappa's face was very beautiful. Baba Ji stood quietly with eyes closed. Then we picked up his body and buried it in the mango grove.

At this juncture, the memoirs shift to some of the main Satsang centers that I traveled to with Baba Ji and where I was able to behold other unique dimensions of his work on behalf of Hazur Sawan Singh in the South.



Episode of the Barking Dog

Each year, Baba Ji traveled to several major Satsang centers that had developed over the years to fulfill Hazur's wish that he (Baba Ji) should spread the teaching of Sant Mat in South India. Baba Ji went to Davangere annually because the dear ones there wished to have him amongst them to celebrate his birthday and, most importantly, to hold a seven-to-ten-day Satsang program.

Thus it was that, in 1972, Graham and I had the opportunity to travel with him, not only to celebrate his birthday but also to open the beautiful new Satsang Hall that was now complete.

As demonstrated earlier, I was somehow still hanging on to the idea that I was an advanced meditator and a mature devotee, even though there was, in actuality, nothing to support that assumption on any level. But the time I spent in Baba Ji's company was gradually helping me to realize that many facets of my being needed smoothing down so that a more open, kind, loving, and humble attitude toward life, both inner and outer, might evolve. This story exemplifies how Baba Ji had to sometimes adopt a more radical technique to get through the density of my thick skull, as I really did not perceive how far astray I was from the spiritual life I aspired to follow.

At the time we went to Davangere, the area had been in

the grip of a drought that was increasingly affecting the farmers, their crops, and the water supply to Davangere and the entire region of Karnataka in which the city was located. On the afternoon of our arrival, we began to notice the gathering of heavy rain-laden clouds on the horizon. The first discourse in the new Satsang Hall was scheduled for 7:00 p.m., and, as that time approached, the sky darkened perceptibly as the clouds advanced towards the city. As sometimes happens, there were some people from the local orthodox Hindu community who opposed Baba Ji and had arranged for a band come and stand outside the hall. They were instructed to play loudly upon their instruments so that the Satsang would be disrupted. The reason they did not approve of his teachings was that he openly talked of the equality of all human beings and the unifying principle of love at the heart of all religions, cautioning against a narrow-minded interpretation of the scriptures that had produced such restrictive social structures as the caste system.

Baba Ji came at the appointed time. The new hall had comfortable living quarters for him on the first floor; all he had to do was come down the steps and enter the room where Satsang was to be held. This was a kind thought on the part of the local organizers, as Baba Ji was now in his late 80s, and his body was beginning to feel the toll of a life that had been dedicated to the search for and realization of the Truth. From the mid-1930s onwards, he had been serving the needs of seekers of Truth, according to Hazur's instructions. He had been entrusted with the work of giving Satsang in 1933, when Hazur cast off his mortal coil, Baba Ji had the added responsibility of initiating seekers into the Path of the Divine Light and Sound. Bestowing initiation casts a heavy burden on

the body of the Saint since, at that time, he takes on the responsibility for liquidating the karmic account of the disciples with the Negative Power.

When Baba Ji began the discourse, the band also commenced playing loudly on their instruments, trying to drown out his words and distract the attention of those listening to the discourse. Baba Ji's eyes began to glow as the clamor of the music intensified. Then suddenly, rolling thunder was heard all around, and lightning flashes illumined the skies as the rain was released in torrents from the heavy monsoon clouds. This effectively washed out the band, and they dashed for cover. Meanwhile, in the Satsang Hall, the lights flickered and went out. Thus, the first Satsang of the evening concluded early and in a dramatic fashion because the electricity was not restored for an hour or so after the rainstorm moved through. The initial downpour was substantial and regular rain continued throughout the remainder of the program, marking the end of the crippling drought that had plagued the countryside for months.

Regarding the staying arrangements for those of us who came with Baba Ji from Kengeri and Bangalore, the dear ones of Davangere had arranged to rent a new, untenanted flat that had several rooms. It was spacious, clean, and private. The rest of the people attending the program from the many villages and towns surrounding Davangere were accommodated in local dharamshalas, which gave free accommodation to those staying there. Hence, hundreds of people would share close living quarters throughout the program. Indian people are wonderful in that way. An amazing number of people can peacefully squash together in the smallest spaces and be happy and content with just a place to stretch out their legs and rest at night and sit cross-legged in

the day in an amicable relationship with their neighbors. There was no problem with food since a large cooking area had been set up behind the Satsang Hall for preparing three square meals a day for the thousand or so people in attendance. A large tent was constructed where all could eat in comfort as the crews assigned with serving the food moved through the long lines of people sitting on the ground with plates before them onto which were served vegetables, rice, chapatis, and dal.



Baba Somanath giving Satsang

Graham and I had our own room in the flat, and the eight or so Bangalore businessmen who had joined us on the trip occupied an adjacent one. The electrical fuse box for the flat was located in our room and is mentioned here because it plays an important role in this story.

After the Satsang was over and the electricity was restored, we had dinner in the community dining area with all the other dear ones who had gathered there.

Somewhere around 9:30 p.m., we all retired for the night, worn out after a long journey from Kengeri and the aforementioned events of the day. Indians tend to be sound sleepers, as was the case with our friends in the adjacent room. Graham also had the ability to rest deeply under most circumstances. But I am a light sleeper, so the slightest outer disturbance usually wakes me up fully, as shall now be revealed.

It was perhaps 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning when suddenly, I heard a dog barking. It was not just an occasional yelp but a continual baying, and it seemed to be nearby, just below the small veranda on the first floor where we were staying. I became increasingly irritated and finally bestirred myself to see if I could determine where this dog was located and if I could do anything to persuade it to cease its commotion. Even Graham was awakened by the noise, so we both went out on the veranda. When we looked down from our room to the street below, we saw a little dog standing there looking right up towards us, unleashing a constant barrage of barks.

Eyeing the dog with a severe gaze, Graham yelled, "Shut up!!!" What happened then was a memorable scene. There was a street running perpendicular to where we were located, at the end of which was a lamp post with a single light that was softly illuminating the surrounding area. As soon as Graham commanded the dog to shut up, the little fellow turned around, ran down that street towards the lone lamppost, turned left and disappeared, never to be seen or heard of again.

If that was all there was to it, then it would have been just fine; a nice simple end to the episode of the barking dog. But rather than an end, it was just the commencement of a series of inwardly orchestrated events that, save for the kindness and love of Baba Ji, would have proven a serious setback for me. I cannot imagine what

my life would have been if he had not somehow held me close to his heart, for the events that now unfolded were to deliver a significant blow to my ego.

The following day, the Satsang program began in earnest with Baba Ji giving two Satsangs daily and, in between, seeing hundreds of people waiting in long lines to go in and look into his eyes for a few brief moments. Men, women, and children of all ages, castes, and communities were eager to look into the eyes of One whose attention had mingled with the source of Light and Love.

For most of us in the West, the concept that the glance of another human might be life-transforming would be hard to accept, but for the Indian dear ones, it is a fact of life that has existed for thousands and thousands of years. Yet, this experience became, at that time and all through the years to come, an integral part of what I know to be inspirational and exalting. No words are spoken at that time—just a simple deep exchange of glances, the repercussions of which are felt both immediately and throughout all the years of one's life. It is a mystery of mysteries that the Master's penetrating glance can reach into the very core of one's being, where the pure soul, enshrouded by mind and Maya, sits longing for freedom. That spark of life touches the sleeping soul within, awakening purity, innocence, clarity, wisdom, love, and every positive thing one can think of. It may be simply for an instant, but that instant is worth living for—even if it comes only once in the life.

So, Baba Ji's entire time was taken up with Satsang and darshan. Within the scope of that darshan time, there were also many people who came to him with life and death problems that he patiently took out time to deal with. When I think of my own self, it is not easy to even have a linear conversation with one person for a

few minutes, let alone hear the tales of sorrow and suffering that are a part of most people's lives. But Baba Ji not only listened to their sad stories but also explained to them how to come out of the cycle of suffering they were in. This was the work he attended to all day long with genuine love for all, and he was doing it in the 88th year of his life. Those who think that being a Saint is a desirable position would think about it differently if they saw what such a routine was like.

On the second night we were in Davangere, at around 4:00 a.m. in the morning, we had another deluge of rain. The Indian dear ones that were staying with us had a definite schedule that they were following in the early morning hours that was different from my idea of the obligatory 3:00-6:00 a.m. meditation discipline. This was the time that Baba Ji talked about in Satsang as the Amrit Vela—the Time of Nectar—when everyone should get up and meditate on the Divine Light and Celestial Sound. Graham and I were dedicated to meditating at that time, and when we discovered that our comrades liked to get up and make South Indian coffee and talk about the Master during those hours, we were not pleased. (But my, oh my, that coffee smelled good!)

When the storm broke out and the lights went off, the coffee making in the adjacent room was also brought to a standstill. The talk did not stop, but the coffee-making did. Then the lights in the neighborhood began to flicker on, and, as the fuse box was in our room, one of the electrically minded members of the party pushed open our door and, flashlight in hand, located the fuse box that was just over the place where we were sitting. He opened the box, hit the light switch, and illumination was restored to the apartment, so coffee-making could resume. All was well except that we felt offended by

this intrusion, and our tempers rose. When dawn came, Graham and I felt we needed to inform our friends that 3:00-6:00 a.m. was the time for meditation and not for talking and coffee-making. They listened politely but continued on with their morning routine in the days to come, causing us to become even more upset that the early morning silence was not being preserved.

A couple of days later, another rainstorm again knocked out the electricity. Once more, our meditation time was "disturbed" by their entry into the room to get the lights going. In the morning, we again reminded them about meditation. We were yet more perturbed than the previous time but tried to keep our voices soft and persuasive when reminding them that meditation from 3:00-6:00 a.m. was required and speech was not.

Unbelievably, the same thing happened several days later when the rainstorm knocked out the electricity, resulting in an entrance into our room to restore it. When dawn came, we could no longer conceal our displeasure and spoke some harsh words, the result of which was a lot of suffering for all concerned. We went to their room and told them: "Several nights ago a dog came barking outside our window, and, when we told it to shut up, it quietened down right away. We have now approached you three times and requested that you be quiet during the meditation time, but you have not listened. Now you should pay heed to what we are saying and accept the Master's instructions to meditate during this time." It was said in a dry, unpleasant tone of voice, with little understanding of how such high-handed words deeply wounded the hearts of those they were spoken to.

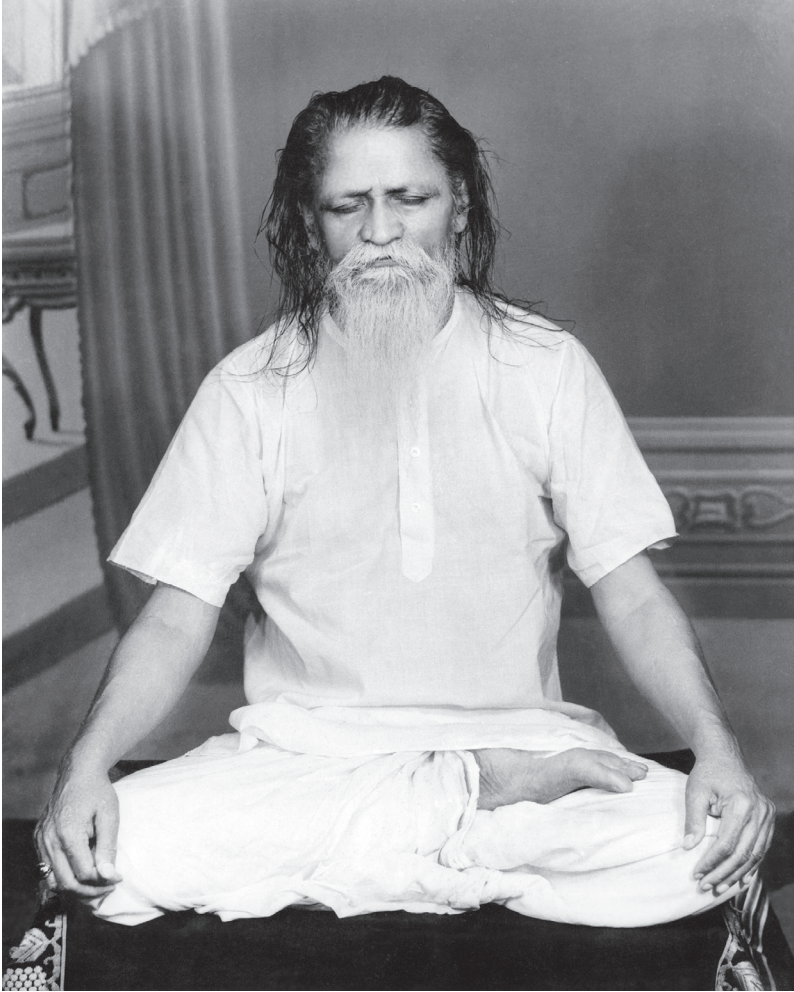
With the thoughts of their transgression fresh in our minds, we contrived the idea of going to Baba Ji and reporting what was going on in our apartment. Graham

and I marched over and stood in the darshan line and waited for our turn to see Baba Ji. The program organizers wanted to know why we were there, and I informed them we wanted to talk to Baba Ji about something important. They went in to tell Baba Ji, and, after a short while, we were told to enter the room. It should be remembered that Baba Ji already had a full schedule. Poor people were coming to see him from many outlying places. It was the one time in the year they had to meet with him and yet we, who lived with him every day, wanted to take their special time to bring a so-called "problem" to his attention

When we entered the room, Baba Ji came straight to the point, gently but firmly: "Well, Christopher and Graham, what is it that you need to see me about?" And then we explained to Baba Ji that the businessmen staying in the flat were not following his orders about meditating from 3:00-6:00 a.m. and instead were talking and drinking coffee.

It was at this point that I began to feel somewhat uneasy. I had been in this situation on several past occasions when interacting with Baba Ji; all of a sudden, the bright ideas presented by the mind did not seem so bright anymore. He had a unique way of communicating his patient displeasure on these occasions, and suffice it to say that the atmosphere became quite chilly as he listened to our complaint.

He became serious and quiet for some time, which was not a good sign. I had thought he was going to support our view and call the offenders to account, but such was not the case. Slowly it began to dawn on me I that we had totally blown it, but I was hardly prepared for the severe jolt to my perception of life and the universe in general that Baba Ji was about to deliver.



Baba Somanath Ji

He began to speak. It is impossible to convey exactly what it was like to be the recipient of one of Baba Ji's incisive analyses of one's actual inner condition, stripped bare of the veneer one had painted over it based on a glorified, self-created version of one's own exalted spiritual

status. Baba Ji's approach was the ultimate act of kindness and mercy, but, on a personal level, it was devastating. Yet when I now think about it clearly, Baba Ji did not invest his comments with any judgmental energy—it was all very simple and clear: "This is the situation. Since you are not able to see things correctly, I am willing to help you. What I have to say may be hard for you to bear, but, unless you understand the implications of what you are saying and doing, you cannot awaken from the sleep of ignorance, which binds your soul in this world and the worlds beyond."

So, it is one thing to hear the pure words of wisdom coming from the Saint who sees things from the heart of Truth and another to accept them properly. Accepting them means to embrace what is being said in a practical way and think, "Yes, this is true, and this is what I need to do to correct my distorted view of things." It generally means coming back to ground zero where one sees that we are all in the same boat and that this business of high and low is a bogus hoax. If one can truly accept such a simple thing, then the natural consequence is that compassion for everyone, including oneself, becomes part and parcel of one's being.

But, since I did not have the maturity to accept his words of wisdom as a sure means of correcting my mistake, I wasted a lot of time, then and in later years, in chastising myself for errors in behavior instead of looking them straight in the face and gently and quietly working to correct them. Perhaps this is not an uncommon approach for many people—I can certainly tell you that it was part of my journey.

Then Baba Ji explained in very clear and explicit terms: "Christopher, you are telling me that you are

meditating from 3:00-6:00 a.m. I must tell you that you are not meditating at all. Why? Because, if you were truly meditating in the way I have taught you, then it would be impossible for you to hear any outer noise at all, no matter what might be going on. The first step in meditation is to totally focus the attention at the center above and between the two eyebrows in which all awareness of outer environments is lost. Then, it would not matter how many people might come in the room to fix the fuse box—you would not hear them—since deep meditation means total absorption within. That is just the first stage of meditation. The higher states of meditation begin later on, but this is the first stage. Now I hope I have cleared this misconception in your mind regarding your so-called meditation.”

Baba Ji put this all before me in a very practical, matter-of-fact way, but instead of accepting it at face value, I began to fall apart because the glorified image I had of myself was at odds with what he was telling me.

But he kindly decided to illustrate the point yet further so it would be indelibly marked on my mind for life. He told a story of the love existing between Layla and Majnu—an allegorical tale of a poet, Majnu, and his ladylove, Layla, who was the daughter of a king. The story appears in many forms in different Indian languages, but, in this version, Baba Ji described one particular incident in their tale in these words:

One day Layla, in a state of intense longing for meeting Majnu, set out to meet him at an appointed rendezvous place. She was so much absorbed in his remembrance that she was totally unaware of her body as she walked along the way that would lead to this meeting with her beloved. Now it so happened that her journey coincided with one

of the five prescribed prayer times for followers of the Prophet Mohammed. At those times, one is required, if at all possible, to cease all activities and spend a short time in prayer, bowing down to the ground on a prayer mat in the direction of Mecca. In accordance with that injunction, an orthodox Muslim priest, who was traveling along the same road in the direction Layla was approaching, stopped and spread his prayer mat on the path to make obeisance toward the holy shrine of Mecca to the west. He was a very good and pious man, totally devoted to the practices of his faith, but within, he was spiritually arrogant, thinking he was great and holy as compared to others.

Layla, meanwhile, was coming along, oblivious to the fact that the priest had spread his prayer mat along the route she was walking. She was intoxicated in the thought of her beloved Majnu, so her attention was not directed toward her outer environment. Therefore, when she came to the Maulvi's rug, she walked right across it, narrowly missing the praying priest himself. The priest was absolutely flabbergasted at this defilement of his prayer time, and he chased after her lambasting her with curses and threats, telling her that the wrath of God would be on her head for the sacrilege she had committed. But, as she was absorbed within, she heard not a word of what he said but continued along her way.

After she was out of sight, the priest thought, "Oh my God, what have I done? She is the daughter of the king, and I have been abusing her left and right. If she reports me to her father, then he may punish me severely or even put me to death. Therefore, he waited anxiously by the roadside in hopes she might return by the path she had come. Finally, after some hours, she did return, and by

that time, her attention had shifted back to normal consciousness of the outer world.

Seeing her, the priest came and fell at her feet, begging mercy from her. Surprised, she enquired for what reason she was to be merciful. The priest could not comprehend the state she was in when she stepped across the mat, so he reminded her of what had happened at that time. When she heard the full story from his lips, she admonished him saying: "O holy one, I have no recollection of what you are talking about, for I was lost in the remembrance of my beloved Majnu. But just consider, Maulvi Ji. I am in love with a mere human being, and, in that love, I had no remembrance of the environments surrounding me, but you are claiming to be a man of God, and you are saying that you are offering prayers to him. So how is it possible that you could be aware of something as trivial as my walking on your prayer mat?" Hearing her words, the priest was abashed and quietly departed from her presence, seeing, to some degree, the hypocrisy of his professed faith.

Baba Ji then concluded by saying: "Christopher, it is my responsibility to inform you that your meditation is no better than that priest's prayers, and I would like to advise you that you need to improve your powers of concentration dramatically."

With this, Baba Ji requested us to leave, as there were many, many people lined up outside waiting for darshan. When we left the room, my heart sank into my stomach. The facade of my so-called evolved spiritual status had been exposed in just a few minutes. I did not have the introspective power to detect just how my mind had deceived me. Hearing Baba Ji's stern but loving depiction of my inner state, I had to acknowledge the accuracy of what he was saying; yet, I did not have

the wisdom to digest it in a mature way, with the result that another 45 years passed with the habit of fruitless self-condemnation still in place over every mistake I made after that time.

When we returned to the flat, I was so distraught that I locked myself in one of the bathrooms and wept (thankfully, there were several other bathrooms available; otherwise, my seclusion would have been short-lived). I believe that it was approximately 11:00 in the morning when I entered the bathroom, and, when lunchtime came around, I did not come out. Then around 2:30 or 3:00, Graham, who knew where I was, tapped on the door with the ominous message—everyone in the flat was to come over to Baba Ji's room. There was nothing for it but to go, but little did I realize that I was about to hop from the frying pan into the fire.

The short journey of five minutes or so to Baba Ji's room was a strange one. I was totally out-of-balance, bewildered and inwardly hurting from the sudden realization that whoever I thought I was did not exist. (Graham took the whole event in a much more balanced way.) Hence, I was left adrift with no perception of what I truly was at heart-of-hearts. What this meeting was all about was equally a mystery to me. I certainly did not know that what had happened earlier in the day was just a warm-up session for what was about to come.

As soon as we arrived, the local organizers of the Satsang program indicated to us that we were to pass into Baba Ji's room. Nobody else was standing outside waiting to see Baba Ji—so the two of us entered wondering what our fate might be.

This time, there was no mistaking the atmosphere in terms of what Baba Ji was creating for our spiritual edification. It was truly electric. The silent and solemn

atmosphere was potent like a sky filled with the mighty rolls of thunder as heavy, black, water-laden clouds spread swiftly across the land, emitting gigantic bolts of crackling lightning. In this case, the lightning effect was produced by the power in Baba Ji's eyes. God forbid that any poor jiva should wander innocently into such a situation as was about to unfold for us.

Baba Ji had to bring us to our senses and rescue us from the devastating effects of the treacherous ego. Let no one be in any illusion about it—we were in hot water, and it was about to reach the boiling point. When we entered the room, all of the people staying in the flat, along with the prominent members of the local Davangere Sangat, were standing along the wall. We were definitely the center of attention. Baba Ji indicated that we were to sit down on the ground before him, with me being asked to move forward to receive the brunt of what was to come, while Graham sat back against the wall.

When I was seated, already seriously shaken by what had happened earlier in the day, Baba Ji wasted no time in taking things well beyond the "shaken" stage. His eyes were aglow, and the glow was searing my quaking mind. He then unleashed the first salvo, and the gentleness and patience, so characteristic of most interactions with him, had vanished. Baba Ji spoke several times in succession, each time with increased intensity: "Christopher, why did you criticize these dear ones? WHY did you CRITICIZE these DEAR ONES? WHY DID YOU CRITICIZE THESE DEAR ONES?"

Not a sound emerged from my mouth. Baba Ji did not wait for me to regain my composure, for there was none to regain. Instead, he bluntly stated: "You have come to India pretending to be a seeker after Truth, wishing to receive spiritual guidance on how to traverse the Inner

Path. But this is all a facade. What you really want is to become a Guru. You have not a speck of humility within your heart. Humility and forgiveness are the cornerstones of devotion, and neither of these is present in your within; not even a speck can I see there. Rather, you think you are superior to others, and you imagine yourself to be a great spiritual devotee. GET OUT!!! GO BACK TO AMERICA AND BECOME A GURU. FULFILL YOUR HIDDEN DESIRE, BUT DO NOT WASTE MY TIME WITH YOUR DECEPTIVE ANTICS!!!”

To say that I was totally done in as he delivered the last powerful words would not be an exaggeration and indeed doesn't really convey my state because I realized that every single word was absolutely true. I knew it then as clear as clear could be. It was everything that I was thinking and feeling about myself. How anyone could be so puffed up is hard to conceive of, but the puff was now gone, and only a flattened pancake remained. I was barely able to sit before such incredible power and majesty, for at that time, Baba Ji revealed something of his inner glory and beauty to this battered creature. And in the midst of the flames of his powerful words, an incredible tender love was sitting, simply radiating into every pore of my being.

Now, here comes the most amazing part of all. Battered as I was, my ego flattened and deflated almost (but not quite) to the point of nonexistence, I finally managed to stammer out a few words: “Baba Ji, my mind made me do it.” Unbelievable!!! How I could have managed such a statement is something to wonder at.

This declaration pushed the atmosphere of intensity up to yet another level. Baba Ji was in no way daunted by such a flimsy excuse. “So, your mind made you do it. Is that what you are telling me, Christopher?”

My weary head nodded: "Yes." Then Baba Ji unveiled another stream of charged divine wisdom.

"Christopher, if your mind can make you make mistakes, why cannot you forgive others when they make mistakes? Get out, go back to America and become a Guru."

Graham had all this time been sitting behind me watching the drama unfold. Possessed of some genuine innate wisdom and real humility, he did what was to be the beginning of a benign shower of grace after the storm. He rose, came forward and collapsed on Baba Ji's feet, weeping all the while. Then Baba Ji's face suddenly softened and became suffused with a radiant light that filled the room. I, too, joined Graham, bowing at his feet. We were both weary and tired but grateful for a type of inner education that would remain with us through all the years of our lives.

He then smiled—a smile, which lives in my heart forever. He gently said, "Ok, all is now forgiven, but please do not repeat such a mistake in the future."

With this, the interview ended; we all went back to the room to pack our bags because this occurred on the day before our return to Bangalore. But what happened then was as great a mystery as everything else. Whether it was the stress of what had been happening over the past few hours or some other reason, I do not know, but very soon after we returned, I got a raging fever—very painful and totally consuming. During the night, it worsened, and the entire trip back to Bangalore the next day was a severe torment.

With each passing hour, I became more and more delirious. Finally, when we reached the ashram, I was totally out of control. I demanded that someone take me to the hospital in Bangalore, where I had spent time just before

meeting Baba Ji. Baba Ji sent word that I should try to be patient, as the convent lady doctor (an absolutely amazing and sweet woman, who I knew) would soon be back and would then take care of me. But I would have none of it. I screamed and shouted and demanded a ride to the hospital, and so Baba Ji had Mr. Menon take me off. I do not remember the details of what happened on my admission. But I was accepted, and soon after, they began to treat my symptoms. Within a 24-hour period, the painful delirium had receded, and I once again noticed the world around me. I was at that point exhausted but hungry. The hospital staff was aware that I was vegetarian, but they had their own loose interpretation of what that meant. They were loving, sweet, Christian people, very devout Catholics, fully dedicated to serving others in the name of Christ, and the way they cared for me was tender and immaculate.

They brought me a nice, simple vegetarian meal to begin the recovery process, and I happily sat down to enjoy what they had presented me with. But at the bottom of my soup was a morsel of meat. I think that beef broth must have been included in what they considered to be vegetarian, but whatever the case might have been, there it was. In righteous indignation, I rose from my bed and stormed down to the front desk, telling them I was leaving right then and there. What could they do?

So, out into the busy streets, I emerged without a penny in my pocket since I had come to the hospital without any provisions like clothes, money, etc. How I was to get back to the ashram was not immediately solvable. But as I moved forward into the stream of traffic, I hatched a plan. I would ask a rickshaw driver to take me to the house of Mr. Anand, the retired Inspector General of Police and devoted disciple of Baba Ji and ask him to

loan me some money so I could pay the rickshaw driver. And if Mr. Anand was not available to take me to the ashram, then perhaps he could give me the money for a bus ticket. It was a good plan except for the fact that, on that day, there was a taxi and rickshaw drivers' strike in Bangalore, and, by consensus agreement, they were not supposed to pick up any passengers.

There I stood watching rickshaw after rickshaw pass me by without stopping to give me a ride. I did not know about the strike, so I was bewildered as to why I was left standing there. Finally, one driver took pity on me and gave me a ride to Mr. Anand's house. Mr. Anand and his wife graciously received me as usual, and as he could not personally drive me all the way to the ashram, Mr. Anand arranged to take me to the bus stand where I could catch a bus to Kengeri and then walk up the hill to the ashram gate. The buses were not affected by the city-wide strike, so I was soon riding along the Mysore Road feeling that now all would be well. Baba Ji was not casting me out, and I could once again join in all the agricultural activities and the daily ashram life in general. I had a home to go back to.

Alighting from the bus, I began the mile journey up the hill on a beautiful, cool afternoon, not noticing the ominous clouds overhead, when suddenly I was caught in a brief but powerful downpour, totally drenching me from head to foot. But this seemed a small thing after all that had happened. Finally, I walked through the ashram gates and, seeing Baba Ji's door open, went upstairs. I entered Baba Ji's room and said simply, "I am back." He smiled a beautiful smile. My heart was so glad and grateful. I then returned to my room, changed clothes, rested a bit and got ready for evening Satsang. Thus ended the episode of the barking dog.



A Visit to Betta

Before I left the ashram in 1971, Baba Somanath Ji had expressed his hope that I might be able to attend the Betta program at the end of December because there I would have the opportunity to experience a unique type of love and devotion. Unfortunately, due to government regulations, I had to leave before I could gain that experience. But in 1972, Graham and I were both able to travel with Baba Ji and a number of ashram sevadars to this ancient part of India that, since the early days of his mission, had been a major center from which he worked.

The ashram is located almost directly north of the Kengeri ashram and a bit to the West, about 150 miles distant. The roads were highly variable in terms of surfacing in those days, and the vehicles we were traveling in also had some speed limitations, especially the 1950 Dodge and the Chrysler Woody Wagon, which carried with it a large load of supplies required for the program, plus about ten people from that area who were currently residing in the ashram.¹

¹ A video of this journey and experience at the Betta (Pahar) ashram, located near the village of Enumuladoddi, can be found on the Baba Somanath Ji website under "Videos." The video is very old but gives some impression of that time and the experience: <https://babasomanathji.org/videos/>



Baba Somanath Ji in the Dodge

It was perhaps 10:00 a.m. when we set out on this amazing journey. Baba Ji and his driver, along with Pushpamma and myself, were in the Dodge; Graham and the other people from the ashram traveled in the Woody. One might say we ambled through the beautiful South Indian landscape, perhaps topping out at 35 or 40 miles an hour at best—but usually slower. The “Mind Crusher,” our affectionate name for the Woody, gently swayed from side to side as we negotiated the multitude of minor, and sometimes major, potholes that pocked the road we traveled on. The Woody, for the most part, behaved reasonably well on the journey there, giving only occasional, alarming hints that the return journey ten days later was to be far from pleasant. An occasional loud pop and the usual noxious fumes swarming through the main cabin were pretty standard for the “Mind Crusher.” Perhaps the fumes were a bit more intense and that, along with the gently swaying motion, induced something akin to seasickness so that those with a more sensitive stomach had to beg the driver to kindly halt while they staggered off into the countryside and relieved their stomachs of any excess, undigested food.

Since I was riding in Baba Ji’s car, I did not have to suffer those taxing difficulties; instead, I relaxed and took in views that changed from the lush lake and pond-bedecked landscapes characteristic of Bangalore at that time, into semi-arid and even arid landscapes that appeared to my eyes delightfully beautiful. It was not just the physical beauty of the natural desert landscape but also the presence of oasis-like farms and small communities that owed their existence to artesian wells and wells operated by electric pumps drawing crystal-clear water up from the earth. We were passing through a land that had been carefully nurtured by its inhabitants

for centuries beyond reckoning. One could strongly feel the devotional imprint of a people that had maintained a philosophy of "hands to work and hearts to God."

As we passed deeper and deeper into this ancient world, we came to small groups of people waiting for the car so they could have Baba Ji's darshan. They sometimes had been standing there for hours because one never knew at what time the car might arrive. They wanted to be sure to be there to have one glimpse of their Spiritual Preceptor. These people were coming from the surrounding small farms and towns. They were, materially, very poor, but on their simple faces was a unique type of joy that came from within. It was a very special time for me because I was sitting just behind Baba Ji and was able to watch all these gentle interactions as an "insider," so to speak.

Sometimes Baba Ji would get out and sit in a chair surrounded by the farmers, and sometimes he would greet them from the front seat. It was a soft and sweet trip to the heart of South India, into a land which time had forgotten.

Toward evening, we came to a juncture in the road. To our left lay a hard-packed dirt track that was used by motorized vehicles, bicycles, bullock carts, and humans. From the flat desert floor arose a number of the giant rock hillocks, their impressive features silhouetted by the sun commencing its descent into the West. Midway up one of these immense masses of rock, one could discern a line of colorful lights. This turned out to be where the ashram was located, and the lights illuminated the walls enclosing it. Electricity had just come to this area during the previous year and had been run up to the ashram, thus enabling the villagers to string lights in honor of Baba Ji's arrival. It was all so

magical—like out of a fairytale. But the most amazing and moving sight was yet to come.

After traveling down the road a short way, a long line of glittering lights reflected from gas lanterns came into view. As we approached, one could see that many of the inhabitants of the village of Enumuladoddi had come out to greet Baba Ji. The line stretched for a long way, with hundreds of people standing along the left side of the road so they could have Baba Ji's darshan. It was a sight that can never be forgotten. The driver slowed the car to a snail's pace so that Baba Ji could look into the eyes of each person. As he passed, many reached through the window and gently caressed his face. Most of these people were poor, but I can say one thing for sure—the richest, most prosperous millionaires had nothing in comparison to what they had in their hearts. It was such an honor to see the beauty of their faces, the luminous quality of their souls.

There was one old woman standing there, dressed in a simple, coarse, cotton sari waiting for the car to pass so she could have Baba Ji bless some sugar that she had wrapped in newspaper. The car slowed even more, and Baba Ji reached out and blessed the paper envelope she had in her hand. Then she saw me sitting in the back seat, and her face became filled with joy—God only knows why. In her excitement, she poured half of the sugar into my hands. It was one of the greatest gifts I have ever received on this earth.

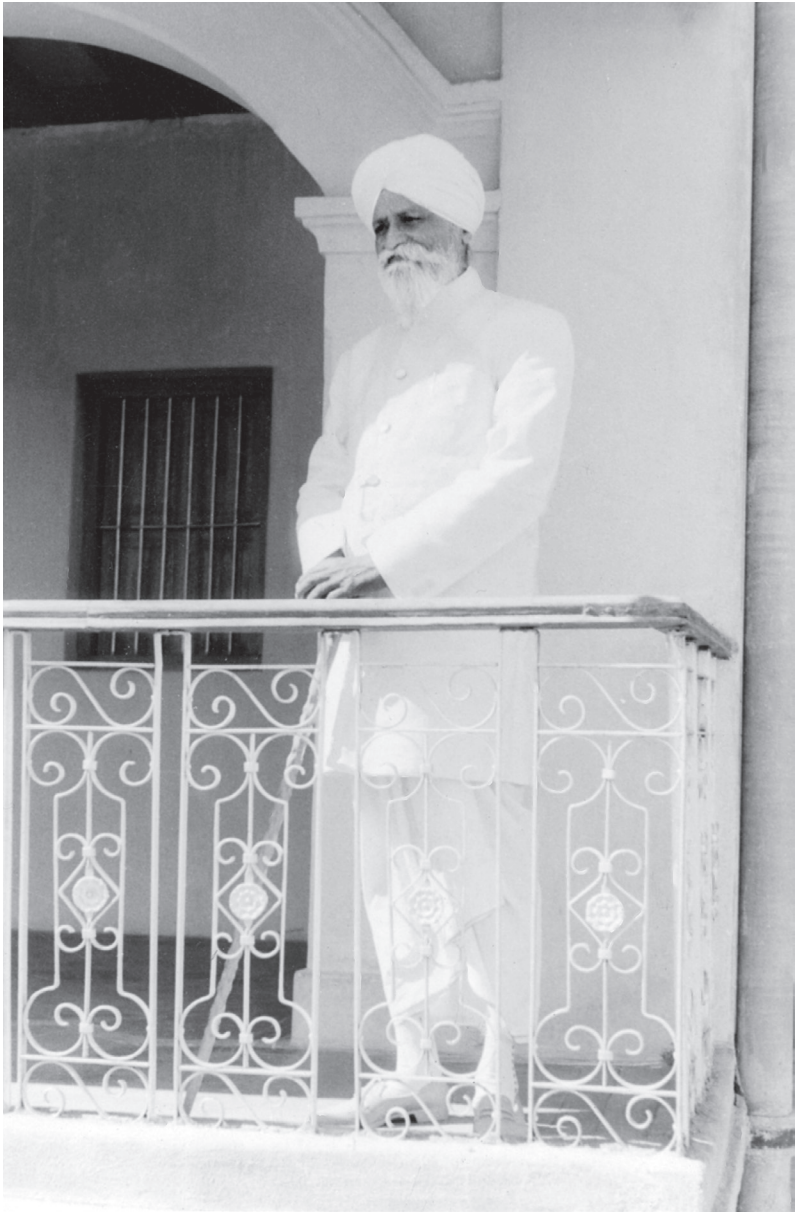
Slowly the car wound its way through the village, and, after we passed the last person, the car picked up speed and headed towards the light-illuminated walls of the ashram. Many people were gathered there awaiting Baba Ji's coming, just as they had been doing regularly over the past 35 years or more. After alighting from the

car, the dear ones who had been waiting carried him up the hill in a sedan chair constructed of a large, covered basket balanced at the center of a 20-foot-long pole. The chair was hoisted into the air by ten people who then carried Baba Ji up the 300 stone steps to his bungalow.

We quietly followed him through the cool, still, desert night with thousands of glistening stars shining in the sky above. We were shown to a cave that had been converted into a room, and, after having some dinner, we lay down to rest for the night. Thus ended the first wonderful day of travel and homecoming into the heart of ancient India.

The nights in the winter season of this area of Andhra Pradesh were rather cool, especially on the hill. It was by no means freezing, but we definitely required sweaters to keep the chill off. The winds, too, were a bit brisker than on the plain below. Around 6:00 a.m., we heard the sonorous blast of an ancient horn outside our room that called to us to come out, as it was time for morning darshan. Perched on the wall above the cave we were staying in, we beheld an old man wrapped in a blanket, who was the source of the trumpet call—the trumpet itself, about six feet in length, was resting on the wall. We were to hear the trumpet call daily at this early morning hour, a most wonderful way to start the day.

All the people gathered on the hill below stood looking up towards Baba Ji's room, and shortly thereafter, he appeared, standing quietly but beautifully, looking down upon us all with hands folded, signifying: "I bow to the Light within you." A more elegant, pristine and heart-ravishing scene would be difficult to find. Our entire surroundings suggested an event that could have taken place thousands of years ago in any ancient land where great Sages and Seers dwelt.



Baba Somanath Ji on the veranda at Betta

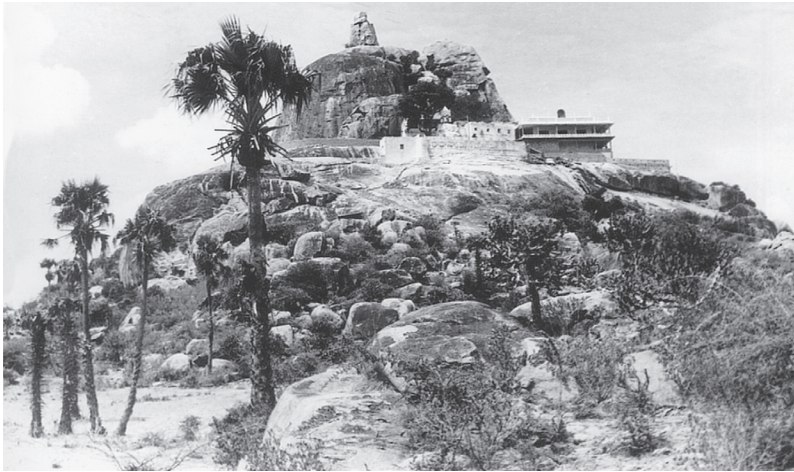


Photo showing completed construction work

From this point onward, the program shifted into high gear. People began flowing up the hill in hundreds and thousands, both for having darshan and also to help in the many seva projects that needed attention. Across from our room to the right was to be found a set of stone steps that led to the Satsang area that could accommodate approximately three thousand people. Adjacent to that was a large community kitchen area where food preparation went on for 18-20 hours a day.

Each time Baba Ji went to Betta, some major project was undertaken, and on this occasion, all the supplies for building a new Satsang Hall needed to be brought up the hill to commence construction work. There were no modern conveniences to transport the bricks, cement, and water, etc.; all the work had to be done by forming a human chain from the bottom of the hill to the top, where bricks and other materials were passed in baskets from hand-to-hand and then deftly stacked by masons who would later put them to use. It was an amazing event to

be part of, and Graham and I spent many hours assisting in this project, along with thousands of eager workers. Men, women, and children all found something they could do to move this seva along.



Sevadars working on the building project at Betta

The bricks themselves were produced locally. About 200 yards from the base of the hillock, a huge kiln had been constructed that produced 100,000 bricks in a firing. The ancient skill of building kilns and making bricks was, at least at that time, very much intact, and it was a

wonder to see how they could fire so many bricks created from the locally available earth. I think there may have been at least one other kiln in the area because we certainly moved a huge number of bricks and other supplies during the program.

Besides the construction seva, hundreds of people were involved in cooking, cleaning, and drawing water from the well. It was, in short, a veritable hive of all kinds of activities that one could be engaged in according to one's capabilities.

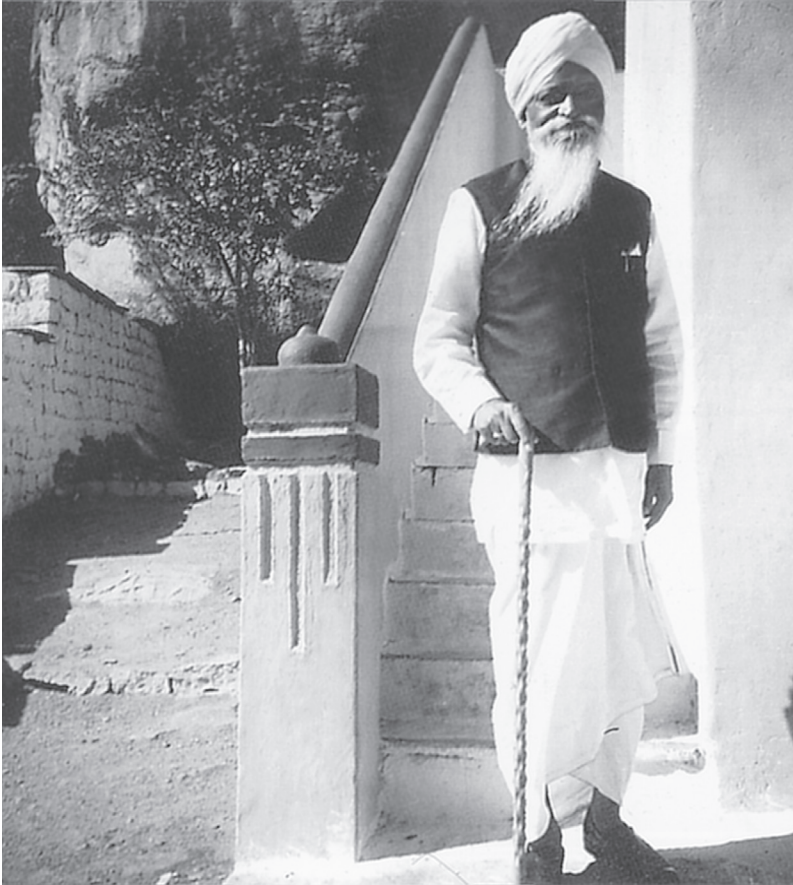
In the midst of it all, Baba Ji held two Satsangs a day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and, aside from that, he was continually meeting with the constant stream of men, women, and children who came from a surrounding radius of about 50 to 75 miles. It is difficult to imagine how many people could be populating such a relatively open desert area, but there could be no doubt that they did, as evidenced by the tide of humanity moving in and around the ashram. What was mind-boggling to me was how the old people could negotiate the steep stone stairs to the ashram; but by slow, steady steps, they did somehow manage to climb up.

There was no time for us to meet with Baba Ji during the program, as he had many works to attend to. But I do remember seeing him once as a constant stream of people entered his room to offer him a few pennies or a piece of fruit, which was to be used for the construction of the hall or distributed as prashad according to the nature of the donation. At that time, Baba Ji said that a Saint gladly accepts the tiniest donation given from the hands of such pure souls as these people were, for there was no ulterior motive in what they did. But sometimes, even if a person tried to donate thousands of rupees or hundreds of thousands, it could not be accepted because in



Baba Somanath Ji

their hearts was lurking the wish to have some worldly desire fulfilled (occasionally, Baba Ji did gently decline such donations during his lifetime).



Baba Somanath Ji at Betta

Also, as time permitted, Baba Ji would come downstairs to an open area where he could observe the seva projects going on. The head engineers for the Satsang Hall would be with him and would discuss details as to how the building was to be constructed and all the features it would have. Other head sevadars would also interact with him at that time.

On one memorable day, Baba Ji was standing on the veranda outside of his room next to a prominent Bangalore

Satsangi, Mr. Munivenkatappa, when from a distance, one could hear the sound of drums coming from across the desert. Then from around a bend, a procession of bullock carts came bearing bricks and other supplies. It was a charming rural site, and the impact was greatly accentuated by the village drummers marching in front beating on their drums.

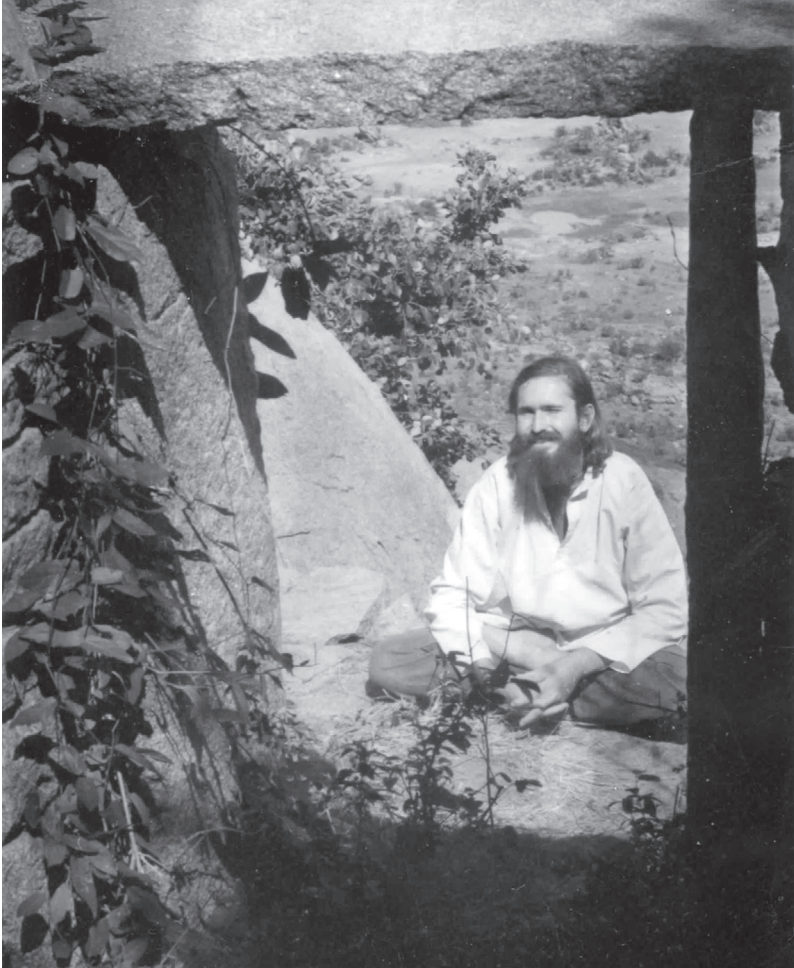
I have many precious remembrances of that program. My experience was greatly enhanced by the knowledge of what role this ashram, and the entire area, had played in Baba Ji's life.² Even before he physically visited Betta in the early 1940s, his Nathpanth initiate, Mahadevappa, had come to this area to engage in deep pranayama and meditation, in the course of which he was able to become perfect in those practices. The result of this was that his attention rose to the capital of the astral plane—Sahas-dal-Kanwal or the Thousand Petaled Lotus. Through his practice, he gained many supernatural and mystical powers that added to his mystique.

In due course of time, he became renowned locally and had his own following prior to his eventual reunion with Baba Ji in Bombay. At that point, Baba Ji took Mahadevappa and his followers to Beas to receive initiation into Sant Mat practice from Hazur Maharaj Sawan Singh Ji. Following that significant event, Baba Ji had been invited to come to the Betta area, and from his numerous visits, everything we were witnessing there had come into being.

I was so strongly impressed with Mahadevappa's exotic story that, one day, I decided to hike up the adjacent

² Recently, Suzanne and I, along with several other Westerners staying with Baba Ram Singh Ji at his nearby ashram, were able to visit Baba Somanath Ji's ashram on the hill so memories of that time became fresh again.

mountain to see if I could discover the cave where Mahadevappa had performed austerities and gained perfection in kundalini yoga. I knew which hill it was because someone had reverently pointed it out to me. It was just across from the one where we were staying; so, without any knowledge of how to get to the top, I took off one morning to see if I could discover its location.



The author on the hilltop above the Betta ashram, 1972

It is lucky that I was ignorant of the fact that the area was a haunt of wild bears and poisonous snakes, large and small, for that might have dissuaded me in my attempt. Although there was no marked path, I managed to negotiate myself around the larger boulders and gradually made my way to the top. When I reached the crown of the hillock, I found the cave, before which was a small pond formed by a natural cavity in a single boulder; this pond had served as Mahadevappa's source of water. The atmosphere was very uplifting, as one had a clear, sweeping view of the surrounding countryside. It was a profoundly quiet and serene place. It was easy to understand why he chose that location, even if he shared it with the wild creatures. I was awed by what he had done while living in such a remote spot.

In the place where the new Satsang Hall was to be constructed, there was a full-grown coconut tree. Baba Ji would not allow it to be cut down. He insisted that it should be transplanted. Hence a giant crater was created around it so that as much of the root ball could be kept intact as possible. It was a huge job, but finally, the tree was ready for transport to its new home at the base of the hill. It was a full moon night when about 200 of us gathered about the tree with many ropes wrapped around the trunk. Then working to the best of our ability as one body, we slowly dragged the tree down the hill to its new home that had been prepared for the transplant. It was a memorable night to share in such a labor of love.

Satsang, as mentioned before, was held twice a day. There would be several thousand of us joined together on the ancient mountain, seated on the ground as Baba Ji filled our hearts and minds with the teachings of the Saints. One day before Satsang, Baba Ji had me sing a bhajan, the first time I had ever done so in public. With

a nervous, quavering voice, I made my way through a beautiful bhajan of Mira Bai that I had been practicing for several weeks prior to the program. Graham bravely got up and gave a short talk in Kannada. It was a touching expression of Baba Ji's love for us because we were toddlers on the Path of Love compared to the villagers whom we were amongst.



Baba Somanath Ji with the sevadars at Betta

Another such event happened when, one day, I received a summons from Pushpamma that Baba Ji needed someone to assist him with coming downstairs. I was nervous because I had never guided or supported an elderly person before, much less the One who was my best Friend and Spiritual Preceptor. As we moved up and down the rocky steps that existed at different levels of the ashram, in my apprehensiveness, I told Baba Ji in Hindi, "Now, be careful Baba Ji, we are coming to a change of levels. Here is a step; watch out." Baba Ji laughed and

said, "I know perfectly well where I am going; kindly be aware of where you yourself are going." (Which in retrospect kind of summarizes the rather clumsy way I have ambled through life, not very aware of where I am going from moment to moment, even now.)

Towards the end of the program, Baba Ji set aside a morning for interviewing people for initiation, and after this, he bestowed the initiation itself. Many people were accepted simply by a gesture or nod in the affirmative, but he closely questioned some of the men as to their reasons for wishing to receive Naam. If their answers satisfied him, they were permitted to take a seat in the section of the hall where this event would take place. But there were several who did not supply the answer Baba Ji was listening for and, hence, were asked to wait till a future program; he instructed them, in the meantime, to attend Satsang and deepen their understanding of the teachings of the Saints.

With the women, it was far different. He might ask one or two simple questions according to what he saw written on their foreheads, but without exception, they were accepted. I remember one very moving incident during this part of the pre-initiation questioning. I think it would be difficult for a person from the West to comprehend how different life in deep rural India was at that time, but in any case, he gently asked some of these women if they were able to memorize the Simran of the Five Holy Names connected with the Lords of astral, causal, and super-causal planes given out during the initiation process. They just sat quietly without any idea how to accomplish this daunting task. Seeing their response, he then kindly enquired if they could remember and repeat his name, and they happily nodded: "Yes." That was all that was required.

I remember, in particular, one elderly lady who was sifting through some grain and making sure it was clean of any foreign particles like chaff, dirt, and tiny stones. She was attending to her work with deeply focused attention, hardly aware of her surroundings. One of the Indian dear ones with whom we were walking pointed her out, saying that she had a nice farm on which she raised a few beautiful cows that gave good milk.

Baba Ji liked that milk so much that she daily brought him fresh milk from her beloved cows. She had in past years raised several prize cows that she gave to Baba Ji so that they could be part of his cow family at the ashram. When the dear ones asked her to greet me, she shyly looked up and folded her hands in greeting, as is common throughout India. Her face was old and care-worn, but there was beauty on it, a shining light that revealed a soul absorbed within. It was one of the most beautiful faces I have ever seen.

On the last day of the program, when Baba Ji was ready to depart, the dear ones brought the sedan chair, and, after Baba Ji was seated, they hoisted it up and brought him safely to the foot of the mountain where the cars were waiting, including the Woody, aka "the Mind Crusher." That car had earned its mighty title more than once because those who traveled in or with it were often put to severe tests of patience as happened on this occasion also, as will now be seen. Hundreds of people were gathered there to bid him farewell, not realizing that it would be the last time they would ever see him at Betta. Emotions were running high as the car slowly moved through the crowd, and then, when we had passed the last villager, we began to pick up a bit of speed.

On the return journey, I was again traveling with Baba Ji, following the Woody. It did not take long before we

heard some sounds that were a bit abnormal in terms of frequency. Various cherry bomb-like blasts were issuing forth from the exhaust pipe, accompanied by rather alarming shakes in the car's cabin. Sometimes, the car would simply stop like a stubborn mule, and everyone would have to get out and push the behemoth to see if we could induce it to start again.



The Woody, aka the "Mind Crusher," parked at Betta

We also had a hand cranking apparatus to help ignite the engine into action once more. In this haphazard way, we reached a village where Baba Ji held Satsang. I think it was there that the driver of the Woody told Baba Ji that we should anticipate some trouble in getting back to the ashram and that he should go ahead so he could rest up from the demands of the program. He agreed, and his car sped off. I stayed behind to offer whatever assistance I could.

Thus, began a unique odyssey of fits and starts through South India, during which the Woody would lurch forward and vibrate along for several miles before halting once more. Out we would hop and nudge it forward; then, we would jump back in the car when some genuine forward motion was achieved. This went on throughout the remainder of the day and into early evening, but, finally, the "Mind Crusher," with one last gasp, ceased to budge another inch. Meanwhile, unencumbered by waiting for the Woody, Baba Ji's car had raced to the ashram with lightning speed in the capable hands of the Indian version of the famous race car driver Parnelli Jones.

Having reached there, the driver left Baba Ji and the others before turning around and speeding back to find out how we were faring. Thus, we were discovered by the road trying to figure out what our next step might be. Everyone squished into Baba Ji's car, but three or four people, including myself, remained to work through possible repair scenarios. As we were now in total darkness, it was decided that we would wait till early morning and then send me and another dear one to find one mechanic in Bangalore who had worked on the "Mind Crusher" before and who might have some ideas as to what could be done to solve our current dilemma.

We hunkered down in the front seat of the cab and waited until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning before trying to hitchhike into Bangalore, which was perhaps an hour or two away. I was cold, tired, hungry, and upset but determined to make the best of a difficult situation. Standing by the roadside, we bravely signaled for the oncoming speeding lorries to stop to give us a ride, which was nothing short of inviting an early departure from this world since lorry drivers are notoriously reckless, but

finally, one, taking pity on us, stopped and transported us into Bangalore.

I cannot remember who I was with, but they knew exactly where to find the mechanic/silk weaver we were seeking; and so, having reached Bangalore and stepping down from the lorry with thanks, we hailed a taxi that took us to the address of the desired person who might help us. The weavers were already at their looms just before sunrise, and they told us the person we needed was just about to leave on a pilgrimage holiday but that we might catch him if we went to such and such a place. We went there with all haste and were just in time to meet him on his way to the bus station, where he planned to join his fellow pilgrims for a tour of the major Hindu temples of the South. Hearing our woeful story, he put aside his own plans and came with us back to the car to see if he could figure out what was wrong.

When we got there, he poked his head under the hood and apparently found what he was looking for. He put his finger on the part of the engine that he felt was the source of the problem and asked the driver to start the engine, which fired up immediately. The mechanic then informed us that he would sit in that position, with the hood upraised and his finger on the trouble spot, so that we could make it back to the ashram. That brave soul remained perched on the engine in that position for the full four-hour ride back to the ashram and never showed any fear or concern for his life. Finally, we reached the ashram—27 hours after we had started from Betta. Baba Ji was very pleased with the mechanic and gave him a nice sum of money for rescuing us. He was so genuinely humble that he tried to refuse, saying he wished to offer his service as a gift

to Baba Ji, but Baba Ji insisted, so he took the money. And after all of us were served a sumptuous meal prepared by Pushpamma, Mr. Menon drove him back to his home. A little later, Baba Ji told the rest of us to go and sleep until evening Satsang, which we gratefully did. Thus ended the wonderful trip to the Betta ashram.

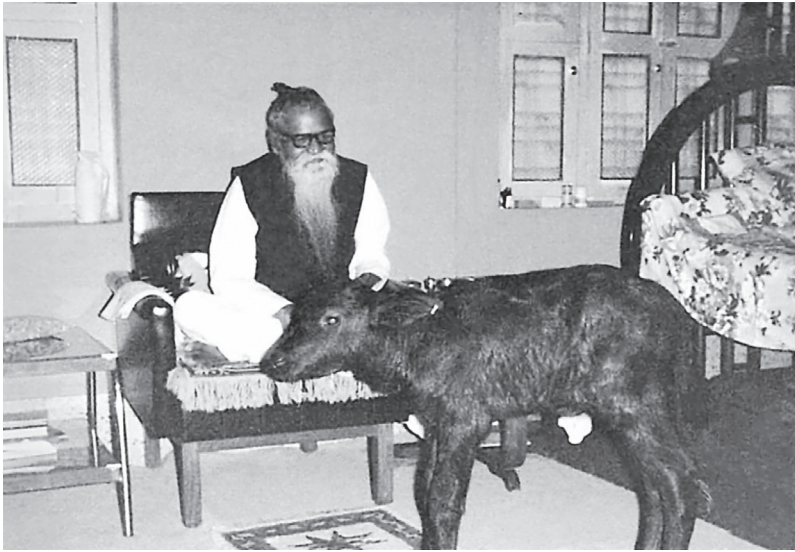


In the Company of the Master, 1975

Baba Ji Gathers to Him More Western Dear Ones

The year 1975 marked the last period of time spent with Baba Ji where we could enjoy his company in Satsang on a regular basis. It was also the period when the rest of the Westerners who were destined to come to him found their way to the ashram. Paul Clarke of Ireland, Dag Daram of Sweden, Bernard and Dominique Daniel of France, and Joel and Marjolaine of France joined the rest of us who had arrived earlier. Paul Young (USA), Kyoko Cailhol (France), Jany Cailhol (France), and Graham Gibson (USA) all had come in previous years. There were two other Westerners from the USA whom I never met, Douglas and Catherine. They came in between my trips, so I did not know or have any interactions with them, but they enjoyed a brief stay in the ashram as well.

To the best of my recollection, we all had the opportunity to visit the ashram at one time or another during 1975. Each of the above-mentioned dear ones brought some unique gift of devotion with them. This helped me understand how many different types of people are drawn to the company of a Saint and how a Saintly Being knows the unique way to work with each individual.



Baba Ji naming a new calf, Nirmala

We were each so vastly different in our personalities, yet we had a wonderful camaraderie, which for me personally was treasured then and remains so now. It was a huge change from the early days when I was alone in the ashram or was there with just one other person, Paul Young and Graham Gibson in particular. It was both a beautiful and a poignant time, for though Baba Ji could be amongst us on a regular basis, he no longer had the physical freedom of movement he had once enjoyed; we needed to carry him downstairs in a sedan chair and escort him about the ashram in a wheelchair. Yet, I think for all of us who were there with him, this time was the deepest revelation of the compassion such a Loving Sage has for those who come to him, not only the Westerners, of course, but the Indian dear ones as well.

One of the great joys of that time was the arrival of Bernard and Dominique. They had learned of Baba Ji through their friend Joel who was staying in the ashram

with his girlfriend Marjolaine. Bernard and Dominique, having completed a long trip overland from France through Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc., came to the ashram towards the end of November. Bernard sent me a note regarding their arrival:

After a trip of three months, we came to the gate of Sawan Durbar Ashram at 6:00 p.m. on November 25, 1975. We met Jamal Bhai walking outside the gate, not realizing who he was. At first, we thought he was just some ordinary man going out to the fields to answer the call of nature; we didn't realize he was Baba Ji's close sevadar. It was just like in the history of Dadu Sahib, Then he asked us, "What do you want?" We told him that we were friends of Joel and Marjolaine. So he went to tell this to Baba Ji. He came back telling us to enter. Then Joel came running out to tell us: "If Baba Ji asks you why you came, tell him that you want initiation."

We had to wait a few minutes as Baba Ji was putting on his turban for Satsang. When we came in, the first thing he told us was, "I was waiting for you." Instead of being happy about this, I was feeling sorry that we were coming so late because we had stayed three extra weeks in Kabul and one month in Pakistan. At that time, Jany was also there. I think you, Christopher, returned a few days later.

Sorry to be so long with the details but that meeting was so important for Dominique and me! I remember clearly now the moment when we first arrived at the gate, before we spoke with Jamal Bhai. I took Dominique's hand and held it strongly, saying something like: "Are you ready? This is our last chance!"

Thank you for making me remember that day.



Kyoko and Dominique at the Kengeri ashram

Right from the beginning, we became good friends, and the times we spent together during this late phase of Baba Ji's life journey were very happy ones. They both were simple, kind and gentle people, while I was full of odd complexities that managed to come out in Baba Ji's company in strange ways with even stranger results as detailed in earlier parts of the memoirs. It was so refreshing for me to be with these two people who were not encumbered with a lot of mental and emotional "baggage."



*Sevadars on the tractor at Kengeri
(Bernard is driving and Dag is riding on the back)*

I enjoyed being in their company, and we spent many happy times together working in the fields and doing all the ashram sevas while absorbing the pure radiance of Baba Somanath Ji's Light and Love through Satsang and meditation.

A Beautiful Initiation Day

One incident I remember in particular was the day Baba Ji called me to his room and told me to go tell Bernard and Dominique that they would be initiated the following day. I ran down the steps and across the courtyard to find them and tell them the happy news. Bernard says he remembers hearing me running to their door and how excited I was. They, too, were happy.

Then on the day they were initiated, I was also there. During the initiation, Baba Ji explained how to withdraw the attention from the lower extremities of the body and focus it at the point slightly above and behind the two eyes, which is traditionally called the Tisra Til or Third Eye. Then, he went on to describe how to hold the attention at that point by concentrating on the Radiant Light and Celestial Melody. To make this point clearer, he posed a question: "If you had lost your way in a deep, dark forest and night had fallen so that you could no longer see the way, in such a circumstance, what would you do?"

Now, this very same question was asked on my initiation day, and, as I had read the Sant Mat literature, I answered, "I would sit quietly and listen for some sound or look for some light coming from any nearby town or habitation."

As with all my silly, mental antics, I was rather proud that I could reply to the question correctly. But when this same question was put to Bernard and Dominique, Bernard quite innocently and naturally replied, "I would sit and wait till morning." Baba Ji roared with laughter on receiving such a genuine and simple reply.

And sometime later in the day, when the initiation instructions had been imparted, and we had returned to our work in the fields, Baba Ji called me and told me

that Bernard and Dominique were so simple and pure that the Master Power did not have to expend any energy in connecting their souls with the inner life-links of Sound and Light.

The Gurumukh Disciple Who Remained Hidden

So, all the days that we passed together were special blessed days. Each one of the disciples of Baba Ji had some unique gift, some way of revealing something beautiful about the glory of the Master, and I felt really lucky to have such company.

And perhaps most incredible of all, we were sharing that experience with his Gurumukh disciple though none of us had a clue of this at the time. In January of 1974, a young man came to the gates of the ashram asking the gatekeeper, Jamal Bhai, if he might come in and meet Baba Somanath Ji since he had traveled from Bombay with the hopes of having his darshan. This dear soul's name was Ram Singh Ji, and he had come to the ashram from Benares via Bombay, where he worked in the mills.

Here is a brief synopsis of his life up to that point:

After coming to Mumbai, he joined a service and worked in a mill. During this period, by chance, he went to Kakad Chambers, Worli Naka and attended the tape-recorded Satsangs of Baba Somanath. He became very intoxicated looking at the beautiful image of Baba Somanath and listening to his voice during the evening tape-recorded Satsangs. After a month, he was feeling such intense longing to meet Baba Somanath that he traveled to his Kengeri ashram in Bangalore. During their first meeting, Baba Somanath showered much grace on Baba Ram Singh, and he was given much seva to do, including the very difficult seva of guarding the entire one hundred nineteen-acre ashram during the evening

hours. Baba Ram Singh also did the seva of working in the farm during the daytime and continued to meditate each day in the early mornings. He received initiation on April 02, 1974. Baba Ram Singh had the company of Baba Somanath for only three years. However, as Baba Ram Singh says, "Baba Somanath laid the foundation of my Spiritual life."¹



Baba Ram Singh Ji as a youth at the Kengeri ashram

We used to all get up at 3:00 a.m., and Paul Young would prepare a warm cup of tea for us. Ram Singh, who had been doing the seva of guarding the ashram at night as he walked about with his two watchdogs, would join us at that time, and after tea, all of us would sit for meditation until 6:00. None of us realized what was happening between him and Baba Ji. We all knew

1 From the "Baba Ram Singh Ji" website: Biography section: <http://santramsinghji.org/biography.html>

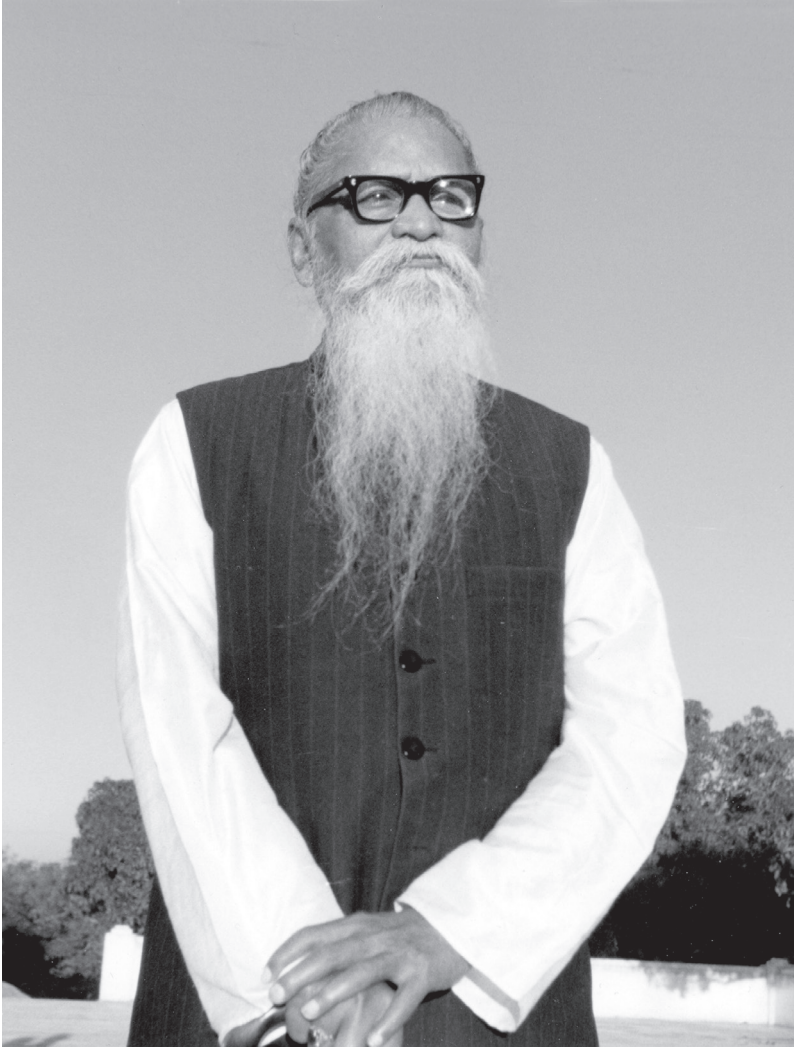
him to be a very simple and loving soul; he would stay up all night guarding the ashram and then would work alongside of us in the ashram activities until lunchtime when he would sleep for a few hours before starting his night routine, but beyond that, we did not realize that Baba Ji was pouring into his heart all his spiritual wealth.

We will return to Ram Singh in the section of this memoir that talks of Baba Ji's departure from the world. During the last days, Baba Ji gave some important indications of what was to be Ram Singh's destiny, although none of us had the depth of perception to realize what Baba Ji was talking about at that time. We did not understand, in fact, that we were standing in the company of the one who would keep alive in the hearts of many thousands of people the love and blessing of Sant Ajaib Singh, Sant Kirpal Singh, and beloved Baba Somanath Ji.

Two Bangalore Initiates of Hazur Sawan Singh

Another event occurred in September of 1975 when I returned to the ashram and, once again, managed to get myself in a bit of hot water with Baba Ji. After landing in Bombay at the international airport, I proceeded to the domestic terminal to catch the flight to Bangalore.

While waiting in the domestic lounge for the flight, I found myself sitting next to two venerable Indian gentlemen from Bangalore, who, as fate would have it, were initiates of Hazur Sawan Singh and who were following Maharaj Charan Singh Ji, his successor at the Beas ashram. Both of these great souls had played a significant role in my own life, and so I was always happy to be in the company of anyone whose attention was focused in that way. They were also curious as to who I was.



Baba Somanath Ji

When they found out I was a disciple of Baba Somanath Ji (who they had not heard of), they began telling me how they were going about doing their devotional practices and how the Saints had influenced their lives. I was

captivated by their conversation, and, during the course of our interaction, they convinced me that I should come to their home and spend an afternoon with them, sharing remembrance of the Masters. It all seemed really good to me, and I promised that I would.

They said they would come for me one day, and, as usual, once I got to the ashram and became absorbed in the daily routines, I forgot all about our conversation and my promise.

Then one day, perhaps after I had been in the ashram for a week, I received a summons to Baba Ji's room. There with Baba Ji were the two men I had met on the airplane, and they were telling Baba Ji I had promised to come and visit them in Bangalore. Baba Ji asked me if this was so, and I, a bit startled, as was often the case at such times, replied that it was true. Baba Ji then told them, "Yes, Mr. Christopher will come to your home as agreed." He said they should set a time when I, along with Mr. Menon, could make the visit. It should be on a Sunday afternoon after Satsang; first, they should both come and attend the Satsang at the ashram, and after that, we would come to their house.

During the conversation, I began to feel a bit uneasy as I could see that Baba Ji was not exactly pleased with my discriminative powers. When they left, Baba Ji called me back to his room. By this time, I was acutely aware that I was once again in hot water. Baba Ji began to directly question me as to my purpose in coming to India. He asked me if I had come for the sake of intellectual discussions and talking philosophy. I stammered out my usual clumsy answers, trying to assure him that what I really wanted to do was to come to the ashram, do seva, to listen to Satsang, meditate, and, most of all—to be in his

company. The atmosphere began to crackle with intensity, perhaps not so severe as on some earlier occasions but definitely quite lively.

Baba Ji was having none of my excuses. He, in no uncertain terms, told me that my focus was not clear. He said that I was still captivated by peripheral issues and that I had not yet grasped the fundamentals of the teachings of the Saints. He emphasized that an ounce of practice is worth tons of theoretical knowledge. I, unfortunately, did not truly grasp what he was saying and why he was saying it.

In my inner mind, I thought that what I had done was not so bad. I certainly realized that, after I had come so far to India to be at the ashram, I should not wander here and there, engaging in long-winded discussions—but in my mind, that was not what had happened.

However, the experience to come was to prove the wisdom of what Baba Ji was explaining to me; he wanted me to learn how to value the time I had been given. And, truly speaking, the time was growing very short though I did not realize it; in a little more than a year, his attention was to withdraw from the body for the last time. Baba Ji's words were brief and incisive, and, after perhaps five or ten minutes, I staggered out the door, once more to ponder the mystery of what I had done and why it was such a big deal in his eyes.

Before continuing further, I would like to mention something that has become an important part of my understanding. Baba Ji was in no way, not to the slightest degree, commenting on anyone else's approach to the spiritual practice—in this case, that of the two gentlemen who had come to fetch me. What was happening between Baba Ji and the two dear souls is known only to

those involved. But he wanted me to understand, in my within, what I had come into the world for and how that aim was to be achieved.

When Sunday arrived, the two gentlemen came and attended Satsang and afterward, they, along with Mr. Menon and myself, went to their house. It was only then that I understood what Baba Ji was trying to caution me about. They had, in fact, also invited a well-known philosopher to give a discourse on some aspects of Indian philosophy. He was definitely a brilliant man, well-versed in the deep philosophical ideas contained in the scriptures. He began to talk and talk and talk, and although he was speaking perfect English, I could not follow what he was saying because he was dwelling in some remote, abstract realm, inaccessible to my untrained intellect.

With each passing moment, I grew more and more uneasy because, in spite of his wonderful grasp of abstract concepts and his ability to discourse on them, there was, at least for me, no radiance, no fragrance coming out of him. It was a stark contrast to being with Baba Ji, whose simple words were but a front for sharing a heart-to-heart glimpse into an inner life charged with the Power of Beauty and Truth.

Finally, after perhaps an hour and a half, the discourse came to an end, and, thanking our hosts for their kind hospitality, we departed and returned to the ashram. Graciously, Mr. Menon did not say anything to me regarding his impressions of the experience, but there was no mistaking why Baba Ji had sent him with me as a kind and understanding escort. I was so relieved that he was there to take me home.

When we returned to the ashram, we went up to

Baba Ji's room. Baba Ji knew without words what had happened and saw that, to some degree, I now had understood why he had been so strong and direct with me on this subject. He never mentioned it again, and I went back to life in the ashram with a grateful heart, knowing that Someone in this wide world cared for me as much as he did.

Baba Ji Asks the Prominent Disciples to Give Satsang

Another significant event occurred one afternoon in 1975. It was one of those unique plays that occasionally happen in the life of a Saint, wherein one is able to see how the Master tests each person coming to him to reveal what desire they really have within. We all think and imagine that we are selflessly serving the Saints, but deep down, some other thought or desire may be percolating of which we are hardly aware.

On this day, there were a number of respected and senior Satsangis staying in the ashram who were group leaders in their areas. They, along with the other sevadars residing in the ashram, were told to come to the Satsang Hall. It was mid-day during the week; hence, it was out of the ordinary for us to be called to the Satsang Hall at that time.

Then, in front of all of us who were assembled there, he asked each one of the group leaders to come forward and give Satsang. It was a very powerful moment. Each and every one of them asked to be excused from complying with his request. They knew in their hearts what Baba Ji was doing. He was testing to see if anyone had the desire to be the Guru after he completed his life journey. One intoxicated fakir who was there managed to start reciting Baba Ji's life story, which he had committed to heart. His whole existence was involved with the

history of Baba Ji's search; he could be asked to start the story at any point. But he was a very innocent soul, and there was nothing in his behavior that indicated a desire that he wanted to be Baba Ji's successor. After a short while, Baba Ji laughed and asked him to sit down.



Baba Somanath Ji in the fields at Kengeri

Another dear one, a very close friend of mine and a prominent Satsangi, then stood up at Baba Ji's request. His whole body was trembling with genuine fear, for he knew what Baba Ji was doing—testing all of them to

see what was in their hearts. He was so shaken that he would ask Baba Ji about each and every word he spoke, whether Baba Ji wanted him to say it or not. It was a very touching moment.

Finally, after a few minutes, Baba Ji mercifully asked him to sit down. This same scene was repeated in one form or another with five or six people until it finally became evident that no one wished to take on the work of the Master. It was a deep and powerful experience that remained with us all throughout our lives.

The Last Westerners to Come to Baba Ji

In 1975, two young men came to the ashram—Paul Clarke of Ireland, who was perhaps 21 years of age, and Dag Daram of Sweden, who was only 16. They had been walking all over India, visiting different ashrams in search of Truth. They were penniless and basically dressed in tatters. They did not mind it. They were having the adventure of a lifetime in their search for the Path to God realization.

The day they arrived was an intense one as sometimes happened in the ashram. Baba Ji had graciously created a farm environment where all kinds of people could live together and, in doing so, work through their individual karmic configurations in a natural way. It was not meant to be an idyllic retreat where people sat around idly in beautiful, serene surroundings, but rather a place where, along with practicing meditation, one engaged with the everyday demands of agricultural activities that produced the basics of life: shelter, food, and clothes. It gave all of us who came to live in the ashram a chance to confront our own strengths and shortcomings in the presence of an awakened Saint so that we could learn how to practically apply the timeless teachings of the

Masters to our lives. With such a diversity of personalities assembled in one place, it was natural that many unique aspects of the human condition would manifest as occurred at this time.

On the day that Paul and Dag walked through the ashram gates, one of the dear ones from a small village in Andhra Pradesh had a severe epileptic seizure. It was the full moon the night before, and it had triggered a very serious attack. He was a young man, very able-bodied, a nice person but a bit on edge at times (as we all were in one way or another).

In the state of agitation caused by the seizure, his behavior became wild and erratic, and he caused quite a disturbance and commotion in the ashram until we were able to calm him down and get him to a cool room so he could rest, eat, and regain his strength and equilibrium. It took a few days for him to fully recover from the attack, at which point Baba Ji had him escorted back to his village to be among family and friends in a familiar environment.

So, this was the scene that welcomed Paul and Dag to ashram life. As they were young and adventurous, they had the capacity to digest new experiences and were not daunted at all by witnessing a rather disturbing event.

After everyone had settled down, Baba Ji called them to his room, where they had a chance to meet with him and request that they be allowed to stay in the ashram for some days so they could understand what he was teaching. Baba Ji granted permission, and thus began a new life for them both.

They felt deeply attracted to Baba Ji as they heard the Satsangs and began to participate in the regular routines of ashram life. Although Dag liked the ashram a lot, and even more so did he like Baba Ji, after a few weeks, he

decided to head up to Agra to learn to play the sitar. Paul Clarke remained with us and was, in due course of time, initiated. Some months later, Dag also returned to the ashram, as he had realized at heart of hearts that Baba Ji was the One that could guide him on the inner way. Upon returning, he was initiated, and within a few weeks, Baba Ji departed from this world.

There are many stories one could tell of events that took place at the ashram, but I feel that the above select few give some idea of what life was like with Baba Ji.



Last Tour to Dhareshwar, Sirsi, and Davangere

Before starting this chapter of the memoirs, I would like to share a section from Sant Ajaib Singh's talk entitled the "Tradition of the Path of Love," which appeared in the June 1992 issue of *Sant Bani Magazine*. Indeed, the whole talk is so deep and amazing that if one were to read it in its entirety, they would have the real inner explanation of what I am trying to share from my own limited perspective. Perhaps the most challenging part in writing the memoirs of the time spent with Baba Somanath Ji is to explain the various events concerning his health, particularly as he approached the time when he cast off the mortal coil. First and foremost, in Sant Mat, the teachings are very clear that the Guru is not the physical body, but that Power of Truth that has become fully awakened in a specific human vessel and that expresses itself through that human form. It is very simple and straightforward, and logically, we can all understand it. It appeals to one's common sense. But in reality, most of us, definitely including myself, do not practice enough accurate meditation to separate our attention from mind and matter and, therefore, end up getting attached to the outer manifestation of the Saint.



Baba Somanath Ji

The Saints always inspire us to make meaning and sense out of life in this world by meditating and going deeper into the esoteric side of the Teachings. But

when one is not inwardly developed, the personality and outer events surrounding the Saints have a very powerful impact on the quality of one's life, especially if one is living in the company of that illustrious Being on a day-to-day basis.

I will do my best to share with the reader some of the major events of this time and then to put them in the right perspective—no small task.

Dear ones, such a devotee of Master who has become the Form of the Master after meeting him, doesn't have any karmas of his own to pay off, as I said earlier. Being controlled by the love and devotion of the dear ones, he takes upon himself their karmas. He burns himself in the fire of others; he suffers for others' sufferings; and while doing so, he doesn't even complain, nor does he mention that he is doing this for others. Many times, it so happens that the dear one whose karmas he is paying off, is having bad thoughts and loses faith when he sees the Master suffering so much. Master always extends feasible help; but sometimes he is drenched so much in the love that he takes up the karmas much beyond the limits, far in excess of the human capacity to bear them, and that proves to be very detrimental to the health of the Master. But still the Master remains happy in the Will of God. He never shows off or claims that he has helped because he knows that everything is in the Will of God Almighty, his Master.¹

—Sant Ajaib Singh

1 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, June 1992, "The Tradition of the Path of Love," p. 7.

Baba Ji's Health Prior to the Last Tour

The first major indication that Baba Ji was nearing the end of his life's sojourn occurred in 1974 when I was in the ashram. Graham also was present at that time. It may have been in the month of September or October when Baba Ji was scheduled to visit the coastal village of Dhareshwar to open the new Satsang Hall built by the dear ones of that area. (I apologize that I cannot exactly recall the dates and maybe even the sequence of events, as I do not have a good linear time sense, but at least the events themselves are clear.)

Baba Ji's health, prior to that tour, had not been good. Up to that time, he had been in generally good health, although there were days when his body suffered from convulsions brought on (at least to external observation) by some incorrect procedure in the days when he was doing intense pranayama practice. Baba Ji himself referred to pranayama as being the source of the convulsions that he experienced. There were a few other symptoms beginning to manifest themselves as well, like general weakness in the legs and gradual loss of eyesight. At this point, Baba Ji was in the 89th year of his life's journey. In fact, he had lived many lives in one lifetime—as evidenced by all that he had seen and experienced both within and without. So, in that sense, too, it is not difficult to see why his normal bodily functions were beginning to fail.

But there is a much deeper reason for all this, which is sometimes briefly mentioned by the Saints themselves. When any pure soul is commissioned to give initiation, then he or she also is given the responsibility of winding up the karmic accounts of the disciples in whatever way they feel is appropriate. In the realm of the Lord of Judgment, those karmas do have to be paid off, and

it is up to the Saints how they are going to have them balanced. This often includes taking on their own bodies some of the sufferings that the initiates were destined to go through.

It is such a deep and vast subject that I cannot pretend to understand it fully, but by some kind grace of the Master, I felt this truth deep within my heart, as the events surrounding Baba Ji's approaching departure from this world unfolded. I will not refer to this subject again—how a Saint vicariously suffers for his disciples—yet to me, it is at the core of all that happened during this time.

Regarding this weakness in the legs, there came a time during this phase, which began just before the Dhareshwar trip, when he could not walk without external support. Therefore, a wheelchair was procured so that he could go out and around the ashram and also go to the Satsang Hall for evening Satsang. I was a very lucky person, as I sometimes helped carry Baba Ji downstairs to the place where the wheelchair stood waiting. It was a bit of a precarious journey down the steps from his room. He would sit in a wooden chair, and two of us would lift the chair, one on each side, and slowly make our way down to the ground level. Even though outwardly it was difficult to see the once robust body of Baba Ji undergoing this change, still to be able to do something for the One who had devoted his life to caring for us was dear and precious.

Concerning his eyesight—that too began to fail rapidly. He needed very strong glasses to read, and his distance vision was also blurred; the eye doctors could do little to stop this decline. One night, I happened to be standing outside Baba Ji's room when the optician was visiting him and doing some basic tests. What I

witnessed remains with me as one of the most tender and precious experiences of my life. Baba Ji was sitting on his bed, like an innocent child—he whose inner being was fully illumined and who was the abode of wisdom, kindness, peace, and love. Outwardly though, he was going through all this drama with the tests. The doctor would hold up one finger or several fingers and ask Baba Ji how many he saw. And Baba Ji, who, on the outer level, obviously did not know how many fingers the doctor was showing, would sheepishly guess.

It may seem very strange to say this, yet it is in my heart to do so. Those scenes that were outwardly very poignant—yes, even unbearably, painfully so—were to me then, and now even more so, some of the most beautiful things on the physical plane I have ever seen, for at that time something resplendent and luminous was radiating from that body in which the Pure Truth resided. The experience of witnessing the physical form of the Master suffering so much, yet bearing that suffering with such equanimity and dignity, is indescribable. I was to bear witness to much more in the time to come but, for some reason known only to him, as the Master's body failed, I only beheld the beauty of the Master increasing. There came a time towards the last months of his life when Baba Ji was legally blind.

Hair-Raising Ride Through the Night

It was in the midst of this rather rapid decline of his physical health that Baba Ji went ahead with the scheduled trip to Dhareshwar. It was not a short trip by Indian standards, being approximately 280 miles from the ashram. Baba Ji traveled the majority of the trip by train with Pushpamma and a couple of other dear ones to help him, while the rest of us went by car.

After Baba Ji was taken to the station to catch the evening train, I had the unique experience of riding in the front seat of Baba Ji's 1955 Dodge (an old American car) with Baba Ji's driver, Mr. Meganathan, at the wheel. He was a truly unique being, possessed of an absolutely fearless driving mentality. To journey with him through the Indian night was an unforgettable experience. First of all, there did not seem to be much of a barrier between what was going on in the engine, the interior of the car, and the outer night air. It was like a person was sitting in a convertible only instead of the air gently swirling around one's head, it was ferociously pouring in from beneath one's feet. The air was intermingled with the oily, gassy, greasy smell of the engine, while the cold, night air engulfed one's body.

Since I had never sat in the front seat of the car before, I had not yet experienced this unique phenomenon. Consequently, I was not dressed for it; I had no jacket or any other covering to protect me from the torrent of cool air flowing in around me. Ultimately, the result was that I did get a cold, but that was of small consequence as compared to what went on outside of the car.

As may be known to some readers of this account, at the time this story took place, the kings of the night roads in India were the lorry drivers who transported goods between cities. Even now, these hearty and danger-loving souls are a breed unto themselves. There is a whole ethic that dominates their attention—the ethic that one does not give up one inch of the roadway to anyone or anything under any circumstances. It is literally a "game of chicken," as we call it in the West, that takes place from dusk to dawn for those whose fate it is to make their living in this way. And woe be to any domestic vehicle that, for some odd reason or another,

is caught in this drama by having to travel the roads at night. But make no mistake about it—Mr. Meganathan was up for the challenge. He was, in fact, in his element.



The author with Mr. Meganathan, Baba Ji's driver

I had seen some of his driving prowess on other journeys that were made in the day and stood in awe of his skill and adroitness while negotiating the highways and byways of India's hinterlands. But this night was to reveal something quite new about his bravado and daring. On my own, I never would have chosen it, for it was to prove a frightful, hair-raising experience. However, it came in my fate, for better or worse, that I should ride side-by-side with a person who knew no fear of the lorry drivers of South India, as reckless a lot as exist on this earth.

But let me regress just a bit regarding Baba Ji's

car—"The Dodge." (Now that I think about it, the name was an apt one, for what we did all night long was "dodge" oncoming catapults of kinetic energy in the form of the lorries driven by absolute maniacs.) Be that as it may, Baba Ji loved this ramshackle old vehicle that was at times literally held together with baling wire. Perhaps it reminded him of some bygone days when he did severe austerities in the search for Truth. God only knows. But that he liked it and would not give it up for a fancy new car was well known. Wealthy Bangalore Satsangis, who had good connections with European car manufacturers, had offered Baba Ji a new Mercedes-Benz—the car favored by the elite of India at that time—but he would hear nothing of it. It was "The Dodge" or nothing.

Now, back to the racetrack, and not a normal racetrack, mind you. We were traveling in relatively uncharted territory on the main two-lane highway (that means one lane on each side) through South India at night with the representatives of the entire lorry-racing nation as our competitors, and with one other interesting twist. They were racing not "with" us, but straight "at" us. Holy Toledo! This was no joke. I mean, even at night, Mr. Meganathan liked to keep the gas pedal on the floor (which incidentally Baba Ji also liked, for he was always asking Mr. Meganathan if he could make the car go faster); but in this case, his opponents were coming at him out of the dark with bright headlights on high (maybe there was only one position—the "blind the opponents in the eye" position).

There was no such weakness as common courtesy in the pedigree of the lorry drivers. The only rule of this game was to thoroughly intimidate all on-coming traffic and see who had the guts to wait till the last second to swerve out of the way of approaching disaster, all the while traveling

at a good clip with a full load of cargo stacked in the back of their vehicles. Incidentally, the hearty transport trucks they drove were probably unencumbered by shock absorbers, as was Baba Ji's car. Each bump and pothole in the road announced itself with an alarming jolt that sent ripples up and down my spine; and, I also had to take extra care that my head did not ram against the inside roof of the car when an extra deep bump or pothole would suddenly send me airborne.

And so it was that we raced through the dark Indian night, staring into one glaring headlight after another, while Mr. Meganathan tested the steely nerves of the oncoming drivers as he plunged right at them. The car might have been four or five times smaller than their bulky beasts, but it was like my mom's corgi that had no fear in charging a massive Rottweiler as though it were an insignificant lapdog (it is true that her corgi Billy did just that one day when we were out for a walk).

I remember sitting in the front seat in absolute disbelief as each on-coming, metal monster approached, and it seemed that no one was going to give. It is funny in the telling, but the actual experience was anything but funny. Then suddenly, at the last moment, as if there was some telepathic message being sent between the drivers, one or both would swerve slightly, avoiding a certain collision. This went on repeatedly during the night while the aforementioned breezes whooshed in from the engine side of the car, making my discomfort and discomposure complete. In this way, we raced through the pitch-black night until the welcome break of dawn. But did this incredible adventure end there? No such luck—because next on the agenda came negotiating the steep and winding road from Sirsi down the Western Ghats to the seacoast.



Satsang at Dhareshwar

This ride was also no joke. The road was truly a feat of engineering wizardry, but not to be traversed by the weak of heart. Fortunately, by this time, I had no heart left to be weak. I was already totally done in by the night's adventure, so a steep descent on hairpin turns down the Western Ghats seemed tame in comparison to what we had just been through. In any other circumstance, I would have been on the edge of my seat, but when Mr. Meganathan raced down the side of the mountain (with no sleep during the previous night, mind you), I meekly sat back and stared at the view of the Arabian Sea, hoping that I was not on a fast track to viewing it close up by miscalculating some twist and turn in the road.

Finally, we reached the beautiful new Satsang Hall, and once there, we were taken to the home of a prominent

local Satsangi, where we could rest and gather our wits, while we awaited Baba Ji's arrival by a separate car that had met him at the nearest railway station at the top of the Ghats.



Dedication of the Satsang Hall in Dhareshwar

I have presented this journey in a humorous fashion, just to bring a bit of comic relief into a truly terrifying experience from a Westerner's standpoint, but to experienced Indian travelers, it was simply par for the course (although I do believe Mr. Meganathan was unusually skilled even amongst experienced Indian drivers).

Dhareshwar, a Program by the Arabian Sea

During Baba Ji's stay at Dhareshwar, he tossed all health precautions out the window in what was to be the

last major program he conducted. During the course of his stay there, several thousand people came to see him from the surrounding countryside. The setting was very beautiful.

That part of the coast of India was more sparsely populated as compared with other regions, and the tropical setting of swaying palms, pristine beaches, teak forests and lush green vegetation was delightful to behold. The rain in that area was well over 200 inches a year, so a number of homes were built on raised "islands" about six feet above canals with stone-lined walls. During this time of year, when the monsoon was not going on, the road to and from the Satsang Hall ran along the bottom of one of these canals.

The Satsang Hall itself was simple and beautiful with typical South Indian temple construction but less ornate. It was very tastefully done with plenty of windows that allowed whatever breeze there might be to blow through the hall that was also kept cool by its shining marble floors. The people, too, were simple, sweet, rural folk making their living by agricultural means. Their lifestyle moved at a very gracious pace. Since they were far from the influences of the larger metropolitan areas, the ancient customs were relatively intact. Not only did the local village people attend the program, but there were also many people who came from deep in the jungles to take benefit from Baba Ji's Satsangs. They lived yet further removed from the life of modern India, as they were coming from tribal communities whose existence stretched far back beyond any recorded history.

By the time Graham and I made the trip to Dhareshwar (Graham was also part of the daring car dash from the ashram to the coast), Baba Ji had already been there many times over the last couple of decades, and so his

following in that area was considerable. In fact, he was so well known and respected that, when his car came to the outskirts, the entire village assembled to greet him and walk with the car to where the Satsang Hall was located. This was done with such natural innocent vigor and enthusiasm that it moved the heart just to be part of it. It was yet another window into an ancient world that, on my own, I would have never seen.

Baba Ji Had No Concern for His Own Health

The program itself was tremendously concentrated in terms of the demands upon Baba Ji's time and energy. He in no way slowed things down or limited the time he gave to all the people who came to see him during this program, even though before arriving in Dhareshwar, his health had been anything but good. The doctors (who included ayurvedic, allopathic, homeopathic, and whatever other "-pathic" there might be) had pleaded with him not to make the trip at this time, considering his health and need for rest, but Baba Ji politely declined to heed their advice.

For those of us who had been with him during the preceding months, this outpouring of love and grace from a body, worn and weary from the stresses of a long life spent in the service of others, was something incomprehensible to the human mind. I think that if any of us will stop and examine our own hearts as to what we do when we fall sick, we will easily begin to comprehend the magnitude of what he accomplished during this ten-day program.

In similar circumstances, we would hardly wish to speak with anyone or entertain visitors, what to speak of meeting with several thousand people, talking with them about the challenges they faced in life and meditation.



Baba Ji with disciples in Dhareshwar by the Arabian Sea

These personal interviews were sometimes very brief, as most of the people came only to look into his eyes for a fleeting moment of darshan, but sometimes they could be quite long if there were life and death issues at stake or there was some intricate obstacle in meditation. Along with these personal interactions that took four to six hours each day, sometimes more, he also gave full Satsangs both morning and evening.

Special Events at the Dhareshwar Program

Not only did he attend to the two above-mentioned sevas with full concentration and enthusiasm, but he also managed to visit the Hindu temple of the goddess

held sacred by the local fishing community. Even though Baba Ji insisted that his initiates subsist on a strict vegetarian diet, he respected their local culture and customs. Their love for him and his love for them was very deep, and when they had prayed to him to please come to their temple, he accepted their request with pleasure.

Then, there was a famous local theater company that performed the traditional enactments of the Hindu epics like Ramayana. In rural areas, the people have loved these stylized performances for centuries, and so they had requested Baba Ji to kindly attend an enactment of the Ramayana. The performance took place after Satsang, with the veranda of the hall serving as the stage. Those who have witnessed these performances know that they last for many hours, sometimes all night long.

When Satsang was over and everyone had finished their dinner, Baba Ji came out in the cool night air and sat in the open area before the hall with hundreds of other dear ones and remained there for at least five hours watching their performance.

One day, the local organizers, along with the handful of dear ones that had come for the program from Bangalore, requested Baba Ji to kindly visit the beach along the coast some miles to the north so that he could walk beside the sea and sit for a while enjoying the beauty of the rolling, ocean waves.

Some of the Bangalore dear ones told Graham and me that, in years gone by, they used to come to the beach with Baba Ji after evening Satsang and sit with him by the sea in the dark night, with only the illumination of a gas lamp by Baba Ji's side, while he talked with them of deep and beautiful spiritual subjects. In the videos that Graham took during the program, one can easily see

how Baba Ji was barely managing the intense demands upon his time; yet, to please others, he was ever ready to do what he could manage and much more, pushing his body to superhuman limits.

Baba Ji Ignored All Advice to Take Rest

Perhaps the greatest wonder of this time was that Baba Ji never mentioned anything about his health. He totally ignored it—and gave and gave and gave. My words fail to portray this time correctly. I know very well how people like to think that if he was such a great Master, then why didn't he simply heal himself. It is certainly an understandable thought, but in all my experience with him and also with Sant Ajaib Singh Ji and Baba Ram Singh, I have noticed that they do not generally engage in such displays of miraculous powers. In each and every case, they push their bodies beyond all human endurance for the sake of others while never mentioning what they were doing, with the result that there comes a time when the body simply can bear no more. The dear ones around them who are responsible for helping them in their work become frustrated and anxious when such times occur because the Saints simply do not heed their well-intentioned advice to rest. They alone know what they need to accomplish before their life's work is complete and as they are in the love of their Master—that is the Power of Shabd, the Divine Light and Celestial Sound Current that manifested in the physical form of their Spiritual Preceptor—they go on serving that Power till their very last breath.

I Injure My Toe

While attending the program and watching all the events surrounding it, trying to absorb something of its

beauty, meaning, and significance, I did not pay careful attention to the immediate environment around me. This type of carelessness had some rather dramatic consequences in that while walking, I mashed my big toe against a large stone, reducing it to a mangled mess and shattering the toenail into the bargain. It was painful, and there was a real danger, in the tropical coastal climate, that it might quickly become septic. By good fortune, there was a fine community doctor in the area who, although he had never been to medical school, had a natural knack for applying the principles of ayurvedic, homeopathic, and allopathic medicines to the various cases brought to his attention. He was a beautiful man with a clear, radiant personality—very competent in his discipline, which he used to serve the people of his area. He had no set fees but received payment or not, according to the means at the patient's disposal. So, I was brought to his clinic. He warmly welcomed me, and, as he had received education in an English medium school, we could talk openly and freely. He promptly gave me an injection to numb the area of my foot where the injury occurred; then, he removed my toenail and thoroughly cleaned my wound. When he found out why I was there and that I was with Baba Somanath Ji, having come to India in search of a competent spiritual Master, he became very enthusiastic and told me that he also had spent his life in quest of God and at one point had come in the company of Swami Ramdas who eventually developed the Anandashram in Kerala State.

I told him that I was familiar with Swami Ramdas' life and teachings, as I had read his two remarkable books, *In Quest of God* and *In the Vision of God*. He was very happy on hearing this and then told me that after

he came in Swami Ji's company and developed faith in him, then one day when he (the doctor) sat for meditation, his mind became still, and he entered samadhi. In that state, his soul reached such a beautiful place within that he clearly saw the Divine Light living in every particle of the creation. It was, for him, a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It had such a profound effect on every aspect of his life that he decided to remain in the rural area where he lived and serve the people in whatever way he could. As it turned out, he started working as a doctor since he had a natural aptitude for medicine and its application in healing others. When I told him a bit about Baba Somanath Ji and his wonderful quiet ways, he felt inspired to come to Satsang and meet him. When he came into Baba Ji's company, he at once realized that here was Someone who could guide him further on the Inner Way. But by that time, initiation had already been held, so Baba Ji told him that, in the future, he could receive the meditation instructions from him. On the one hand, he was sad, but on the other hand, he felt happy and grateful, for he saw in Baba Ji the competency of a true spiritual Master and knew that, in due course of time, he too would receive the precious gift Baba Ji had promised to bestow on him. As it turned out, he was to meet Baba Ji once more, as will be detailed in the upcoming Davangere section of this account.

The Saint's Langar is Free to All Alike

Another unique feature of such large programs is that a huge outdoor kitchen is set up to serve three meals a day to all those coming for the program, both locally and from distant places. It is a work that requires a lot of time and energy because cooking for a thousand people

a day or more is no small task. (Only in Bombay was this arrangement unfeasible because there was no space for such cooking arrangements.) Baba Ji himself would sometimes come and sit at the head of the langar when food was being served. One day a group of orthodox Brahmins came to Satsang and liked very much the way Baba Ji was explaining the spiritual precepts of the Path of the Masters. But afterward, when they came to the langar, they asked the organizers where the Brahmins could sit and have their food apart from the common people. They were told that in the court of the Saints, there was no caste system and that all sat together to eat without consideration of high or low. They were so upset by this that they refused to eat and left.

Another memorable occasion occurred after Satsang one evening when a famous local group of dancers came into the hall dressed as lions and danced and capered amongst all those sitting there. It was quite an entertaining scene, and all of us, but most of all the children, were enthralled by their antics. It was all part of a display of innocent love and devotion expressing itself in different ways.

Initiation Day and Baba Ji's Advice to a Young Sadhu

Toward the end of the program, a day was set aside for initiation, and amongst those seeking this sacred gift was a young sadhu who hailed from a local family. He had taken on the robes of a renunciate and was wandering from place to place, living on the alms of others. Baba Ji and this young sadhu had a lively conversation, as Baba Ji was in the habit of interviewing each person who was seeking initiation to see if they were prepared to live up to the basic precepts of adopting a vegetarian

diet, earning their own livelihood by honest means, and gradually developing the habit of sitting for 2½ hours each day. Baba Ji understood well the meaning of the renunciate life, as for 20 plus years he had done severe penances and difficult kundalini sadhanas. He greatly appreciated those who did these practices in their earnest quest for God realization, but he also knew that many who outwardly adopted the symbols of the sadhu were only seeking to have a life unencumbered by worldly responsibilities, enhanced by free meals wherever they wandered. In rural areas, in particular, such sadhus are greatly honored as holy people by the innocent householders earning their living in agricultural and other rural occupations.

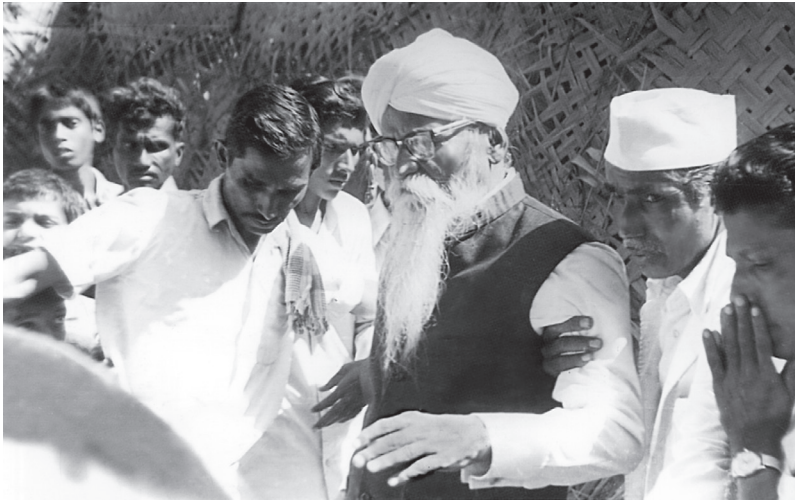
This young sadhu was of that type, so Baba Ji gently chided him for appearing to be a holy man yet not really engaging himself in the hardships of the yogic practices that were well known to Baba Ji. There was a good deal of laughter while Baba Ji helped the sadhu see that perhaps he was not really what he pretended to be. It was done in a gracious way, and in the end, the sadhu asked him to please initiate him. Baba Ji told him that he should wait and first readjust his lifestyle so that he was earning his own living; only then, when he had shown that he could integrate into the community and become a responsible member thereof, would initiation be considered.

Visit to the Home of a Devoted Disciple

Finally, the day came for departure, and the whole village came to the hall to bid Baba Ji farewell. The villagers once again followed Baba Ji's car. It was a poignant time of parting from their midst of the One they loved and revered, whether they were initiated or not. Little did they

or any of us know that this would be Baba Ji's last trip to Dharehwar.

On the way back up the Ghats, we turned off on a dirt road and journeyed deep into a jungle area where one of Baba Ji's dear disciples and his extended family lived on a small farm in that remote place. Because of his disciple's intense longing to have Baba Ji visit their home, he had agreed to do so for a short while. This disciple was another of what was called in India a "mast" fakir—an intoxicated one whose attention was constantly riveted inside and who relates to the outside world from that inner standpoint. With Baba Ji's grace, he was able to digest his inner experience while engaging in most normal farming activities.



Baba Ji visiting Sirsi

At one time, he had become so absorbed in the love of the Master that he was totally oblivious to his surroundings; and the people around him, concerned that

he might injure himself in that God intoxicated state, brought him to Baba Ji in Kengeri. Baba Ji had a unique way of dealing with the situation that proved to be very effective. This disciple was comfortable around the cows and water buffaloes, so Baba Ji let him spend his days in the animal sheds at the ashram, where he could sing the praises of the Lord to his heart's content, amongst his understanding friends.

Each day, he was escorted to Baba Ji's room, singing Baba Ji's praises both coming and going, and, gradually, he once again learned to function in an acceptable way in the outer world while remaining focused within. During this readjustment period, he committed to memory Baba Ji's entire life story, as much as was known to him at that time, and he could recite it in a beautifully poetic way from any point one wished him to start. It was his home that Baba Ji and all of us visited. It was a very moving experience to be with him and his family in this remote jungle area, permeated by a spirit of intense love and devotion.

Satsang Program in Sirsi

We returned to the main road after this love-filled visit and continued on the way up the Ghats to the city of Sirsi, where Baba Ji had another sizeable Sangat. A two-day program was scheduled there before Baba Ji returned to the ashram via Davangere, and several moving stories are associated in my mind with that town, one of which I was privy to.

There was a well-respected doctor, who lived in Sirsi with his wife and daughter. I had the opportunity of going to their house with Baba Ji during our stay there. I, unfortunately, have a poor memory for names but I

remember their faces well. The doctor was still in practice, the wife took care of home affairs, and the daughter, at that time, was studying in medical school.

This story mainly concerns the wife, although each of them struck me as being wonderfully kind and loving souls. But, at least for me, the wife remains etched in my mind. How can I describe this type of person? I fear I am always struggling to find words for something that seems forever beyond my grasp, but I will try. Some souls have a quality of loving devotion that is absolutely pure and innocent. There is a type of soft, delicate, ethereal radiance that comes from such people, although they do not themselves know it. They have a delicacy and refinement of manner that is elegant yet totally free of artifice. It is not something contrived or learned from any outer system of behavior but flows from the heart—naturally, quietly, and beautifully. A person as coarse as I am can hardly bear to be in their presence, yet because of who and what they are, one feels that one need not fear, that all is well. In that vision of beauty, one finds one's heart has been touched, at least momentarily, with an awareness of what it is like to dwell naturally in the core of one's own being where love, kindness, gentleness, and devotion are all that exist. I flounder now for words because my head is so full of concepts and ideas of all these things, but, in that experience, such mental oscillations do not arise—there is just the living reality of being in one's own true heart where only purity and innocence naturally dwell. Well, that is the best I can do with it, far from the mark, but still something of what I experienced when I saw her interacting with Baba Ji.

There was something in their mannerisms towards each other that was luminous and whole—a heart-to-heart

communication where words were few but filled with deep meaning between the two of them.

What I came to know about their relationship was this. Some years ago, she had become paralyzed from the neck downwards. I do not know the cause. She was heartbroken because she could not go to see Baba Ji, her dear Spiritual Preceptor. So, Baba Ji came to her. He told her not to worry, that all would be well. He asked her to do him a favor. What was that favor? He asked her to try to write him a letter whenever she felt so inclined. At the time, she could not hold a pen in her hand. But because of the love in her heart for Baba Ji, she began to will herself to learn to write again. And slowly, she did learn to hold a pen and to write just one letter, like the letter "D". Then gradually she could write a whole word "Dear," and on like that. And in this way, life slowly came back into her body till, one day, she could write him a simple note of love. And, from that day forward, she gradually regained the use of all her limbs. When I went to their home, she was able to attend to all the household duties and serve us with the natural grace of a loving host, as is often found in Indian homes.

Saints have their own unique ways to bring each of us along the Path of devotion. There is something a Saint sees in each of us, some way he can touch our hearts, and it is different for each person. But once that chord of love has been touched in one of a thousand ways, we can never forget it. Life may deal us some severe blows that seem to numb us to the thing we know to be true, and we may even seemingly forget altogether. I know this feeling only too well, and I think it may happen to many folks. Yet, once this spark of love issuing forth from a Saint has touched you, whether it is by word, or look, or

gesture, just anything, one can never truly forget it, for it is coming from the abode of true Light and Love. And sooner or later, that spark, covered by the bitter ashes of life in this world, will get ignited again and then we can proceed once more on the Path back to our True Home, with a heart deeply and sincerely grateful for having seen, even once, a Saint in whose heart is filled with love and love alone.

During our visit to Sirsi, I also had the chance to visit the home of my dear friend Ragu. Whenever Ragu came to the ashram, he always kindly spent time with me, and the hours together with him were very happy ones because his love for Baba Ji was so deep and his understanding of what it was like for me living there—often alone, with no one to talk to—so real. Therefore, it was a joy to spend a few hours at his home with his family.

Ragu told me of an incident that had occurred in Sirsi a few years earlier, which gives yet another glimpse into the heart of this quiet Saint. He said that one year while Baba Ji was in Sirsi, the children came to him and requested that he please give them some meditation instructions, so they could remember him when he went away. Baba Ji was very pleased with their innocent request and so held a special program for them in which he gave them instructions on how to listen to the Sound Current reverberating at the center above and between the two eyes. So he had them all sit for meditation for a short while. One beautiful little girl, as soon as she fixed her attention at the eye center, became totally absorbed within, listening to the strains of the Divine Melody. She was totally oblivious to her surroundings, and while she sat there, a bee came buzzing around her head. Baba Ji quietly got up from where he was sitting and stood over

her, shooing the bee away from around her face so that she could remain absorbed in her spiritual reverie.

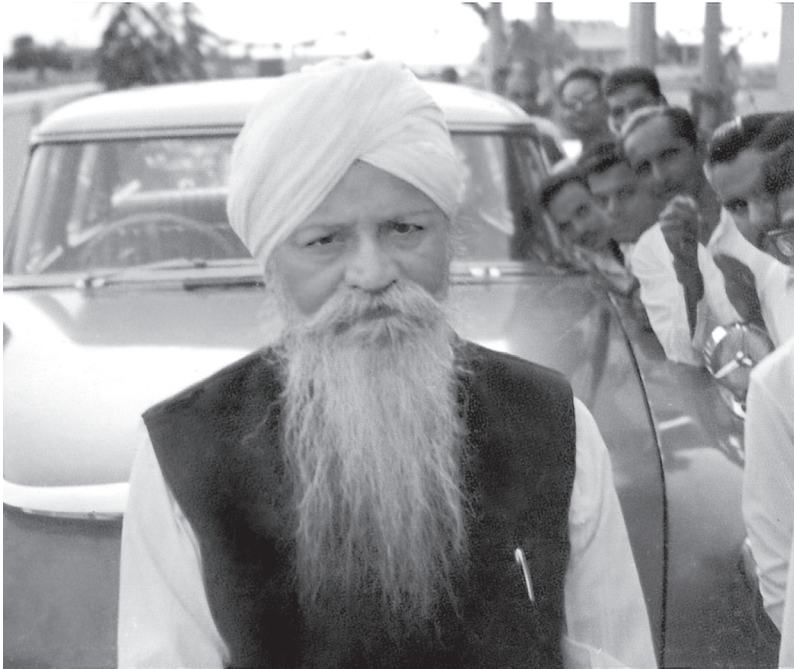
Another small incident occurred when a mother and daughter came to him requesting Initiation. They were from a very wealthy family. The mother was attached to their wealth, and her arms were bedecked with golden bangles—a sort of status symbol of where one stood on the material ladder of success. Baba Ji accepted the daughter but requested the mother to wait till a later time when she had heard more Satsangs and had a better grasp of the teachings of the Saints. Later, the organizers asked as to why the daughter was accepted and the mother rejected. Baba Ji said that the daughter's request and her yearning to awaken to the Truth within was coming from her heart, but the mother's heart was still filled with the desire for gold and riches, leaving little place to put the precious gift of Naam. She was searching for the Truth, and her time was undoubtedly coming, but first, she would need to understand that all these worldly riches were of no value on the Inner Path, where only love, devotion, humility, and forgiveness could assist the aspirant.

In Sirsi, Baba Ji continued with the rigorous schedule he had followed in Dhareshwar, but the toll on his health was becoming increasingly evident.

The Last Davangere Program

On the return trip, Baba Ji stopped in Davangere at the request of the local Satsangis. He gave a couple of beautiful Satsangs there and visited the cloth shop of a devoted merchant, from whom he procured some cloth for clothes that would be made for the Kengeri ashram sevadars. With regards to this merchant, Mr. Parameshwar,

there is a wonderful story that I would like to relate. He had two young twin boys who were about seven years old when I first saw them (during the 1972 program). Right from their infancy, they had the great influence of their parents, who were very dear devotees of Baba Ji. They also had an older sister who once came to the ashram and stayed with Pushpamma for several months, helping her with all the work related to preparing food for guests coming to see Baba Ji, keeping the rooms neat and tidy, etc.



Baba Ji on tour in Davangere

These two boys, as the result of the good influence of their upbringing, had very early on learned to harmoniously sing the bhajans of the Saints, and, sometimes

before Satsang, they would be allowed to lead the Sangat in the well-known, sacred hymns of the Sages of Sant Mat, like Kabir, Mira Bai, and Tulsi Sahib.

On that first visit to Davangere (where the Episode of the Barking Dog took place), I was outside Baba Ji's room one day when those two young boys were sitting with Baba Ji, and while I stood there, I suddenly heard Baba Ji begin to sing, which I had never heard him do before, in the most beautiful voice. As I listened, I realized that he was teaching these boys how to sing *Sātguru Sāwan Shāh*. It was an incredible experience. It was an event where the pure heart of the Master intermingled with the pure hearts of the two beautiful young boys, and the waves of love and grace that flowed from it washed over my own heart, creating a longing to once again become innocent like a child.

And, as it turned out, even after having pushed his body to the absolute limits of endurance, he decided to give initiation in Davangere since there were about 100 dear ones waiting to receive this gift. Exhausted as his body was, he held initiation on the second full day of his visit. It was the last initiation program he was to do on that scale. He would later initiate several Westerners, including Bernard and Dominique Daniel of France, Paul Clarke of Ireland, and Dag Daram of Sweden, but all these were done in the privacy of his room at Kengeri.

When the decision to hold initiation was made, Baba Ji sent word to the doctor in Dhareshwar (the one who had taken care of my toe) to come immediately if he wished to be initiated, but due to some unforeseen delay, he arrived just after initiation took place, once again missing the golden opportunity. Even though he was deeply disappointed, his spiritual maturity was such that he realized he would, in due course of time, definitely receive

this blessing. In such cases, the Saints extend a special type of grace, and, even though the dear one has not formally been initiated, still they are in the protective shelter of the Saints, both during life and at the time of death.

Baba Ji's Health Declines Dramatically

After the rigorous tour to Dhareshwar, Sirsi and Davangere—where Baba Ji gave unstintingly—there was not an ounce of giving left in his exhausted body, so when he returned to the ashram, an almost total collapse was inevitable, the results of which will now be detailed in the following pages.

With each passing day after Baba Ji's return, his health declined further. Naturally, all daily Satsangs were suspended, as Baba Ji was almost entirely confined to his bed. The various members of the medical profession who were familiar with Baba Ji's health history all came to the ashram and, in joint consultation, decided that Baba Ji should be taken to a nursing home in the city, where he could undergo all the tests that they felt were necessary to determine what was ailing him. It seemed that he had some type of an advanced cancerous condition.

The atmosphere in the ashram was very somber at this time, as the sevadars all naturally worried that perhaps Baba Ji was about to depart; instead of his health improving with rest, he was getting worse, and, with his advanced years, it did not seem that he could easily recover. Then one morning, we were all summoned to Baba Ji's room for a farewell darshan as Baba Ji was about to leave for the nursing home. It was a tearful occasion for one and all—despair was written in every heart—but it seemed that the only possible hope lay in getting Baba Ji to a place where the most advanced

medical professionals and equipment could be utilized to diagnose the problem and, hopefully, come up with a treatment plan.

Bringing Fresh Milk to the Nursing Home Each Day

Just before Baba Ji departed, Pushpamma called Graham and me with instructions that each day we should bring fresh milk from the ashram—once in the morning and once in the afternoon—with the two of us to alternate in bringing it. It was a great kindness on her part to give us this opportunity, for we, at least, would have some first-hand knowledge of what was going on instead of depending on hearsay.

Thus began one of the most intense times of life that I can recall. Each day, as per Pushpamma's request, we brought milk to the nursing home. Baba Ji was confined to his bed. When I would go there, I did not wish to bother him with talking, so I would sit quietly in the same room in an out-of-the-way place and remain there for about 15 to 30 minutes. The room was spacious, cool and well ventilated, so it was a good place for him to rest. The Christian nurses attending upon him were deeply respectful of him and did all in their power to make him comfortable. One day, one of the nurses who was assigned to his care came to me and said, "Mr. Christopher, your Baba Ji is God." It was very moving to hear these words come out of her innocent and pure heart. She did not know anything about his life or his teachings, but she simply felt this thing deep within her heart and kindly spoke those words to me.

The doctor who took up the responsibility of caring for Baba Ji was one of the top cancer specialists in Bangalore. I well remember the first time I saw him enter

the room. He was dressed in an immaculate hand-tailored suit, perfect in every detail. He was tall, immensely handsome, with a robust physique. He had the appearance of a Bollywood movie star. He radiated confidence and competency and justly felt that he could discover what was wrong with Baba Ji and design a curative program for his disease, which he thought might be cancer.

Unfortunately, the days ahead were to prove a challenge for him because, try as he might, he could not find the key to unlock the mystery behind the weakness that was incapacitating Baba Ji. The first set of x-rays that were made were hazy and did not show clearly the signs he was looking for. He was naturally concerned because, normally, the x-ray machine gave an accurate image of the internal organs, but such was not the case with the set the lab had produced. He had not seen this type of inaccurate x-ray before, and everything that happened afterward was also fraught with similar challenges.

No other tests he did could help him in determining what was wrong. All that could be observed was that Baba Ji was very weak, and they prescribed a simple diet that Pushpamma could prepare for him. Baba Ji, though, was not particularly pleased with the dietary regimen because they forbade that he should drink almond milk—one of his favorite beverages. With each passing day, the doctor felt more and more concerned because, with all his best efforts, he could not find the key to healing that he had hoped to discover by which Baba Ji could return to good health. He and all those who worked with him were immensely kind and thoughtful, for they knew how much Baba Ji meant to the dear ones who began arriving in Bangalore from all parts of South India. Most of all, they recognized in Baba Ji a great soul, the likes of which they had never encountered before.

Twin Girls Come for Darshan at the Nursing Home

A particularly beautiful thing happened, though, one day when I came and sat in the room. One dear Bangalore husband and wife had twin daughters about nine or ten years old. These two girls had, from a young age, been coming to see Baba Ji, and they had that pure and innocent love that is a natural quality of children living in a household permeated by the spirit of devotion. As I looked toward the bed where Baba Ji lay, I saw the two girls standing beside him, with their beautiful, long, black, braided tresses; their smooth glowing, fresh, childish faces; their clean and neat school attire, immaculately pressed—all presenting a scene of simple beauty. Their hands were laid gently in his, while Baba Ji looked deeply into their eyes. Not a word was spoken for perhaps five minutes—just this silent heart-to-heart communication. After a while, they bowed before him and left. It was a moment of transcendent beauty.

Meanwhile, from every part of South India, dear ones had started coming to Bangalore, for word had spread that Baba Ji was precariously ill, and many feared that he was about to depart from this world. Inside the room, it was quiet and peaceful, for the doctor had given strict orders that Baba Ji was not to be disturbed, and the nurses saw to it that this command was followed. But outside the room, one could feel the anguish and despair of all who came to the nursing home, for which there was no relief because Baba Ji could not see them nor they him.

Baba Ji Announces He is Returning to the Ashram

Several weeks passed in this manner—I have no exact recollection of how long but perhaps two or three weeks. Then something very strange happened. Baba Ji sat up one day and announced that he was now okay, albeit a

bit weak, so there was no longer any need for him to remain in the nursing home; he would be returning to the ashram. And sure enough, that very afternoon, he bade farewell to the nursing home staff, thanking them for all their love and care, and they, with tears in their eyes, bade him farewell, for they had come to love him deeply.

Meanwhile, back at the ashram, there was great rejoicing, for many of the sevadars had given up hope they would ever see him again. Now, by some great good fortune, the life-infusing presence of Baba Ji was amongst us once more. It was to prove a time of great blessing for all of us. And after a short rest, Baba Ji was able to resume his normal routine of going about the ashram, although now it was in a wheelchair. He also began giving the daily Satsangs, as he had formerly.

The way the Satsangs once again started was like this. Naiyar Ji, who had served Baba Ji for many years before this event occurred, and who had been Baba Ji's right-hand man in his cloth shop in Bombay when he was living there, came to stay in the ashram for a month or two before the Dhareshwar Program, to help in any way he could while Baba Ji's health was not good. He had such a competent yet humble way of attending to practical matters that his positive attitude inspired confidence in us all.

When Baba Ji decided to go to Dhareshwar, in the face of the doctor's plea for him not to do so, it was Naiyar who came forward and did everything humanly possible to ensure that the trip would take place according to Baba Ji's will and wish. Naiyar himself was shaken by Baba Ji's determination to make the trip, but once he understood that this was his wish, he put aside his own worries and gave himself up to the task at hand. It was to

prove a profoundly challenging seva, and I marvel that he did it so beautifully and determinedly; even today, I still wonder how he managed it all.

It was Naiyar who somehow held things together, as best as such things could be managed, when Baba Ji was in the nursing home and afterward. It is truly impossible to imagine the difficulty of this task, for the mystery of the sickness of the Saints is something that transcends all our normal perceptions. Yet, he did it beautifully, graciously, quietly, and humbly. Pushamma, too, was a stalwart of service during this trying time.

The greatness of these souls cannot be fathomed, for they had, to the best of their ability, given their lives to the service of a Saint, a very difficult job indeed because it has to be done while still carrying some vestiges of the human persona. It is through these two great souls and numerous others that important aspects of devotion were revealed to me because I was close enough to both of them to know that they had human propensities like mine and had to struggle against their small selves to serve a Saint in this most intimate and immaculate way.

As Baba Ji's health improved from day to day, so did the daily opportunity to go for morning darshan resume since Baba Ji could now sit comfortably for longer periods of time. There were several dear ones from Bombay who had come to stay in the ashram, along with other dear ones from South India who spoke fluent Hindi, so one day I had this brilliant idea that Naiyar should send a message to Bombay for the dear ones to bring or send Hindi Satsang tapes that we could play in the evening. (So far, all my brilliant ideas had managed to get me in deep, hot water, so somehow intuitively I knew that I should not present



Baba Ji distributing prashad to the sevadars

this particular idea directly to Baba Ji but should encourage Naiyar to be my representative.) By now, I had become quite proficient in understanding Hindi and had grown very fond of the amazing Satsangs Baba Ji gave when he went to Bombay.

Normally, in the evening, only Kannada Satsangs were played on the reel-to-reel tape machine. Of course, most of the dear ones from South India understood these very well, but I was eager to get some spiritual nourishment from the Hindi Satsangs and thought that, perhaps, we could add them now and again to the evening program. Naiyar attentively listened to my request and thought that it was a good idea. So off we went, marching up the steps to Baba Ji's room, with Naiyar in front and me behind. When we got to the door to Baba Ji's room, we found it open, and, at this point, I had one further brilliant idea. I would not even go into the room myself. Instead, I gently nudged Naiyar Ji forward to make this request on behalf of the Hindi-speaking group now assembled in the ashram.

I think by this time in my relationship with Baba Ji, there was some awareness that one did not casually ask Baba Ji a question unless they were willing to accept the consequences of their enquiries—which might be far different than they had anticipated. I stood outside the room on the veranda and watched Naiyar approach Baba Ji. It is a priceless memory. Baba Ji was obviously feeling better. He was sitting quietly in his chair, looking radiantly beautiful. But I could see that perhaps this question—as had happened with some of my own previous questions—might be taking an interesting twist.

Baba Ji gave Naiyar a penetrating glance and said, "Well, Naiyar Ji, what is it that you want?" I think at this

point, Naiyar Ji also might have been wondering what he was doing there, but he managed to bravely ask this seemingly innocent question regarding having the Hindi tapes sent from Bombay. All of a sudden, the atmosphere in the room became electric. I had certainly been a part of such scenes in the past.

He looked at Naiyar with a severe countenance and, in a stern voice, said, "What, Naiyar? Do you think I cannot give Satsang in Hindi anymore? I can certainly do so. Give up your idea of having tapes sent from Bombay. I myself will come in the evening and commence Satsang once more." Naiyar quietly backed out of the room, batting his head from side to side with the palms of his hands. I witnessed all this from outside the room. It was so beautiful and powerful, and, as I was not the direct recipient of Baba Ji's incisive comments, but merely the observer, I was compelled to laugh all my way to the room, while Naiyar recovered from the interchange.

But the wonderful thing was that Baba Ji did indeed resume daily Satsang from that time forward, and we were to enjoy his regular presence in the evening until October of 1976, when he entered the final phases of his life's journey.



Baba Somanath Ji's Final Days in This World

For many years, I have thought about those last days with Baba Ji. The passage of a great Saint from this world is such a powerful event. It intensifies the inner life of all those who have been in contact with him, either in his immediate surroundings or from any place in the world they might be. In many ways, that time is too challenging and painful to recollect. But all the Saints emphasize over and over that the Guru is the Shabd, and the disciple is the soul, and on some level, we accept their words, but when we have to face that moment when we are deprived of his physical presence, even the mighty stalwarts on the Path are shaken.

Those disciples who have some inner access and can fly to the feet of the Master within may gain solace for their lacerated hearts, but for those, who during their discipleship have confined their interactions with the Master to his physical manifestation only, do not have that recourse. Still, regardless of our own stage of development, the Master always supports and showers grace on the disciple. He stands by us in this world and the next and never rests till he, in the form of the Shabd Guru, presents us at the feet of Sat Purush, the True Lord,

beyond all realms of time and space, birth and death, happiness and sorrow. Ultimately, in a time frame that lies beyond what we can perceive with the human mind, his whole work is to purify the soul and make it ready to return to the Source from which it came.



Baba Somanath Ji with dear ones at Kengeri

In the summer of 1976, Baba Ji had sent word to the few Western initiates who were not already in the ashram to, if possible, return in the autumn. During the previous couple of years, a beautiful new Satsang Hall had been constructed in Andhra Pradesh, in the Betta area. It was the place where Baba Ji first came many years ago upon the invitation of Mahadevappa and the other village elders who, along with Mahadevappa, had been initiated into Sant Mat by Hazur Maharaj Sawan Singh Ji, the Great Master of Beas. It was to this very area that Hazur had instructed Baba Somanath Ji to go and start

giving Satsang since the village people were too poor to travel all the way to Beas to be with him. That hall had recently been completed, and we thought Baba Ji would be going there for its inauguration. Already Paul Clarke, Dag Daram, and Paul Young were at the ashram when Baba Ji sent his message. Bernard and Dominique arrived in late October, and Graham and I came a few days later. Jany and Kyoko Cailhol and their baby daughter Deepa were also scheduled to come at the same time, but, as fate would have it, they arrived after Baba Ji had already left the mortal coil.

When I came to the ashram, my own mood was pretty intense. Two weeks before traveling to India, I had gone to the desert near Palm Springs, California, and, under the guidance of an elderly lady, I fasted on water for a couple of weeks. And when I arrived at the ashram, I continued eating very little. It was not a wise thing to do, but then again, I have been forever short of that commodity. Very soon after our arrival, Baba Ji became very sick. Many doctors were called to try to diagnose his illness, and many medicines were prescribed. Baba Ji had a whole table of them by his bedside, but nothing worked.

I, meanwhile, due to not having consumed a balanced diet for some time and basically subsisting on buttermilk, got this wild idea in my head that I was soon to leave the body. Fortunately, the Western dear ones around me managed to endure my erratic ways. I even remember composing a letter to my mom, bidding her farewell. There was nothing "spiritual" about my behavior. It was an advanced case of emotional imbalance, parading as spiritual intoxication. I sat for meditation a lot, sang bhajans, read the teaching of the Saints, and all manner of things of this nature, but what I really needed was a good square meal or two so I could get my feet

on the ground and start working in the fields. But the Indian Satsangis were very concerned about me and did not know how to shake me out of the mood I was in.

Baba Ji was, meanwhile, getting weaker and weaker as the days went by. Yet, in the midst of all this, he still had time to save me from myself. It happened in this way. In order to ease the aches and pains that were constantly bothering his body, Paul Young, who had good knowledge of massage, would go up in the evening and massage Baba Ji for some time.

One evening, when he went up to give the massage, Baba Ji asked him about me, for word had reached him of what I was doing. Paul explained the situation to him. Then Baba Ji said these memorable words: "Tell Christopher that by acting in this way, he cannot force the inner doors of grace to open. Such type of practice does not win grace. Yes, a person can reduce his sleep, his food, and his speech to a reasonable degree. That is acceptable. It can help in developing his meditation practice. But to go to this type of extreme is not good. It is not healthy for the mind or the body, nor does it win the Lord's grace. Tell him to start eating again."

When Paul came back and conveyed Baba Ji's message, I suddenly snapped out of my obsessive behavior and realized I was making a fool and spectacle of myself, which is the exact opposite of what is required on the spiritual Path where one is to live a normal, quiet life, while engaging in meditation and taking care of one's outer responsibilities with enthusiasm and care. On that day, once again, I returned to eating with everyone else.

But as concerns Baba Ji, things did not improve. He still maintained a regular schedule of Satsang, in spite of his weakness and poor health. It was pure will power, manifesting in him, that compelled his body to come to the Satsang.



Baba Ji going for Satsang

Mr. Menon was coming to the ashram quite regularly, and so, he would bring his car to the base of Baba Ji's steps, and some of us would carry him down so he could get in the car. Mr. Menon would drive him to the door of the hall, and then, with Naiyar Ji's aid, he would walk the length of the hall to take his seat. It was quite a heart-wrenching scene. But each night, something really amazing would happen. He would start explaining the meaning of the bani in a somewhat subdued voice, but with each passing stanza, his voice grew louder, clearer

and more beautiful. For a brief 15-20 minutes, he gave elegant Satsangs before returning to his room.

Needless to say, all of us living in the ashram were profoundly affected by what was happening because, on some level, I think each one of us realized that Baba Ji was about to depart. Though everyone prepared for this event in their own way, few of us had done enough meditation to understand the significance of what was happening. Those who have meditated deeply and have connected themselves with the Inner Power do suffer extremely at such times because they have a profound appreciation for the human pole in which that Power is working. But at the same time, since they have also manifested that Power within their hearts, they have the wisdom to digest what is going on without losing their equilibrium. As one Sage has clearly put it, "If you are perturbed by anything, it is because you are perturbable."

Sant Kirpal Singh Ji in *Morning Talks* graciously described the mature attitude of a traveler on the Inner Path during such times:

The first principle, the basic principle and I would say the grandest of all, is to know that God is everywhere. We are living in Him, and He is in us. We live and have our being in Him, like fish in the river. The fish lives in the water, its whole life depends on water. It lives in water; it lives on water, from whence it gets its food. When God wished "I am One and wish to be many", the whole Universe emanated, came into being. The whole world is an expression, a manifestation of God. Where is that place where He is not? We are in Him; He is in us and is our Controlling Power. All ensouled bodies are the drops of the Ocean of all Consciousness. When we know this, all is beautiful. God is beautiful, and any world made by Him,

manifested by Him, is also beautiful. Beauty comes out of beauty, not from ugliness. Anything that appears to be ugly in the world is the result of the spectacles that we are wearing. If the glass of the spectacles is smoky, you will see all smoke. If it is red, everything will appear red. If it is black, everything will appear black. Well, the world is not black, red or smoky, mind that! So we have to change the trend of our mind, of our heart.

The first principle that we have to abide by is to know that He is everywhere. We are in Him, and He is in us. When you know this, you will just pay respect to everybody. They are all manifested in the man-body. When we know that He is everywhere and that He knows everything of our heart, how can we do anything that is not good or commit a sin! Our Master used to say, "When a child of five years is sitting by you, you will never dare to do anything which is wrong." When you have the viewpoint that He is within me, He is outside me, I am in Him, how can you perpetrate anything? Can you? This is the sum and substance, the basic principle. If you abide by it, everything will follow of itself. The world will be beautiful. Beauty comes out of beauty. If the world appears to be ugly or not beautiful, that is the result of the spectacles that you are wearing.¹

—Sant Kirpal Singh

What was really important about this time was not our personal reactions to this powerful event but what Baba Ji himself was manifesting. It was very beautiful and deep. It is these memories that remain in my heart, now and forever. While Baba Ji's health declined, the love

¹ Kirpal Singh, *Morning Talks* (Delhi, India: Ruhani Satsang, 1970) "What the Principles are of Bhakti or Devotion," p. 123-124.

flowing from him increased, sustaining all of us during that trying time.

In the midst of the intense atmosphere that overhung these days, one extraordinarily beautiful event stands out in my memory. None of us who were present at that time realized what its significance would be in the years to come. In a quiet way, Baba Ji was revealing that there would be Someone from amongst us who would help many dear souls to deepen their love for the inner Master Power, as well as help seekers to enter the Path of love. I am saying this realizing that there were doubtless other events that occurred regarding dear souls to whom Baba Ji was entrusting responsibilities for the time to come, to help his children remain steadfast in their devotion. It is now deeply ingrained in my within that one simply cannot fathom the ways of the Saints, and they have many mysterious methods in which they work.

As I mentioned earlier, there was one young man who had come to the ashram from the Benares area via Bombay named Ram Singh. I was there at the time of his arrival. Once he came to the ashram to have Baba Ji's darshan, he never left. His quiet love and devotion to Baba Ji were hidden from us all since he went about whatever duties had been entrusted to him with such gentleness, respect and delicate humility that one hardly noticed he was there. Yet, we were, in fact, very close to one another as we worked in the fields and on ashram projects together. For him, though, a good deal of his time was utilized in doing the night watchman duty for the ashram, so we did not see him as much the other sevadars. His full story is not the focus of this book; that tale has already been written by others, but still it forms an important part of this chapter since at that time, Baba Ji was pouring into Ram Singh's heart the immense

spiritual treasure that had been entrusted to him by his Guru, while yet keeping the process totally hidden.

The events at this time are described in detail in *In the Lap of the Supreme Father: The Biography of Sant Ram Singh Ji Maharaj*:

Three years passed with Baba Ram Singh continuously and steadfastly doing his seva in the ashram of Baba Somanath Ji. Baba Somanath Ji was becoming very old. His health was deteriorating. Baba Somanath had given Ram Singh an indication that he would be leaving the body soon. Baba Ram Singh used to remain introverted. In these days, his body was doing the Seva, but his heart was in fear of something happening to Baba Somanath. One day he was taking rest after his night duty. Baba Ji called him at 3:00 p.m. He at once presented himself at his feet. He bowed down before Baba Ji. Baba Ji cast a glimpse of love at him. His eyes met with Baba Ji's. He felt as if a powerful stream was penetrating into his heart through his eyes. At the same time, he heard the words of Baba Ji, "Be ready to go to Pahar [Betta] ashram.² The Satsang Hall is ready there. First of all, you have to go there, then I have to go. You will have to do duty after me." Naiyar Ji, Karibasappa, Laxman, Bernard, and Christopher were also present there, when Baba Ji gave this order. The worldly people cannot always understand the true meaning of the Master's words. Sant Ajaib Singh Ji says in a Satsang: "The Satguru makes a decision in his lifetime, there is no doubt about it, but we are not ready to accept it."³

2 Betta ashram is also known as Pahar ashram; both words mean "hill." This is the place where the new hall had been constructed and to which we thought we would be going with Baba Ji when he summoned us back to India.

3 Pratap Singh Shakya, *In the Lap of the Supreme Father: The Biography of Sant Baba Ram Singh Ji Maharaj* (Guddella: Som Ajaib Kirpa Ashram, 2014) p. 25.

Baba Somanath instructed Ram Singh Ji that he should travel by tractor so they could transport some needed supplies to the Betta ashram. Ram Singh requested that Jamal Bhai be allowed to join him to which Baba Ji agreed.⁴ The departure time for the tractor to Betta ashram was set for 4:00 a.m. Bernard Daniel also accompanied them since he was skilled at driving the tractor. Before they left, Baba Ji handed each of them a banana and eight rupees. Jamal Bhai, who was an advanced meditator, shared his belief with Ram Singh, that these bananas might be the last prashad that Baba Ji would give them with his own hands, and they decided to eat the precious gift, peel and all.

They had planned to stay at the Betta ashram only one day, reaching there on a Thursday and returning on a Friday. However, the need to transport bricks using the tractor delayed their return, and they eventually got back to the Kengeri ashram on Saturday at 11:00 a.m., only to find Baba Ji seriously ill. Although no one was being allowed to visit Baba Ji, Baba Ram Singh managed to make his way up to Baba Ji's room and catch a last glimpse of his beloved Guru through the window. Baba Somanath Ji lay in his bed, undergoing a medical examination. Witnessing the Master's deteriorating physical condition filled his heart with sorrow.

Physical Departure of Baba Somanath Ji

When the Saints depart from this physical plane, the loving disciples cannot bear the pain of the physical separation from their Beloved Master, even though the Master Power always dwells with them and never

⁴ Bhagirathi and Jija Bai also made the trip to Betta, but they traveled by bus.

abandons them in this world or the next. But the disciples realize that if they had not come in contact with the physical form of that Power, they would not have been able to go within. I think this is explained far better in the words of Sant Ajaib Singh Ji than anything I can say:

When Supreme Father Kirpal left the body of five elements—he came in the Will of God, and he left in the Will of God; but when he left his physical body this poor Ajaib wept very much in his remembrance. When I was weeping, one person came to me and said, “You have always said that you should never cry or weep when anyone leaves the body because just by weeping or crying for someone you cannot bring that person back. You have always said that, but now you yourself are crying. You are a wise person; why are you crying?” At that time, I was in deep pain, I could not talk very properly, but still I told him this story.

There was once a king who decided to go on a tour to some other states, to some other kingdoms. He told his queen that he was going on the tour. When he left, he did not really go on the tour; after some time, he just came back, canceling his tour. But the queen was in love with another man, and when the king had left for the tour, she had already made arrangements with this man she loved, saying, “The king has now gone on tour, and he will not come for some days, so you come, and we will enjoy.” When the king came back, at that time the queen and the other man were enjoying and sleeping together. The king was surprised to see that another man was with the queen, and he was also surprised because that was the palace. How could another man come into the palace? But when he saw that the other man was with his wife, and they both were sleeping naked, he did not

get upset. He did not show that he was there, and they did not know that the king had come back. The king simply took off his shawl and covered them with it, and he went into the other room.

Now when both of them woke up, the queen was terrified to see the king's shawl over them, and she thought that the king would give her punishment because the king had seen all that they had done, because this was the shawl of the king, and nobody else would have come and covered them with the shawl except him. So when the queen thought of that she became very afraid. But the king did not mention anything about that to the queen; even though they met many times after that and lived together for many years, the king never mentioned anything about that to the queen.

After some years, when the king's end time came, he called his sons and gave the successorship to the sons, and then he told his sons that they should respect their mother and obey her. "Take good care of her, she is a good woman; do whatever she tells you." And then he transferred some property and things for the expenses of the queen also. But when the king was telling his sons to take care of their mother, the queen started weeping and went on weeping very bitterly.

The king asked her, "Why are you weeping now? I have transferred so much property to your name, and you will be comfortable when I die. What else do you want, why are you weeping?" She said, "I am not weeping for any wealth. I am crying because now, when you are leaving, who will come and throw the shawl over me? Who will hide my faults?"

So I told the dear one that was why I was weeping. I told him that when the Beloved Master was in the physi-

cal form, he used to hide my faults, he used to forgive me for my faults. Even now when he has gone back to Sach Khand, in his Radiant Form he is showering grace on me, and he is forgiving me and hiding my faults. But when you have the physical form of the Master in front of you, you can express what is in your heart, you can go and weep at his feet.

Just by having the darshan of the physical form of the Master you can get rid of so many bad sins and bad karmas that you have done, which you cannot do very easily when the Master is not there in his physical form. So that is why those who go within and see the glory of the Master within, and who know how the darshan of the Master works, they weep in the remembrance of the Master because they know that now the Master is not going to come back in his physical form and hide their faults: he is not going to come and throw the shawl over their faults.⁵

Now we are heading deeper into the heart of Baba Ji's departure. On an outer level, this moment is unbearable for all the loving disciples. Many of us have gone through such times when someone near and dear to us advances into a terminal illness. But the experience was magnified many times over when the person happened to be a revered Spiritual Preceptor loved by thousands of people dwelling in cities, towns, and villages throughout South India. Yet what really stands out for me personally was that, in spite of the emotional and mental turmoil we all went through, still Baba Somanath Ji remained calm and serene throughout, growing ever more radiant day-by-day.

It was, in a real sense, the ultimate teaching—the real

⁵ Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, June 1986, "The Pearls of Spirituality," p. 29-30.

Master is not the body but the Power living in that human vessel. I definitely saw that his body was suffering a huge amount, but whenever I looked at his face, it was beautiful and radiant beyond all imagining.

Here are a few of the most precious memories that I experienced at that time. The first happened perhaps five days before Baba Ji departed. It was evening time, around 6:45. At that time, Baba Ji was still coming to give Satsang, but I do not think it was every day. For some reason, I had gone upstairs. Perhaps I was to help carry him down in the sedan chair. I cannot say for certain. Some Satsangis had come from Bangalore and were in the room with him. I was not standing at his door as I might normally have done. I think, in fact, it was closed.

But there was a window open on the south side of his bungalow where I could look into the room. By good fortune, Baba Ji was standing at the mirror tying on his turban in preparation for Satsang. In the room, I could hear the doctor and others kindly requesting Baba Ji not to go for Satsang because of his health and the inclement weather. I remember Baba Ji clearly telling them in no uncertain terms, "I must go for Satsang tonight." He was very emphatic.

That Satsang was a memorable one, for it was to be his last. His power and beauty that night cannot be described. One would have to have been in the room with him. The Satsang was on love. He said the entire Path of spirituality could be cognized by understanding the inner meaning contained in the 2½ Hindi letters composing the word "*prem*," which means "love." During that Satsang, He began speaking of his own spiritual preceptor, Baba Sawan Singh Ji, and when he began to refer to him, the room quivered with a rarefied spiritual vibration, for his voice was choked with emotion,



Baba Somanath Ji giving Satsang at Kengeri

and he quietly wept for a brief time before continuing on. For me, it was and is one of the most precious moments of the life.

A brief synopsis of that Satsang is included below, taken from *Rare Jewels*, a pictorial essay of Baba Somanath Ji's life.

Renunciation does not mean to give up wealth, food, and other material activities but to free oneself from both Karma and Dharma. Many people, bored of life or tired of the various troubles of life, get into the habit of drinking alcoholic liquor. The intoxication of this liquor, however, is transient whereas eternal intoxication can be experienced by drinking the liquor born out of devotion and love for Naam. The Guru within generates this love and devotion. This is the only Path to salvation. The Guru is Paramatma. The Paramatma is full of love—merge in that love. Why do you waste time in thinking of others? Think of yourself! Ask yourself: "Why am I in this world? Where do I go from here?" We are caught in this cycle of births and death—the trap of time. Time is a power that has ensnared Sadhus and Yogis. Paltu says that he too was in the flame of time till his Satguru saved him.⁶

A couple of evenings later, I went up to his room for I saw the door open. It was very strange because everything was quiet, and there was no one around. When I went to the door, Baba Ji was stretched out on his bed, and his entire body was shaking with convulsions. His back was towards me. There was no one in the room with him, and no one outside the room with me. I stood

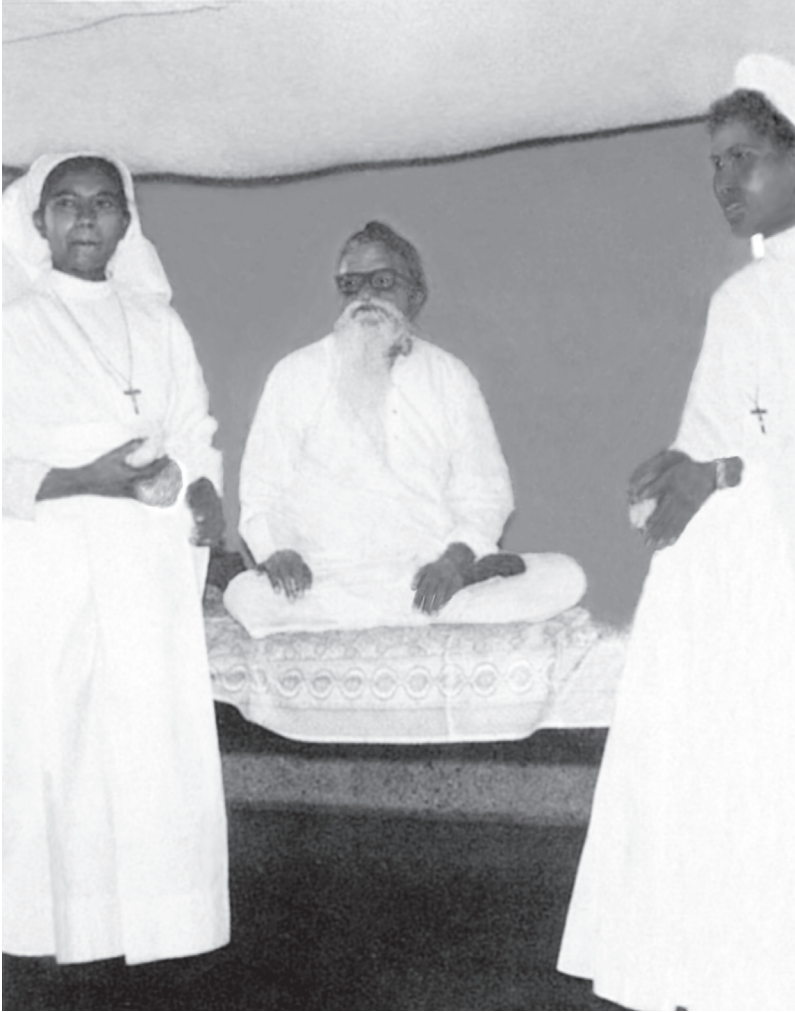
⁶ *Rare Jewels* (Bangalore: Radhaswamy Satsang, Sawan Durbar Ashram, Kengeri, 2003) p. 124.

there in awe, watching this whole thing take place. Then, all of a sudden, the convulsions stopped, and he turned over on his side towards me. His face was more beautiful than I had ever seen it, if that was possible. It was radiant, and his eyes were lustrous. He beckoned me to come into the room.

I timidly approached him. He reached over onto the nearby table where a banana was sitting. His beautiful golden hands picked it up and then placed it in mine. He simply said, "Go to Satsang." I bowed and kissed his hand and backed out of the room totally stunned. These were the last words he ever spoke to me.

I think it was on Friday night that the next event happened. During the day, doctors were arriving to see if they could allay the continuous convulsions that Baba Ji's body was undergoing. No remedy worked. This continued throughout the day into the night. Finally, it was decided to bring in one of the top physicians from Bangalore, who had a potent experimental drug that was thought to give relief from convulsions so that the person having them could rest. But it was not known what its side effects might be. It was 11:00 p.m. or perhaps a bit later when the doctor arrived. He went up to the room and, shortly thereafter, administered the drug intravenously. It was considered to be at the upper extreme of potent. It too had no effect, and so the night continued in much the same way. Finally, toward morning the convulsions subsided, and Baba Ji was able to rest a bit.

At about 8:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, a lady doctor, who was a nun from the nearby Nirmalagiri Convent, came to visit Baba Ji. She was one of those immaculately pure souls one rarely meets; her whole way of comporting herself radiated inner peace, light, and purity.



With nuns from the Nirmalagiri Convent

Regarding the nuns from the convent in general, I would like to briefly mention that while was living at the ashram, the entire convent would sometimes come over to see Baba Ji and talk with him. It was a scene from another world. The sisters, all dressed in immaculate

white, would file one by one into Baba Ji's room and seat themselves about him. They had all taken vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and to them this commitment was deep and true. From them radiated innocence and simplicity, and on their faces was a soft light. Baba Ji's love suffused their true hearts, and it was an honor to behold them sitting together. Their respect and honor for Baba Ji was so deep that when the novices took their final vows, they would invite Baba Ji to the convent to bear witness to their commitment.

This doctor and Baba Ji had a deep love and respect for each other that had evolved over the years. She had come that morning to say farewell to Baba Ji since she was under vows of obedience, and word had come that she was being transferred to another convent. The meeting between them was very tender and precious. I cannot remember why I was present—I think I was standing outside the door.

She told him, "Today, I am leaving Baba Ji." Baba Ji looked deep into her eyes and said, "Today, I am also leaving."

I do not know who else heard it, but I thought, "Oh, Baba Ji is going back to the nursing home," not realizing that in just a few hours, he would be departing from the worn-out body that had done so much seva for us all.

As we all went about the regular business of the ashram that day, an unspoken heaviness hung in the air. It was as though everyone was holding their breath, awaiting the moment that was both dreaded and yet somehow banned from conscious thought. But even the body of the Saint succumbs to the inevitability of mortality at the appointed time. And so it was that at 11:20 a.m. on Sunday morning, Pushpamma came running out of



Baba Somanath Ji
September 7, 1885 – November 28, 1976

Baba Ji's room, crying with grief, "Baba Ji has left the body." We were all dumbstruck, paralyzed by our irreparable loss, feeling like orphans adrift in a strange and alien land. No event in life can prepare the disciples for that bleak moment, and no outer words can comfort the broken hearts. But on the first day of initiation, the Saints tell us plainly that the true Guru is the Shabd permeating all creation. So, while there is no remedy for the grief that overtakes us when our physical Master departs from mortal plane, ultimately our real Master, in the form of Shabd, is closer to us than hands and feet and is caring for us even more carefully and lovingly than before.

The days that followed were demanding ones for everybody. People from all over South India flocked to the ashram. Groups gathered together, trying to decide what to do next? It was all totally understandable, but all I could do was withdraw deeper and deeper into my own self; I could not find the stamina to think of anything but how to deal with my own aching heart.

The one remaining event that was to prove a foreshadow of wonderful things to come took place perhaps three days after Baba Ji had withdrawn from this world. My good friend Damu Shinkar, along with other dear ones from Bombay, had arrived at the ashram, and on this day, we were all sitting together in our rooms. I was very emotional at the time, and during the course of our conversations, I said, "Now I will never be able to go to any other Saint." Damu kindly replied to this statement by relating a story from the times of Baba Jaimal Singh, when he was nearing his end time. One devoted disciple, in essence, said what I had just declared about not going to any other Saint. Baba Jaimal Singh Ji became very serious and said, "You are not worthy of my successor."

When he said these words, they pierced right into my heart, and a sudden spark of hope was ignited there, which opened up the possibility that someday I might once again sit in the company of one who held within his heart the Light and Love of God.

This indeed came to pass, but that forms a part of another story. Within a few days, it was apparent to me that I needed to continue my life's journey in the way that Baba Somanath Ji was guiding me towards. Something told me from within that my life in the ashram had reached its conclusion. Such decisions come up in life like that. It has nothing to do with what is right for others but has everything to do with what seems right for us. So, one fine morning, Paul and I hoisted our backpacks on our shoulders, paid our respects to Pushpamma and all the dear ones and began our homeward journey.

For me, this was the beginning of the road the led me into the loving company of Sant Ajaib Singh and later, through him, to Baba Ram Singh Ji, both of whom have watered the spiritual seeds planted by Baba Somanath Ji and helped maintain and increase our love for the teachings of the Saints. This story is related in the next chapter.



After Baba Ji's Departure

The passing away of the Perfect Master is a calamity unrivaled in the life. The going away of a Perfect Master from the world is the greatest catastrophe which can befall the disciples and admirers. When violent thunderstorms and hurricanes blow, even the heaviest trees are sometimes uprooted.¹

—Sant Ajaib Singh Ji

The Param Sants emphasize over and over that the Guru is not the body, and the disciple is not the body. Shabd is the Guru, and soul is the disciple. Swami Shiv Dayal Singh tells us:

*Rādhā ādi surat kā nām,
Swāmi ādi shabd nij dhām²*

*Radha is the name of the primal surat (soul)
Swami is the primal Shabd emanating from the True Home.*

When one bulb is fused, another is put in its place, and the God Power flows on unabated, shining kindly Light and Love

1 A. S. Oberoi, *Support for the Shaken Sangat: Personal Recollections of Three Great Masters* (Sanbornton, NH.: Sant Bani Ashram, 1984) p. vii.

2 *Swami Shiv Dayal Singh, Sār Bachan* (Beas, Radhasoami Satsang, 1978) *Bachan 2, Sifat chauthī*, p. 8.

on the mortal world. Master Kirpal Singh describes it as an uninterrupted stream:

*The Stream of Life rolls on ceaselessly in the endless course of time, and the power of the Timeless appears and disappears in the realm of relativity.*³

The ongoing story of the incarnation of the Primal Lord in the realm of Time to rescue His lost jivas from the clutches of Kal has been for me a very sweet, heartwarming and deeply meaningful story. There are several important segments of it that I will now try to weave together into a coherent whole.

Hearing News of Ajaib Singh

In the months prior to coming to India for the last time in 1976, just a month before Baba Ji left the body, I was working with an initiate of Sant Kirpal Singh Ji whose name was Marc Rubald. Marc and I were working on a large project for a community called Village Homes, in Davis, California. We were responsible for installing the landscape for the community, both food-producing and ornamental.

I was very aware of what had happened after Master Kirpal left the body. I was, in fact, living in the ashram with Baba Ji when he left the mortal coil. Word immediately reached Baba Ji about Master Kirpal's departure. Baba Ji called me to his room and gave me the news. Within a few weeks of that event, Bibi Hardevi (a dear sevadar who prepared food for Master Kirpal and generally looked after his daily needs) sent a telegram to

³ Kirpal Singh, *A Great Saint: Baba Jaimal Singh, His Life and Teachings* (Blaine, Wash.: Ruhani Satsang, 1987) p. 7.

Baba Ji requesting him to come to Sawan Ashram to hold Satsang to give solace to the Sangat. Bibi Hardevi and many of the devoted initiates of Baba Sawan Singh Ji were well-acquainted with Baba Ji from the glorious days they spent together during Hazur's life, and they were well aware that he was a highly evolved Gurumukh disciple. But Baba Ji told me that he could not go, as there would be a lot of challenges and turbulence among Sant Kirpal Singh Ji's Sangat.

It often happens that when a Saint leaves this world, their following goes through a difficult time. It can be particularly intense at the physical location where they lived.



The author (left) working with Marc Rubald at Village Homes

In his book, *Support for the Shaken Sangat*, Mr. A.S. Oberoi gives a vivid portrayal of what the Master expects from us all in those unbearable moments:

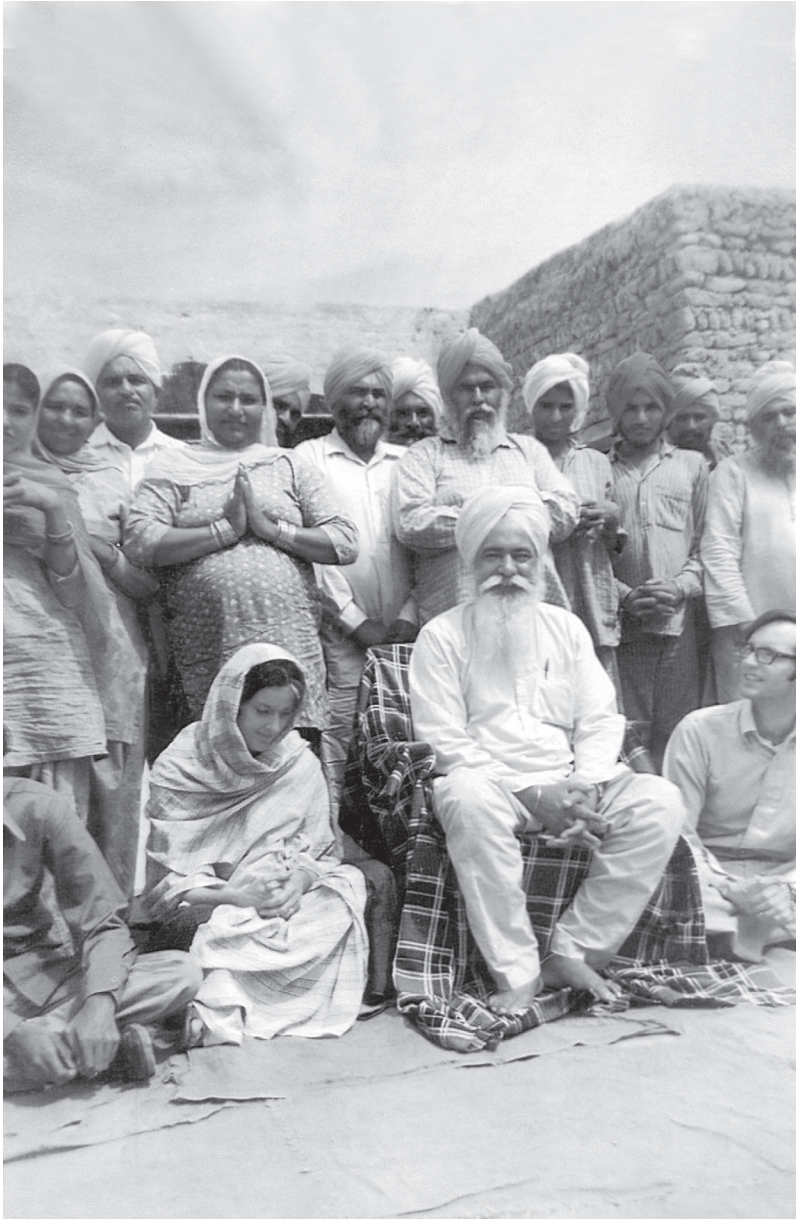
We have always to keep in view that being the children of such an exalted one, we have obligations and responsibilities which must never be lost sight of. Our living and thinking should be exemplary, so that people who come in contact with us, may at once feel attracted and impressed, that being followers of Sant Mat and such an accomplished Master, we have mended ourselves to the degree that we have a life much different from worldly people, and which may inspire confidence in others about the excellence of the Path and the need for its adoption.⁴

So, during that period of time after Master Kirpal's leaving, I was also receiving messages from initiates of Master Kirpal, who lived in the other side of my mom's duplex. They were good friends of mine, and I gave their letters to Baba Ji.

Of course, I did not know much about all of those details, nor does it matter. It is very clear that all are dear to the Saints no matter what happens outwardly. When a Saint leaves, there is no doubt that strange events occur, but it is simply what must be. In order to go within to the source of love, which is the true form of the Master, a lot of our shortcomings have to be washed away, often through great suffering. We are and always shall be One no matter what path the Master has to take us through to get our hearts purified so that we can see the Divine Light living in our own hearts and in every part of the visible and invisible creation.

But back to Marc. One day he received the booklet: *Introduction to Ajaib Singh*. I cannot say why, but I took

4 A. S. Oberoi, *Support for the Shaken Sangat: Personal Recollections of Three Great Masters* (Sanbornton, N.H.: Sant Bani Ashram, 1984) p. 189.



Sant Ajaib Singh Ji at Village 77 RB in Rajasthan

one look at Sant Ji's picture, and I knew he was a true Saint and Master, but I had no idea of what role he would play in my life because Baba Somanath Ji was still alive, and that is where all my attention was focused. But I did mention to Marc that now a great One has come that will be a comfort to the dear ones of Sant Kirpal Singh Ji. It is a very strange thing because, honestly, I do not know anything about anything. Who can understand who these Great Souls are? But there was simply something about the purity of Sant Ji's face that struck my heart. I cannot say more than that.

Upon returning to the ashram for the last time, I forgot about Sant Ji, as the days to come were to prove to be challenging ones for all of us who were there. The description of those events has already been given in the previous chapter, bringing the story up to the point when Paul Young and I departed from the ashram.

Paul and I Meet with Maharaj Charan Singh Ji

A few days after Baba Ji completed his work in this world, Paul and I hoisted our backpacks and took the train for Bombay. We left the ashram realizing that we were about to enter into a new phase of our life's journey that could no longer be fulfilled by staying there. What that was to be, we had not a clue, but something was compelling us to go, so we went.

Arriving in Bombay, we went to Baba Ji's Satsang Hall, where we were welcome to stay. Our plan was to depart for the USA as soon as we could arrange tickets. But by good fortune, it so happened that Maharaj Charan Singh Ji was giving his yearly program in Bombay, so we went to attend the Satsang there. It was a huge area where

many thousands of people gathered to hear the discourses. As I mentioned earlier, I had actually met Maharaj Charan Singh Ji in 1970, before my first trip to India.

One of the initiates of Baba Somanath Ji knew the organizers for the program and so was able to arrange a meeting for us with the Master. We told Maharaj Charan Singh Ji that Baba Somanath Ji had left the body, which, of course, he already knew. We asked if we might come to Dera to pay our respects to the place where Baba Ji had lived at the feet of Hazur. He kindly agreed, and so, after the program, we took the train to Dera, where we had permission to stay for a week.

One day, there was a beautiful Sikh gentleman from Jalandhar sitting next to Charan Singh Ji on the dais, and Charan Singh had him give Satsang. He gave a really elegant Satsang in Hindi. Since I was able to understand Hindi, I could appreciate the beauty of what he was saying. It was very moving. Afterward, we sought him out at his cottage on the ashram grounds. He welcomed Paul and I, and we had a loving interaction with him.

When we told him that we were initiates of Baba Somanath Ji, he was astonished. Then he told us something very beautiful. His family was very close to Hazur, and, from his childhood, he was able to spend time near him. One day, when he was a boy of eleven, he was standing behind Hazur, who was sitting in a chair, watching the ashram seva going on—clearing the fields for planting. From a distance, he saw an emaciated Hindu Sadhu respectfully approaching Hazur. Hazur beckoned for the Sadhu to approach. It was, in fact, Baba Somanath Ji. It was the first meeting of the two, so he was eyewitness to that event. It was very moving to hear his words. A golden moment.



*The picture of Baba Somanath Ji
seen at the Dera*

Another special moment occurred when we were taken to the home of a very elderly Satsangi who had been closely associated with Hazur Sawan Singh for many years, starting from 1911, when Hazur took up the responsibilities entrusted to him by Baba Jaimal Singh Ji. He also remembered Baba Somanath Ji very well and, in his meditation room, had the beautiful picture of Baba Ji when he was a Nathpanth yogi, which one of his family members brought out to show us.

When we left the Dera, we had a lovely interview with Maharaj Charan Singh Ji, sharing that since Baba Ji had left the mortal coil, we felt like orphans in this world. He looked at us quietly for some time and then gently said, "You will be taken care of."

Return to the USA and My First Meeting with Sant Ji

After we returned from India, I again took up work with Marc on the Village Homes project, and then we came to know that Sant Ajaib Singh was coming to the USA. I was very lucky to meet Sant Ji in Nanaimo. That was a significant moment in my life. No one knew at that time what a deep inner connection there was between Baba Ji and Sant Ji. That was all revealed later, but at that first meeting with Sant Ji that took place under a conifer tree at Yellow Point, I told him I was an initiate of Baba Somanath Ji. I spoke with him in Hindi. He smiled and said, "Do you know any Hindi bhajans?" So, I sang *Satguru Sāwan Shāh*. During that time, I looked into his eyes and saw that they were those incredible eyes that only Saints have. In that moment, I knew that he was for me all and all and, in fact, the very form of Baba Somanath Ji.

Thus began a whole new life that continues unfolding in the sweetest way to this day. On the day I met Sant Ji,

as earlier described, I was totally convinced that he was a Perfect Saint and the one entrusted to carry on Baba Ji's work. I went to him and asked if I could go to India and tell the initiates of Baba Somanath Ji that the new Master had appeared. Sant Ji graciously agreed.

A Trip to Rajasthan

So, in October of 1978, I returned to Bombay, full of enthusiasm for what I had experienced in Sant Ji's company. By experience, I do not mean deep, inner experience because, in that regard, I am nowhere. But in terms of experiencing the beauty of the Masters and all the flows from them—that experience was definitely there.

One needs to try to imagine what it was like coming to India and telling the dear ones in the Bombay Sangat about Sant Ji. It was not that anyone openly doubted me, but they had absolutely no reason for thinking that an unknown Saint in Rajasthan could have any connection with Baba Somanath Ji at all. He was even relatively unknown to the disciples of Sant Kirpal.

I spent a week or two in Bombay making copies of Baba Somanath Ji's Satsangs and feeling a bit disconnected from those in the Bombay Sangat who I knew so deeply and well. The love had not changed, but I was on a totally different track than what was happening with the rest of them. Only Damu Shinkar and another dear one, named Satpal Dase, who was perhaps 18 at the time, were very excited to know about Sant Ji.

After that week or so, I took the train to Delhi and then went out to Rajasthan. It was such a powerful experience. Sant Ji was so incredibly beautiful. The groups were very small. The simple 77RB ashram was a lovely desert oasis, and the entire setting was profoundly moving. It was like stepping back in time hundreds of years. It had

the same feeling as Baba Somanath Ji's Betta ashram in Andhra Pradesh. With the passage of the years, the remembrance of Sant Ji's ashram grows yet more precious. By that time, I was totally overcome by the beauty of the experience of being with Sant Ji there. I could never have imagined that another such opportunity would come to me as had existed in the time of Baba Somanath Ji, yet it was once again part of my life. My plan at that time was to go back to Bombay, copy more Satsangs and then return to the USA, but instead, I asked Sant Ji if I could come again for the next group. He told me that the ashram was my home.

So I went back to Bombay, full of zeal once again, but now realizing that it would be better to keep quiet about what was happening with me. But Damu was there, and hearing of my experiences captivated his interest. After a couple of weeks in Bombay, I again returned to Rajasthan, and the connection with Sant Ji deepened yet more. Again, I returned to Bombay and spent a day or two there before returning to the USA.

Damu and Satpal Invite Sant Ji to Bombay

After I returned to the USA, Damu and Satpal went up to Delhi to meet Sant Ji, as Sant Ji was giving monthly programs there in those early days. Just a few people would come, but he had his own important work that he was doing there, which only a Saint knows about. When Damu met Sant Ajaib Singh, he was convinced that he was indeed a Perfect Master. He requested him to come to Bombay and give a Satsang program there for the dear ones of Baba Somanath Ji. Sant Ji instantly agreed.

Now from what I understand, word had quietly spread in Punjab and Rajasthan that a Perfect Master had commenced his work. Invitations began coming to

Sant Ji to visit certain rural localities and towns, but at that time, he was not yet going out much. Nevertheless, when Damu asked him, he did not hesitate.

Thus, a program was fixed for November 1978. A few Westerners were fortunate enough to travel with Sant Ji to Bombay for three unbelievable days of Satsang and darshan—a matchless outpouring of the Saints' Love and Light-filled grace on the parched souls longing for the Lord.

Tuesday morning, we went over to Sant Ji's apartment at 6:00 a.m. to sit in a room adjacent to Sant Ji's while he gave Naam to eight souls. Originally Sant Ji did not intend to give Naam in Bombay, but enough thirsty souls came forward to make this event possible.

The atmosphere was very charged with the Love flowing from Sach Khand at that time. Many people were crowded into the apartment during the program. After the initiation, Sant Ji came out into the darshan room where we were all sitting. He was vibrant and glowing. He looked at us with those precious eyes and said, "Three of the souls initiated today went up and had Baba Ji's darshan."

Later, he told me that this was to show that Baba Ji's grace was working in full. He also said that this was something that all Saints do; i.e., when they give Naam, the initiates see the form of the Master on whose behalf they (the Saints) are working. The Love Feast was continuing in full force!

After prashad was distributed, we proceeded by taxi to the Fort Area of Bombay where Sant Ji was to give Satsang at the apartment of a wealthy initiate of Baba Ji [Narayan Shinkar, Damu Ji's brother]. Everything was very nicely arranged for the Satsang program, and about one hun-

dred people attended that final Satsang. Again, Sant Ji delivered a most powerful and love-charged Satsang.

Afterward, we (the Westerners) were all ushered into a back room to have a prashad meal in Sant Ji's presence. For me, it was an especially sweet occasion because Baba Ji often had us eat in his room while he sat and gave darshan. During the meal, the dear ones in attendance began to file in for their last darshan, and Sant Ji really threw open his spiritual treasure house. He gave the sweetest darshan to those souls. Sant Ji was beyond a shadow of a doubt very, very pleased with the simplicity, innocence, and purity of the Sangat.

Just before Sant Ji left, we all clustered about him for a group photograph of the Westerners and the main Bombay sevadars, and we too were given a chance to share some of his spiritual wealth in a very tangible way. Perhaps he did this because we were such desperate cases that he could only make us understand how much he loves us in that particular way. Who can say? One thing is very clear, though, and that is that everything is dependent upon his grace and mercy. That does not excuse us from working as hard as we can in our meditations, but we should never allow ourselves to think that we are in some way deserving of his grace.⁵

One incident stands out in my mind from that program—the meeting between Sant Ji, Baba Ram Singh Ji, another very loving dear one named R.R. Singh (a very close friend of Baba Ram Singh Ji) and Bhuvaneshwar. R.R. Singh left the body a few years ago. He was a very good meditator, and I knew him quite well.

5 Christopher McMahan, *Sant Bani Magazine*, March 1979, "The Bombay Tour, Part 2: With Sant Ji in Bombay," p. 23-24.



*Sant Ajaib Singh, with the Shinkar Family, Naiyar Ji,
and other dear ones in Bombay, November 1978
(Graham Gibson can be seen in the lower right corner)*

Baba Ram Singh Ji had been living in Andhra Pradesh for several years when this incident occurred. But as fate would have it, he had come to Bombay to spend time with R.R. Singh at the time when Sant Ji's first Bombay program was held. He had heard about Sant Ji from some other dear ones—that I and several other Western initiates of Baba Somanath Ji were coming to Bombay with this Saint from Rajasthan. But he and R.R. Singh thought that perhaps Sant Ji was just a nice Sadhu that we had come in contact with, and because Ram Singh had a deep regard for the Westerners who he had lived and worked with at the ashram, he along with R.R. Singh and Bhuvaneshwar decided to come meet with us and have the darshan of the Saint.

Between the numerous programs Sant Ji held during that first three-day visit, he stayed on the 11th floor in an apartment on the Worli Sea Face beside the Arabian Sea. It was a lovely location, as the air there was fresh, unpolluted, and cool. It was one of the most desirable places to live in Bombay—just about 15 minutes' walk from Baba Somanath Ji's Satsang Hall and the place where he used to have his cloth shop.

I think there were about nine Westerners that morning in the flat. Sant Ji was in a light-hearted mood. Very intoxicated. We were also floating on a cloud of his Love. Sant Ji had retired for a short while to his room. We were all happily resting in the other rooms of the apartment. There came a knock on the door. A dear one answered it, and it was Ram Singh, R.R. Singh and Bhuvaneshwar.

I came forward to greet them, as they were dear souls who I knew from the past, and I was delighted to see them. I knew something about R.R. Singh because when he sometimes came to the ashram from Bombay, I would sit near him in Satsang. Normally, at the ashram, the only people who attended Satsang were 40 to 100 or so of us living there doing seva, and occasionally a few visitors coming from outlying areas. R.R. Singh would get so intoxicated in Satsang that he would leave the body and fall back, his face luminous with light. So, one of my assignments was to keep people from disturbing him. In my happiness on seeing them, I innocently went and knocked on the door to Sant Ji's room. Sant Ji called out to come in. When I opened the door, Sant Ji was sitting cross-legged on his bed. He was so resplendent. I told him that some dear ones of Baba Somanath Ji had come to meet him. He smiled and said to let them come in. Then the most amazing thing happened. As soon as

they entered the room, Sant Ji sprang to his feet and embraced them. I had never seen such a thing happen. He was simply radiant and must have been waiting for them. R.R. Singh's attention immediately withdrew from the body, and he fell to the floor. Ram Singh stood there stunned. Then Sant Ji asked me to leave and close the door behind me.



*Sant Ji giving a talk at Baba Somanath's
Satsang Hall in Kakad Chambers*

Thus began a whole new chapter in the history of Sant Mat with regards to Sant Ji, his mission in South India, and the transferring of the Power that Baba Somanath Ji had entrusted to him to pass on to Baba Ram Singh Ji. The lovely story continues to unfold to this day as Baba Ram Singh Ji attends to the needs of thousands of initiates of Sant Ji, Baba Somanath Ji, Sant Kirpal Singh Ji, and new seekers of Truth also. A hundred or so Westerners also

attend his twice-yearly meditation programs at his small ashram near Bengaluru, as well as at his Som Ajaib Kirpa Ashram in Andhra Pradesh.

During Sant Ji's first visit to Bombay, he went to Baba Somanath Ji's Satsang Hall in Kakad Chambers, Worli. This Satsang Hall has a very special place in my heart as it was opened for the first time when my Master, Baba Somanath Ji, took me to Bombay in 1971, and after that I stayed there every time I was in Bombay. For me it had a profound significance when Sant Ji came to deliver Satsang. Just prior to His arrival the entire Sangat was absorbed in singing *Terā Nām Rasmulā Jī* (Your Name is Nectar to those who have tasted it.)

He delivered a memorable talk that we were all fortunate to attend. For that Satsang, Sant Ji chose to sit on a chair beside Baba Somanath's dais. Sant Ji gave the Satsang in Punjabi, and before the Satsang he had told Pappu that it would not be necessary to have any translation into Hindi because those who were to understand the Satsang would understand through his eyes. And seeing the intoxicated state of the congregation at that time it seems that everyone understood.

He was so humble and full of light. Pathi Ji sang the introductory bani and then commenced with the main Satsang hymn. And this is a partial translation of Sant Ji's introductory remarks. He said, "Before giving the Satsang, I would like to make this request to Baba Ji's Sangat. Please do not think I have come here as a Guru. I have come here only as a sevadar. I have been pulled here by the love of the souls who were initiated by Baba Ji. One gardener plants the seed and after Him another comes to give water to those seeds. Therefore I have great respect

for Baba Ji's Sangat, and I have come here only to do seva for the Sangat."

"When I went to America and met Baba Ji's sevadars—Chris, Paul Young, and Graham—and they told me that they were initiates of Baba Ji, then I remembered how I had met him at the feet of Baba Sawan Singh Ji when Bishan Das took me to the Dera. Baba Ji's and my life were very similar. From childhood Baba Ji searched for God and he did many japas and tapas in the same way that I did."

"When Baba Bishan Das, my first Guru, took me to Baba Sawan Singh Ji, He said, 'This is my disciple, and he has done many spiritual practices from the time of his birth, but he has not got any peace of mind; and he has come to me.' Bishan Das was a pure soul who had knowledge of two shabds but he did not look on himself as a Guru. He told me, 'There are higher states beyond that which I know.' And for that reason he took me to Baba Sawan Singh Ji."

"At that time Baba Sawan Singh introduced me to Baba Ji. He said, 'Here is one who has done all the sadhanas from birth and who has realized the complete Truth.'⁶ So when I met Graham and Chris, this meeting with Baba Ji so many years ago came into my memory very powerfully. "

"You should have no doubt that all Saints are one and that they always meet on the higher planes, and you should never think that Baba Ji has left you because He

6 This is the first time, to my knowledge, that Sant Ajaib Singh had spoken publicly about his meeting with Baba Somanath, but through the years he was to repeat this story many times, e.g.: Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, Jan/Feb 1996, "To Become a Child of the Master" p. 42-43.

is no longer in the body. Saints always are waiting for their initiates with great love on the inner planes, and they are always extending their protection to those who remember them."⁷

Speaking movingly, he emphasized the Oneness of all the Saints and the love and respect we should extend to all our dear brothers and sisters who are on the Path Godward. The Masters come to liberate us from the realm of duality where we have languished for so long. His words rang with the authority of the Almighty Lord but were as sweet and tender as a mother soothing a fretful child, touching the hearts of all who listened.

*"Saints come to unite, not to separate."*⁸

And even today, his words resonate as clearly and powerfully as they did on that auspicious and unforgettable day in Bombay over 40 years ago.

7 Christopher McMahan, *Sant Bani Magazine*, March 1979, "The Bombay Tour, Part 2: With Sant Ji in Bombay," p. 18.

8 Pratap Singh Shakya, *In the Lap of the Supreme Father: The Biography of Sant Baba Ram Singh Ji Maharaj* (Guddella: Som Ajaib Kirpa Ashram, 2014) p. 37.



Baba Somanath Ji

Addendum



Sant Ajaib Singh on Baba Somanath Ji

In the southern part of India, no one knew the language of Guru Nanak, Baba Sawan Singh, and Baba Jaimal Singh. But when the love for the Master was created within Baba Somanath Ji he came to this place. And you know that this area does not even get enough rain, and as the earth becomes dry because of no rain, in the same way, the hearts also become dry if they do not get the love of God.

So Baba Somanath Ji, sitting in this area, showered the love of the Master, and he made the hearts of the people green and alive by giving them the love of the Master.¹

From a short talk given in Bangalore, July 1987

* * *

Guru Nanak Sahib says, "You see the image of God according to the feelings you have for him." Leave aside everything. When I go to Bombay and Bangalore, where most of the initiates are of Baba Somanath, there are many dear ones of Baba Somanath who don't even want to come to the Satsang.

1 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, April 1988, "It is All Due to God's Grace," p. 23.

But those who do come—not hundreds but thousands of dear ones come to the Satsangs—they tell me that they see the form of Baba Somanath in me. And they say that they are following me, understanding me as Baba Somanath.²

From a question-and-answer session, Sant Bani Ashram, Village 16PS, Rajasthan, Dec. 1987

* * *

[QUESTION]: Did Baba Bishan Das ever ask for initiation from Baba Sawan Singh?

[SANT JI]: Yes, Baba Bishan Das went to Master Sawan Singh when he was very old. Master Sawan Singh told him, “Since you are very old now, you won’t be able to meditate, and you don’t need to take any initiation. But I promise that I will take you when you leave your body.”

I had told Baba Bishan Das about Master Sawan Singh. I came to know about Baba Sawan Singh from people who had seen him when he went to Peshawar. I was posted at a place called Nowshera, and these people told me about this great Saint. They said that they didn’t know what inner power was working within him, but they knew that his outer form was very radiant and beautiful—he had a beautiful white beard, his face was very radiant, and he was a God-like man. So when I heard about Baba Sawan Singh’s glory, I was so much attracted towards him that I went to Beas and had his darshan. That made me so happy that I couldn’t keep it only to myself, and I went to Baba Bishan Das and told him about Baba Sawan Singh.

² Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, May 1988, “The Fruit of Simran,” p. 27.

Then Baba Bishan Das accompanied me to Beas, where he also had the darshan of Baba Sawan Singh. At that time, Baba Sawan Singh promised Baba Bishan Das that he would take him.

Regarding me, Baba Sawan Singh told Baba Bishan Das, "This man has performed many austerities, and he has done many other things; but still he has not got the real thing. I have one devotee here who also used to perform austerities before he came to see me." That was Baba Somanath. At that time, Baba Sawan Singh called Baba Somanath, and we were introduced: that was the time we met.³

From a "walk talk," Sant Bani Ashram, Village 77RB, Rajasthan, Jan. 1980

* * *

We should be grateful to Supreme Beings Baba Somanath and Master Kirpal Singh, who gave us the opportunity of sitting here together and sharing their love. They gave us the message that we are all the children of the same Father. If they had not given us this message, we would never have sat here together.

Now we are sitting here together, and we are sharing their love. We cannot take its credit on our own selves. We cannot say it is because of our efforts. It is completely the grace of those great souls...

If you go within, you will find that both Masters, Kirpal Singh and Baba Somanath, live in the same city. They are dwellers in the same city, and they don't have different points of view. They don't have different glances for their disciples; they both look with the same

³ Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, February 1980, "When Man and Woman Agree," p. 24.

*gracious sight on their disciples. And they always want the disciples to come together in their love. The only difference is that they have made their permanent abode in the Unreachable Plane, in the Unreachable City. And we are living in the reachable country, in this world. So we should also do the meditation and make our permanent residence in the Unreachable City.*⁴

From Sant Ajaib Singh's discourses, Bombay Program, Jan. 1983

* * *

Master Sawan had given the duty to Mastana Ji of Baluchistan for a very limited period and for a very limited area. This area in which we are living now is called "The Area of Bagar." Master Sawan Singh had made him the emperor of this area which is called Bagar. And that is why he had given the maya, he had given out the riches to the poor and the needy ones. He left his body in 1960.

*In the same way, in South India, Master Sawan Singh gave the duty to Baba Somanath to preach the Naam. Master Sawan Singh gave the duty of the whole world to Master Kirpal Singh, saying, "You should sprinkle the water of Naam everywhere in the world." Now, this is the secret of the Masters or the Saints, and only the Saints know the secrets of the Saints.*⁵

From an underground room talk, Sant Bani Ashram, Village 16PS, Rajasthan, April 1986

4 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, March 1983, "With the Master in India: January 1983," p. 18.

5 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, June 1998, "Are We Ready For His Grace?" p. 18.



Sant Ajaib Singh at the Bombay Program

[QUESTION] *Sant Ji, Kirpal Singh was a very familiar figure at the Dera of Sawan Singh, and I was wondering if you ever saw him there when you were visiting Sawan Singh, when Sawan Singh was alive?*

[SANT JI] *It is possible that I may have seen him sometime when I was going there, but I did not meet him anytime personally, and I did not have any communication with him; I didn't know him, that he was Kirpal Singh, and he didn't know at that time that I was Ajaib Singh. Even my meeting with Baba Somanath was done by Baba Sawan Singh.*⁶

From a question-and-answer session, Sant Bani Ashram, Village 16PS, Rajasthan, Nov. 1983

* * *

[QUESTION] *Sant Ji, yesterday you told that very beautiful story about how you met Sawan Shah and how Bishan Das came to Sawan Shah. In the end, you told about when you first met Baba Somanath Ji. Could you tell us anything more about what happened at that meeting? If you had any conversation or anything because that story is very dear to my heart.*

[SANT JI] *When I went with Baba Bishan Das to see Master Sawan Singh, we were only introduced. We didn't have any other conversation at that time. When Baba Sawan Singh learned that I had performed austerities, that in search of God I had left my home and had wandered here and there to many places, then he called Baba Somanath and told us that he also had one disciple*

6 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, January 1984, "Shot by the Bullet of Love," p. 27.

*who had done all these things before meeting him.*⁷

**From a “walk talk,” Sant Bani Ashram, Village 77RB,
Rajasthan, Jan. 1980**

* * *

[QUESTION] *Master, You have always done your best to answer questions in relation to the disciple’s relation to the living Master. I wondered if you could explain the difference, if there is any, in the living Master’s relationship to his own disciples, to the disciples of his own Master, and to the disciples of Baba Somanath Ji.*

[SANT JI] *The difference is only in our understanding because there is no difference for the Saints. They look at the souls of everyone, and they know that the soul is innocent. All the bad faults or bad qualities are in the mind, and they never pay any attention to the mind. They look at the souls, and there is no difference in that.*

You know that the sun shines on every part of the creation. The sun never says, “I will not shine on this part or I will not shine on that religion or that community.” He does not feel any difference, and that is why he gives his radiance to everyone in this world.

In the same way, for the Mahatma who has reached Sach Khand, for him no one is different, everybody in this world is equal. The only difference is that he takes the responsibility of those dear ones whom he has initiated, and he is responsible for them. And other dear ones, the other people of the creation, those who have his darshan with love, those who believe in him, those who are praising him, he takes responsibility for them, also. The other people—those who do not have his darshan with faith in

⁷ Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, August 2002, “With the Help and Grace of Master,” p. 12.

him, those who do not believe in him, or those who do not hear him—they also get the grace of the Master, the only difference is that the Master does not become responsible for them.

The Master always bows down to the initiates of his own Master because he sees the Form of his own Master within each of the initiates of his Master. That is why I always bow down to those who are initiated by my Master, Kirpal Singh.

Kabir Sahib said that those who understand a difference between one Saint and another, they will go to hell.⁸

From a question-and-answer session, Bombay Program, Jan. 1983

* * *

Baba Sawan Singh Ji also gave the duty to Baba Somanath Ji to do that work in the southern part of India. Every Saint has his own way of doing things—only he knows whom he has to make work and in what way he has to make a certain being work. You all know the history of Baba Somanath Ji—how much great sacrifice he did in his life. It is very easy to criticize any Mahatma, but to work as hard as he has done and to live a life like that of a Mahatma is very difficult. If God could be realized without working hard then what was the need for the Mahatmas to work hard.⁹

From a discourse given to the Indian Sangat, Bombay Program, Jan. 1987

* * *

8 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, April 1999, "To Him, Everyone is Equal," p. 9.

9 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, December 1987, "On the Soul's Wedding Day," p. 21.

[QUESTION] *Could Sant Ji speak about Baba Somanath?*

[SANT JI] *Whatever I know about Baba Somanath Ji, I have said that earlier also. I do not know more about him outwardly. The dear ones who want to know the Shabd Form of Baba Somanath—what was his relation with Baba Sawan Singh and Master Kirpal Singh Ji—should go within, because there is something which you can know only after going in the within.*

I know only this, that if those great souls had not come in this world, if they had not showered grace on us, we would not have gotten together here, and we would not have been able to do the devotion.

I have said that earlier also. I do not know more about him outwardly.¹⁰

From a question-and-answer session, Bangalore Program, July 1987

* * *

We are very fortunate ones because we know that when we started this program, it was a very little thing—a very small thing when we started—but it was all the grace of the Masters and Baba Somanath that now so many people come in this bhandara and so many people do the seva and take advantage. And many people get the benefit from this program.

This is all their grace, and we are very fortunate ones that they have chosen us for doing this seva.

I hope that like you have done the seva in the past bhandaras, in this program also you will do the seva with an open heart with all your love, faith and keeping your mind

10 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, October 1987, "Meditation is the Only Means of Receiving Grace," p. 29-30.

*quiet and peaceful so that the other people may learn from your seva and they will also get the benefit from it.*¹¹

**From the first sevadar interview, Bombay Program,
Jan. 1985**

* * *

First of all, I thank all of you for cooperating in the bhandara of Baba Ji that all of you worked with your body, mind and wealth; you did the seva here.

You know that in the name of Baba Ji, the sangat is increasing here every year, and all of you who are doing the seva should realize this and considering the increase in the numbers of the sangat you should do the seva. And you should know in what way you have to make your seva better or in what way you are to do the seva so that you can serve all the dear ones, and get their pleasure.

Now Baba Somanath, Master Kirpal, Master Sawan have gone in their Real Form, and all of them have become One, and they are now united, they have become One, and they taught us about the unity, and their message was also of Unity; so, like that we should also remain united, and we should always get along with each other and do the seva.

Baba Somanath Ji had a lot of respect and appreciation for Supreme Father Kirpal. One very dear Satsangi told me that Baba Somanath had so much respect and appreciation for Master Kirpal that he would not sit with him on the dais. He would always sit on the floor in front of Master Kirpal. He had so much love, respect and appreciation for him.

During Master Kirpal's first tour to Bombay, when Master Kirpal came, Baba Somanath had welcomed

11 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, May 1985, "With Sant Ji in Bombay," p. 11.

Master Kirpal and had taken care of him and his langar with all his heart.

Master Kirpal had himself told me that even while living at the feet of Master Sawan, they had a great amount of love for each other, and after that also it continued.

I am very pleased to celebrate the bhandara of Baba Ji, and the dates do not make any difference. Saints are not attached to any dates because the Saints never die. They never take birth. They withdraw from the body and go back in the Shabd, so the dates do not make any difference. We should not pay any attention to when he was born or when he left the body, thinking that we should make the bhandara only on that day. Because Saints come for the benefit of the other people. They are not involved in birth and death. They come for the benefit of other people. The dates do not make any difference. All of us get together in the remembrance of Baba Ji, and, in his Name, we celebrate his coming into the world.¹²

From the second sevadar interview, Bombay Program, Jan. 1985

* * *

I am very pleased that even after our Masters have gone back to Sach Khand, their Real Home, still they are showering grace on us. As I said earlier, it is all the grace of Baba Somanath Ji and Master Kirpal that we are able to do their remembrance and sit together and share their love. It is not because of our efforts because we do not have any strength in us; It is all the grace of those Great Masters that they are giving us love and making us share it.

12 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, May 1985, "With Sant Ji in Bombay," p. 11-12.

You know that not many people in the West know about Baba Somanath Ji, just like no one knew about me even in Delhi, what to speak of the West. There were some dear ones initiated by Baba Somanath Ji in the West, and it is possible that if they had not received water after he left, they would have also dried out. It is because of the grace of Baba Somanath Ji that they came across a Sadhu who has a broad heart—because you know that Master Kirpal collected people of all different sects and religions and made them sit together, and I also had the effect of that broad-heartedness of my Master. So it was very gracious of Baba Somanath Ji to send his dear ones into contact with me, and with his grace and with the cooperation of all those people, this program started in a very limited way, and now with his grace only it has increased and has become huge, and because of his grace only many dear ones are getting the water of Naam, and in the future also many more will get it.

I am very pleased that in our Satsang, there are no differences. People can sing the bhajans of Baba Somanath Ji, Master Kirpal or the ones written by me; whatever they want to sing, they can do that. No one has any bad feelings for any other person, and there are no differences in our Sangat. In all the countries where people love Master Kirpal Singh, they also love Baba Somanath Ji, and there is no difference.

They all love and respect him, but it is a pity, I am sorry to say, that even though the Sant Satgurus come into this world for everyone, for all humanity, sometimes their disciples are misled by Kal, the Negative Power, and try to limit the Glory of their Master for certain people only and try to restrict his teachings only to a few people. Those people do not like the other dear ones who sing the Glory of their Master. They think—and say—“Why are they singing the glory of our Master? Why are they

following somebody else?" They neither like the Glory of the Master nor do they like those who sing the Glory of the Master.



Sant Ajaib Singh at Children's Darshan, Bombay

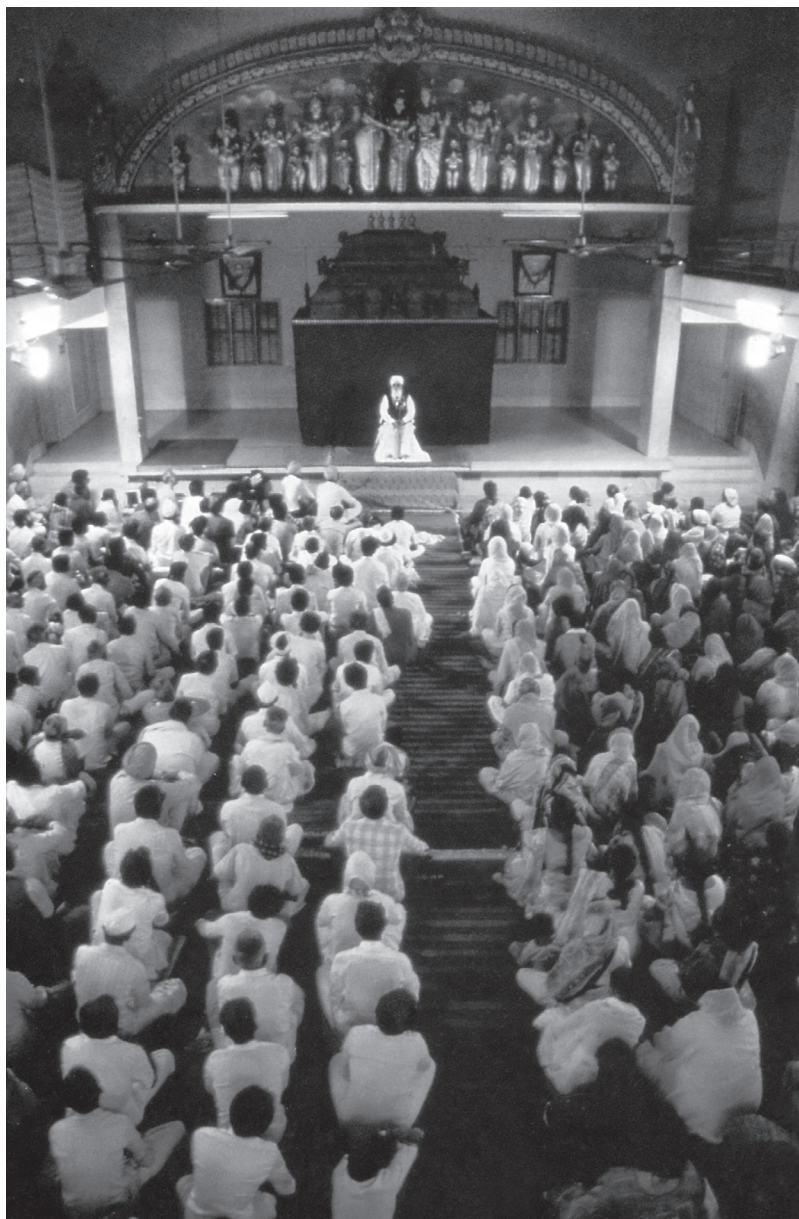
Guru Nanak said, "People imitate those Mahatmas that have become one with God Almighty, but they do not know the Reality, and they cannot do everything the Mahatmas do." You know that Damu had to face a lot of difficulties in the beginning from people who were opposing him and people who did not approve of what he was doing. They did not think in their mind: "Can we do such a big program in the remembrance of Baba Somanath? We share so much love of him with each other, can we do this thing that is happening in the remembrance of our Master?"

I'll tell you a story of my own life. In the village where I used to live, before I got the initiation from Master, there was a family of ten or twelve people, and they were all

initiated by Baba Sawan Singh Ji. Even though I did not get the holy initiation from Baba Sawan Singh Ji, still I got a lot of opportunities to sit at his feet. (For initiation, he had told me that the Master who was supposed to give me the initiation would come to my home himself.) I had so much love and affection for him, I sat at his feet many times. So ever since I had seen him, I was celebrating his birthday every year, and I would invite people from all over—those who knew him or loved him. Everybody would come. But the people of that family, who were all initiated by Baba Sawan Singh Ji, would not come to attend the bhandara, which we were doing in the name of Baba Sawan Singh. They would come to take the things from my field on other days, but on the bhandara day, the celebration day of Master Sawan Singh's birthday, they would never come. They would say, "What right does he have to celebrate Master Sawan Singh's bhandara? He is not even an initiate of Baba Sawan Singh!" So I would tell them, "Dear ones, I do not ask for any money from you, I do not ask for any kind of support or anything like that from you, I'm just inviting you to hear the glory of your Master and to be in his Remembrance—but still those people did not like to hear the Glory of their own Master; even though they were all initiates they did not like that people should praise their Master. The reason I'm telling you all this is that if disciples cannot hear the glory of their Master and cannot participate in praising their Master, how can they get anything from the Master? You know that Sawan belonged only to those that loved him and remembered him."¹³

**From the second sevadar interview, Bombay
Program, Jan. 1987**

13 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, April 1987, "Bombay 1987" p. 18-20.



Sant Ajaib Singh Ji in Bangalore

It was Baba Somanath Ji and Master Kirpal's grace that we were given this opportunity to serve them and to serve the dear ones. Whenever in the future they will shower grace on us we will once again serve the dear ones in the sangat. And whenever the program will be planned, whenever it will happen, you people will be informed; because you people have done a tremendous amount of work, taking care of the sangat, and you have done a lot of seva. So whenever the program will happen in the future, you will be informed, and you will be given the duty of doing all the work. And I hope that in the future also you will perform your work, your duty, wholeheartedly as you have done up until now.¹⁴

**From the sevadar interview, Bangalore Program,
July 1987**

* * *

The perfect Masters have the knowledge of their past births. They know everything of their own past, and they know about their future. They also know about the past and future of all their disciples. They are Omniscient, and they are All-conscious. Only the Saints of their own degree can understand and appreciate the glory and grace of the Masters. How can we, the worldly people, know the grace of the Master?

At that time, Baba Bishan Das was very pleased with me. He said, "I have made a very good disciple because he has told me about this very great man. Because of him, I have come into contact with this great Mahatma."

At that first meeting, Baba Bishan Das told Baba Sawan Singh about me, about how I had performed the austerities and done so many different kinds of practices in search of God Almighty. Baba Sawan Singh Ji said,

14 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, September 1987, "The Talks to the Bangalore Sevadars," p. 30.

“Yes, this man has performed many austerities, and he has done many other things, but still he has not got the real thing. I have one devotee here who also has done a lot of searching for God and also used to perform the same kind of austerities before he came to see me. He even had long hair which he cut off only after coming to Beas.” Then Baba Sawan Singh called Baba Somanath, and we were introduced. That was my only meeting with Baba Somanath, there in the presence of Baba Sawan Singh.

Baba Somanath Ji was a disciple who worked very hard and made very great sacrifices in his life. It is very easy to criticize any Mahatma, but to work as hard as he did and live a life like that Mahatma is very difficult. Later, Baba Sawan Singh gave to Baba Somanath Ji the duty of spreading the teachings of Sant Mat in the southern part of India. He told Baba Somanath Ji: “You should awaken the souls in South India. Connect them with God Almighty and make them do the meditation of Naam.”¹⁵

From “My Fortune Awakens: I Meet Baba Sawan Singh”

* * *

[QUESTION] Could You tell us a little about Baba Somanath Ji?

[SANT JI] There is a book which has all the stories about Baba Somanath Ji. Chris McMahan will tell you some stories from that book. Master Sawan Singh Ji made my meeting with Baba Somanath possible. It was a very brief meeting. From my childhood, I had been searching for God. I had performed many types of austerities. And I did so many things. In the same way, Baba Somanath had also spent a major part of his life searching. He also performed

¹⁵ Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, June 2003, “My Fortune Awakens: I Meet Baba Sawan Singh,” p. 17.

*many austerities and did many practices. When he finally came to Baba Sawan Singh, his search was completed, and he got the knowledge of God.*¹⁶

**From a question-and-answer session, Bombay
Program, Jan. 11, 1983**

* * *

[QUESTION] *Can you say something about the seva we are doing right here?*

[SANT JI] *I have said a lot about doing the seva, and that is why earlier I advised you that you should read the Sant Bani Magazines. Because during the last Tour I said a lot about doing seva, the seva which we do in the langar. It is one of the best sevas.*

By doing physical seva, our body becomes pure. And by doing the seva of Simran, our mind becomes pure. Seva is, after all, seva, whether you do it here or back at your home. When you are serving in the cause of the Master, when you are serving the dear ones because of your Master, you definitely get the benefit of it. Whether you do the seva here—because here also the langar of the Master is being done—or back in your home, whenever you are serving in the cause of Master, you do get the benefit. Many people are able to meditate and remember the Master with the efforts of a few people. So the people who are serving benefit from the meditations of the people whom they are helping to meditate.

You know that a very few people made the efforts and showed me their love, and as a result, the Bombay program was made, and the other dear ones try to take advantage of this program. And that is why I give them the program

16 Ajai Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, October 1998, "Get the Opportunity," p. 32.

*every year. There are a few disciples of Baba Somanath Ji and a few disciples of Master Kirpal Singh Ji [here], and because of their efforts and seva, we all are sitting here together and sharing the love of the Master. We all are doing the seva in one way or another.*¹⁷

**From a question-and-answer session, Bombay
Program, Jan. 11, 1983**

* * *

In the same way, Baba Somanath also came in the staff of Master Sawan Singh. Even though he did many rites and rituals and he searched for him very much, but the Master who is supposed to give something to a disciple knows when the disciple has to come to the Master. The dear ones of Baba Somanath Ji know very well how many hardships he had to suffer and how much he did in his search for the Master.

*In the southern part of India, no one knew the language of Guru Nanak, Baba Sawan Singh, and Baba Jaimal Singh. But when the love for the Master was created within Baba Somanath Ji, he came to this place. And you know that this area does not even get enough rain, and as the earth becomes dry because of no rain, in the same way, the hearts also become dry if they do not get the love of God. So Baba Somanath Ji, sitting in this area, showered the love of the Master, and he made the hearts of the people green and alive by giving them the love of the Master.*¹⁸

From a bhajan talk, July 1987, Bangalore Program

17 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, October 1998, "Get the Opportunity," p. 31-32.

18 Ajaib Singh, *Sant Bani Magazine*, April 1988, "It is All Due to God's Grace," p. 23.



*Baba Ram Singh Ji with the author and his wife Suzanne
at a meditation retreat held for the
foreign dear ones at the Channasandra ashram*

About the Author

Christopher McMahan attended Friends World College in Bangalore and received a B.A. in Indian Philosophy. While studying there, he had the good fortune to come to the feet of Baba Somanath Ji and was initiated by him in 1971. Between 1971-1976 Christopher spent six months each year living with Baba Somanath at Sawan Durbar Ashram and traveling with him to Satsang centers throughout South India.

Following Baba Somanath's departure from this world in 1976, he discovered the same Power working in Sant Ajaib Singh of Rajasthan. He was a sevadar at Sant Ji's yearly Bombay programs in remembrance of Baba Somanath from 1978 till Sant Ji left the body in 1997. It was at the 1984 Bombay program that he and his wife Suzanne were married.

Christopher was one of the original gardeners at Village Homes, a pioneering "green" community in Davis, California. Beginning in 1984, Christopher worked as Assistant Garden Superintendent at Filoli Gardens in Woodside, California and later freelanced as an expert pruner. Suzanne served as South Asia Librarian and Head of the South/Southeast Asia Library at the University of California, Berkeley, where she received an M.A. in Hindi in 1997. In 2004, they moved to the picturesque Pacific Northwest to be closer to Christopher's mother. There they ran a successful essential oil business till 2020.

Now, by the grace of Almighty Lords Somanath, Kirpal, and Ajaib, they are continuing the spiritual journey, attending the programs of Satsang, Seva, and Simran held by Baba Ram Singh, a Gurumukh disciple of Baba Somanath and True Lover of Sant Ajaib Singh.