

## *Chapter Six*

### **THE CLOSING YEARS**

I have already touched upon Babaji Maharaj's participation in the Kumbh Mela at Prayag; that was in month of Magh of the Bengali year 1300 (January-February, 1894 A.D. Christian era). That was also when I met Babaji Maharaja for the first time. Reverend Vijaykrishna Goswamiji also, along with a large band of his own followers, had joined that same Kumbh Mela and installed his prayer rug in a tent at the festival ground.

Prior to all these, I had enrolled myself for 12 years in a certain sect of yogis to learn from them the art of breath control and related techniques. Ultimately, it occurred to me that I had mastered all the physical-spiritual processes that the sect could offer. It is possible that my judgement was in error, but that was how God led me to conclude. I could no longer sustain a conviction that continued association with that school would steer me to Supreme Realization, because I could not discern anyone there who had himself risen to that level. There is no denying that the type of asceticism and scriptural rites they practise are beneficial, but I ran out of the notion that those had guided, or even could guide, anyone to the Ultimate Reality. That line of thinking, as I have already said, could have been fallacious, but that was indeed what I honestly came to believe. What I needed most—I was convinced—was a refuge under the wings of an Ideal Preceptor (Sadguru\*) who had himself made his journey to the Very Top and who could therefore show me the Way. Driven by such thoughts, I began to ponder over the ways and means of seeking such a Sadguru.

I had known Reverend Vijaykrishna Goswami rather intimately for a long time. He had come upon his Sadguru and achieved inner fulfilment twelve years prior to the Kumbh Mela at Prayag and had since then initiated a large number of disciples himself. I used to call on him occasionally and held him in abundant regard because of his intense asceticism. The momentum of his religious austerities was so strong that, even over the relatively short intervals between my successive visits, I could clearly discern the rapid advance in his spiritual status from the tell-tale transformations in the look

of his eyes and in his visage in general. Such accelerated progress is not a common experience among aspirants and, consequently, I considered him quite extra-ordinary. Spectacular progress notwithstanding, I did not perceive him as one who had yet united with the Supreme Lord. Very highly evolved as he was spiritually, he was still an aspirant—an aspirant par excellence—who had till then not experienced the final fulfilment. That in any case was how I genuinely felt, rightly or wrongly. I could not therefore visualize him as my Sadguru.

When I was in this state of mind and in profound inner turmoil, I was blessed with an one-letter seed-mantra\* through a divine intervention. Being advised by the same celestial source that its steadfast recital would assure me of meeting a fully-illuminated Sadguru, I set about doing so in right earnest. As I sat alone and ruminating, past one midnight, in the portico of an Amherst Street residence in Calcutta, an important metaphysical enquiry surfaced in my mind. Although I pondered over the matter at some length, I could not work out a satisfying solution and finally retired into the house with a sort of interim answer. Three months subsequently, prevailed upon by a friend, I accompanied him to the Kumbh Mela at Prayag, as mentioned already, during the month of Magh. On arrival, I went to the tent of Reverend Vijaykrishna Goswami and made my obeisance. Pleased, he blessed me, "It augurs well that you were able to come. Many great souls have assembled here. If any of them should take a benign interest in you, your salvation is assured." The friend who had taken me to Prayag was Shree Harinarayan Roy. His elder brother Shree Abhoynarayan Roy, who had been initiated by Babaji Maharaj four or five years previously, was staying in Goswamiji's tent. Hardly had I and Shree Harinarayan reached Goswamiji's tent and greeted him when Shree Abhoynarayan also came in and, much delighted on finding us there, said, "I have just come from Babaji Maharaj. I had mentioned to him that my younger brother who was to join us at Prayag has not turned up yet, and asked him if he (Harinarayan) would show up at all. Babaji Maharaj replied that he (Harinarayan) should be here in no time. Come, both of you, let us go and have the divine pleasure of meeting him." Right away, we proceeded, along with Shree Abhoynarayan, to where Babaji Maharaj was. I was already aware that Sree Abhoynarayan had received initiation from him several years ago, but knew nothing about his standing as a hermit, nor had I ever engaged in any dialogue with Shree Abhoynarayan

on this subject. On reaching the site together with Shree Abhoynarayan, I beheld—seated under a huge umbrella—a hoary sage with a mass of matted hair and a physique exceptionally radiant with inner power. As Shree Abhoynarayan identified the saint as his Guru, Shree Harinarayan and I prostrated before him. Shree Abhoynarayan introduced us to the hermit in this manner, "This is my younger brother; he is the one I asked you about a short while ago. And this a friend of ours. The two have just arrived." Babaji Maharaj said, "It is nice that they could come," and then pointing at me, "I have seen him at Vrindavan." It is true that I had been in holy Vrindavan during the preceding month of Ashwin, and so had Shree Harinarayan sometime ago, but none of us had met him anytime earlier. Why he still spoke as he did—and that too only referring to myself—was not clear. Be that as it may, all three of us took our seats near Babaji Maharaj. As we did that, the very first act of Babaji Maharaj was to look at me directly, repeat the question that had worried me some two or three months ago after midnight at the Amherst Street verandah and provide the answer. Thoroughly startled, because the matter had clearly slipped out of my mind, I wondered, "What's this? He has come to know of the problem that I had deliberated upon within my mind at dead of night at a faraway secluded location!! How has he done that? It does seem as if God has taken note of my petition and so have his emissaries wherever they happen to be. This sage is perhaps one such emissary and that's how he is aware too." Momentarily reassured, I continued to ruminate, "Even if he has the knowledge of what was in my mind, why did he have to communicate with me in this manner? Is it because he happens to be a great soul of the type I have been biding my time for? Has he revealed himself because he wishes to bestow his grace on me? Let me just wait and watch silently." Having so resolved, I sat there for some minutes listening to assorted conversation, then went back for food to Goswamiji's tent and devoted the rest of the day in visiting other sacred souls and in sundry hallowed pursuits.

After the morning ablution on the following day, I learnt that Goswamiji and his disciples were to go and pay their respects to Swamy Dayaldas. The latter had installed his seat, along with his congregation, on a sandbank near Jhusi and a wealthy merchant from Delhi was ministering to him like a domestic attendant. It was estimated that upto ten thousand heads visited Swamy Dayaldas daily and every one of them was treated methodically and sumptuously by that businessman with many items of excellent foodstuff. I

decided that I would accompany Goswamiji and his disciples for a visit to Swamy Dayaldas. A large number of people, about 60 to 70, had assembled in Goswamiji's tent for their usual morning tea. As circumstances would have it that day, almost all of them made short work of their tea and departed from the tent with Goswamiji—leaving only his disciple Sridhar, Ashwini, Shree Abhoynarayan and myself waiting yet for our share of the brew. Presently it came, and while sipping his cup of tea, Sridhar remarked, "It does not appeal to me that Goswamiji had admitted so many disciples. This place is like a bazaar, noisy all day long. I rather prefer the senior Kathia Baba (Shree Ramdas Kathia Baba) who was apparently instructed by his Guru to accept only four disciples. And accordingly, he has inducted, four disciples from four regions and called it a day." I took Sridhar's words to be genuine; I was not aware that he was prone at times to mental imbalance and speaking nonsense. My expectation of the day before, that Babaji Maharaj was perhaps the noble soul who was about to confer his grace on me as a Guru, now seemed premature. Because of Sridhar's assertion that Babaji Maharaj had ceased accepting new disciples, I concluded that my optimism of the previous day was but futile imagination. After finishing tea, the four of us circumambulated the congregation and proceeded to pay special homage to the more prominent among the hermits. After greeting a sadhu known as the junior Kathia Baba, we got to Babaji Maharaj, prostrated and squatted near him. No sooner had we done so than he spoke out thus, without any apparent provocation, "I do have five or six disciples. Even so, I may admit some more if I find eligible aspirants." Because of the absence of any obvious relevance, that statement—I felt—was specifically aimed at me in order to dispel the misgiving in my mind engendered by Sridhar's utterance of a short while ago. However, I refrained from giving an expression to my thoughts to anyone at that stage. After spending some more time near Babaji Maharaj, we moved on to Dayaldasji, observing other sadhus on the way. I abided at the Prayag fair for only five or six days, visiting Babaji Maharaj almost everyday to pay my respects. On each of those occasions, he would invariably come out with some remark or other that betrayed his clairvoyance. It occurred to me that this was his way of telling me that I was going to be the recipient of his mercy. But I did not speak out my mind to anyone—even Babaji Maharaj. On the day I was to depart from the fair, I went to him to bid farewell. As I prostrated and got up to leave, he addressed me thus, "Come and see me at Vrindavan in the month of Chaitra." To which I replied, "I am

an advocate by profession; the court does not go on an extended holiday during that month. I doubt that I can make it to Vrindavan at that time, unless you see to it that I do." He smiled, "Yes, of course, Hanumanji\* will certainly have you out there." After taking leave from him and Goswamiji's consent, Shree Harinarayan and I returned to Calcutta. I did not however let anyone in on my inner cogitations on Babaji Maharaj but continued fervently with the recital of the divine one-letter mantra.

Let me recount at this point some incidents relating to Babaji Maharaj's sojourn at the Prayag Kumbh Mela, as gathered from some of Goswamiji's disciples and others. Shree Mahendra Nath Mitra spoke of one occasion when he discovered Babaji Maharaj sitting bare-bodied, exposed to the bitter winter chill—having used his own blanket to enwrap the heifer Ganga. The space where Babaji Maharaj and his sadhus had congregated at Prayag was an open sandy expanse at the confluence of three rivers (Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati) and the month was Magh, dead middle of the winter season. It was therefore brutally cold. On seeing Babaji Maharaj without any covering on his person in that freezing weather, Shree Mahendra asked, "How is it that you have given over your blanket to the cow while you have nothing yourself to protect your body with? Animals are comfortable as they are. Why have you gifted your blanket to her and opted to suffer the chill yourself? His answer was, "Son, this place is exceedingly cold, she was thoroughly miserable in this icy temperature. Being a mute animal, she is unable to communicate and that is why I have to keep a special eye on her. As for myself, I have the sacred fire burning in front of me and my body is coated over with ash. I hardly notice the cold." Shree Mahendra again asked, "Why have you brought the cow here, so far out from Vrindavan? Wouldn't it have been easier to leave it behind at the hermitage? Babaji Maharaj explained, "It is not as though I had planned to fetch her along; I could have very well come comfortably by train. But the cow appealed to me, 'Babaji, you are on your way to the fair, won't you let me accompany you? I would love to come along.' That is why I brought her with me, travelling by foot. That was no problem for me, none at all."

I have it from Shree Abhoynarayan that, in the course of conversation one day during the same Kumbh Mela, he had asked, "Babaji Maharaj, are there any seekers in these modern times who have scaled the same heights of

devotion as did Dhruva and Prahlada in the days of yore?" An equivocal 'Yes' being the reply, Shree Abhoynarayan enquired if any such soul was present at the Mela. "Yes, many of them," replied Babaji Maharaj, "indeed, there are quite a few from even loftier domains. But how can you perceive them with human eyes? Dwellers of Heaven are also here. And God Immanent Himself."

After the conclusion of the festival, Babaji Maharaj returned to Vrindavan. Apprising friends and acquaintances merely that we were on our way for a visit to Vrindavan, Shree Abhoynarayan and myself left Calcutta late in the month of Chaitra and landed at Babaji Maharaj's hermitage. Garibdasji, Mauniji, Ramanandji\*, sadhu Kalyandas—mentioned earlier—and one other sadhu of name Pushkardas were at that time the other inmates of the ashram. We arrived at the ashram after dusk and paid our homage to Babaji Maharaj and others. I was profoundly impressed by Garibdasji's demeanour—an ocean of bliss, as it were. For our evening repast, he prepared and fed us with thick pulse soup and wheat flour bread (tortilla). We thoroughly enjoyed our daily ration of delicious and holy wheat flour cakes and lentil soup during the nearly three weeks we spent at the hermitage on that occasion. We did not crave for rice, cleansed the eating spot and the utensils after meals much like everyone else in the ashram and felt no worse for that. Although there were no problems in regard to food and related matters, I was nevertheless utterly disenchanted by Babaji Maharaj's daily routine of activities. Before coming to Vrindavan, I had conjectured that he would probably be in samadhi most of the time or at least in some kind of a supra-normal mode. On arrival at the ashram, however, I discovered that he lived a-work-a-day life that compared unfavourably with that of even a most humdrum mortal. Every morning, he went out for marketing, picked and bought vegetables and other necessities after much haggling and carried the lot back to the ashram on his own shoulder. On occasions when a disciple needed to be deputed for any purchase, he would be cross-examined stringently for the accounts. Every morning and evening, he sat on the roadside near Sevakunj when, from among the passers-by, some would gift him a quarter pice or half pice. If anyone paid an entire pice, Babaji Maharaj made it a point to demonstrate his pleasure. Some local citizens, who came and sat by him for hemp, would once in a while cry out to the wayfarers, "Hello there! Here is a saint who lives only on milk. Make a contribution for him and be blessed."

And Babaji Maharaj would appear happy and smiling as the Vraja-dwellers cajoled the pilgrims in this manner. Thus, twice a day, he collected some few pice and hung on to them most possessively, allowing no one even to touch the coins for fear as if of pilferage. Even during the post-evening sessions at the ashram, never would he dwell upon spiritual and ethical issues but would confine himself to such trivia as the escalating prices, quality of drinking water at this or that place, money gifted to him by some wealthy individual in some bygone past or the expected visit by the king of Jaipur when the latter would certainly make a lasting provision for the daily bread of five heads and later donate a fat sum of money for the inauguration of his temple. Sometimes, for small or no reason, he would swat a disciple with his pair of tongs and provoke him with vulgar and stinging invectives touching, for instance, his mother or sister. One was praised or spoken ill of depending on whether he did or did not oblige monetarily. And, in general, he displayed much affection for Shree Abhoyanarayan and a hint of severity and aloofness towards me.

Besides, the hermitage seemed like a natural breeding ground for all kinds of snakes. An idol of Hanumanji had been installed in a very small room, flanked on either side by a secret unlit cubicle hardly a meter wide. Those two cubicles had a profusion of fissures and holes, infested with huge and deadly snakes, such as cobras and red vipers. Facing Hanumanji's room and the two adjoining cubicles lay a small portico, less than four meters by two, at one end of which stood a home-made divan for Babaji Maharaj to stretch out. An exceedingly long red viper would frequently climb up to and rest on Hanumanji's pedestal. Babaji Maharaj would pick up a stick, cushioned at one extremity with old linen and kept handy precisely for that task, and gently prod the reptile with the soft end while urging it verbally also to move away. As it would obligingly slither down into a hole, he moved in to smear vermilion on Hanumanji's body and to garland him. A virtual home for all those fearsome snakes, that was where Babaji Maharaj passed his nights all alone—as if among friends. On the other hand, everyday unfailingly before meals, he walked up with a mini-spade in hand to each and every tree and creeper in the ashram, big or small—loosening the soil at the base or pouring some water or just caressing. Furthermore, he would set apart a small share from his wheat-cake and toss that in small pieces at a designated spot for the sparrows and other birds to come and eat, which they promptly

did. Only then, he took his meal himself, and rounded it up by summoning and gifting each of us with a bit of his holy left-overs.

He owned a small horse, and it so happened one day that it did not return to the hermitage at its usual time. Babaji Maharaj went around in vain, looking for it in the meadows and the woodlands under the scorching midday rays of the Vaisakh sun. Eventually he came back to the retreat and announced rather helplessly, "My horse is gone; some poacher must have walked away with it. What am I to do now?" Gosaian, the 'dacoit' disciple alluded to earlier, happened to be present at the hermitage at that point of time, executed a powerful snort and declared, "Babaji Maharaj, don't you worry any. Your horse will return." "It will, indeed?" was all Babaji Maharaj could ask, faintly hopeful as it were. As Gosaian vigorously confirmed, "Yes, Maharaj, it certainly will," Babaji Maharaj seemed relieved by the assertion.

Another characteristic of his needs be called attention to. Whenever any eatable found its way to the hermitage, he distributed it evenly among all the residents—in tiny bits or, large portions depending on the quantity initially received. Invariably though, he served himself the last and apportioned the least.

After dusk on one occasion in the ashram, Shree Abhoynarayan, myself and some local citizens sat near Babaji Maharaj conversing. During the course of exchanges, as Babaji Maharaj made some observation—I do not recall now what exactly it was—I reacted rather strongly and spoke out against it. Babaji Maharaj promptly folded his palms and, as if transformed into an innocent youngster, apologized, "Son, I am old and foolish—your little boy, unfamiliar with scriptures. Pray illucidate." Embarrassed, I felt silent.

Observing Babaji Maharaj at Vrindavan during those few days, the impressions I had formed of him at holy Prayag melted away in toto. Daily exposures to new facets of his personality led me to surmise that he was an individual of the most commonplace variety, limited in education as well as in mystic power. He seemed no better than a superannuated village character, thoroughly enmeshed in worldly pursuits. Simultaneously, however, I could not very well forget his remarks to me at Prayag, as documented earlier, and therefore hesitated in branding him outright as an ordinary individual of that variety. At one moment, I would rationalize that his utterances at Prayag might have been simply fortuitous. At another, I would wonder why, if he had



no spiritual attainments whatever, the entire conglomeration of hermits belonging to different diverse Vaishnav sects should hold him in such high esteem as to single him out for leading them to the ceremonial bath at the Kumbh Mela. That could have been merely an act of courtesy, I would tell myself, conferred on him by the monks in recognition of his advancing years and his status as the Mahanta of holy Vraja. But then, I remembered Goswamiji's statement that, among the holy men assembled at the Kumbh Mela, there were many who were genuinely illumined as well as many who had simply piled up the years. Was it possible that they extended so great a veneration to Babaji Maharaj for nothing more than plain old age? Various conflicting thoughts such as these agitated my mind relentlessly, but I refrained from taking anyone into confidence. I continued to watch his actions and deliberate within. When this was the state of affairs, I was suddenly reminded one day of some of the legends in Srimad Bhagvat\*. During his divine exploits in Vrindavan, Lord Krishna resorted frequently to miracles of diverse nature—invariably with such finesse that no one did ever suspect Him to be any different from an ordinary lad. Even the demi-Gods, inclusive of Brahma\* Himself, were deluded by His manners into dismissing Him as a mere mortal. And it was only by virtue of His grace that they were eventually able to see through the illusion. As I recalled the narrations in Srimad Bhagvat, it occurred to me that, should Babaji Maharaj be one with the Supreme Lord (this was not inconceivable), then of course his activities would be—as divine pastimes are—beyond ordinary comprehension. Yet, doubts persisted. Lacking in spiritual vision myself, how could I decide that Babaji Maharaj had indeed merged with God? On the other hand, if he had, then certainly he was type of Sadguru I had been casting about for. But how could I possibly surrender to him without being dead certain? Cogitating thus, I finally came to the conclusion that I would have to stay content this time with having achieved only a limited goal—namely, a simple pilgrimage to holy Vrindavan. And that I would not share my thoughts with anyone. Also that, if he was truly one of the Enlightened Souls, he would spontaneously be aware of the goings-on in my mind. And, should he be inclined to accept me as a disciple, he would reveal that himself and dispel my doubts in some suitable manner. These introspections helped me to restore the balance of my mind.

Some two or three days later, as we sat near Babaji Maharaj after the midday

meal, a postcard addressed to me was received from Shree Abhoynarayan's brother, Shree Harinarayan. After scanning through it himself, Shree Abhoynarayan handed that post card over to me and I began reading it myself. Shree Abhoynarayan was a regular recipient of communications from Calcutta, but Babaji Maharaj had never displayed any curiosity about any of them. But, this time round, as I was going through the post card, he commanded, "Tell me the contents of this letter." In that dispatch, Shree Harinarayan had enquired if I had yet received initiation from Babaji Maharaj. That was in fact the first and the last letter he ever wrote to me ! Besides, I had never expressed to him or to anyone else any yearning on my part for initiation from Babaji Maharaj. I could not make out what prompted him to mail me a letter with that specific enquiry. In any case, when Babaji Maharaj wanted to know what that card was all about and I was momentarily groping for a reply, Shree Abhoynarayan informed him, "My brother has written, asking if Babuji<sup>3</sup> has received initiation yet from you." Without any ado, Babaji Maharaj replied, "Yes, tell him that Babuji has." Having spoken those words to Shree Abhoynarayan, he looked at me and said, "I shall not induct you just yet. Come back here along with your wife in the month of Shravan and I will then initiate you both at the same time." I was sort of relieved by those words, as I thought to myself, "It suits me rather well that he does not propose initiation right away, because as of this moment—I have no desire for initiation. Let me first of all be free of the reservations I have about him, and I shall see."

Two or three days after this episode, we left Vrindavan to return to Calcutta. I have already touched upon the fact that, during my sojourn at the retreat, Babaji Maharaj used to be a bit stern with me. But as I was bidding good-bye to him, he bestowed on me a look that penetrated my whole being with a profound sense of bliss; he was the very embodiment of tenderness and love as it were. That glance triggered a strange ecstasy in my heart that echoed within me all the way upto Calcutta. In a couple of days, however, the beatitude faded away and I was back to square one—high and dry.

In the course of various conversations during my stay at Vrindavan, Babaji Maharaj had specified three or four maxims that are exceedingly beneficial

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<sup>3</sup> Meaning of recipient of the letter or the author of this biography

for aspirants to abide by :

1. Avoid sleep during the last quarter of the night.

He had also recited a native verse that is commended by the sages and is in harmony with the above precept.

*All are awake in the first quarter  
Seekers of pleasure in the second  
Thieves are awake in the third quarter  
while yogis are alert in the fourth.*

2. Act by your conscience, not by panegyries nor by censure, and
3. Live immaculately.

As it is understood, this meant abjuring sin and hypocrisy.

There were various other injunctions too, but I make a special mention of these three.

Back in Calcutta, as I tried to put his first edict into practice, I discovered that—being unaccustomed to rising that very early—I was often unsuccessful. Even when I did succeed, the brain would be too tense and the body too fatigued during the day to do justice to my daily assignments as an advocate. I have a delicate nervous system and have not had sound sleep even for a day in many years. The breath control and other mystic rites that I practised rather energetically sometime ago with the sect of yogis, had played such havoc with my nerves that I had not known peaceful sleep within years. It was only during the cool hours of the receding night that I could relax and doze, even if disturbed by a procession of dreams. This was why I failed many a time in my attempts to wake up with the onset of the last quarter of the night and, even when I succeeded, I would be overwrought in the head for the entire day. All the same, I never gave up trying. At that stage, a miracle befell me during the first half of the month of Ashad. I was in bed under a mosquito net, next to the window in my room, sleepy at night's end, when someone called out 'Get up' and hurled a small piece of stone at me. As the tiny missile landed on me, I promptly rose and picked it up, but failed to

detect anyone outside the window. More remarkably, there was no tear in the mosquito netting, and I was at a loss trying to figure out how the projectile could have hit me without punching an opening in the cotton material.

On a later occasion, I was stretched out on the open roof of my house when, towards the dwindling hours of the night, someone called out my name very softly, twice or thrice. Soft as it was, I woke up, only to discern nothing but dead silence all around and no hint of any living being anywhere. Taken by surprise, I began to pace on the rooftop.

I looked in vain for an explanation of the above events, as I continued faithfully to recite the one-letter mantra received earlier through divine mediation. That I was unable to develop a sense of confidence in Babaji Maharaj has been mentioned already. I did remember his directive for me to be at Vrindavan for initiation in the month of Sravan. But, having had no success in working up a faith in him, I attached little importance to his instruction and was wholly disinclined towards undertaking a trip to Vrindavan for the purpose of initiation. I was depressed in mind-biding time and planning for the day when a God-unified Sadguru would grant me succour. Days would pass in professional hassle, but the post-evening hours—when I would not as a matter of principle, engage in any activity pertaining to my livelihood—were taken up exclusively by that yearning. Perhaps that was why God took pity on me and, in order to dispel my misgivings, devised a solution that defied imagination. One night late in the month of Ashad, I was resting as usual on the roof when I suddenly woke up at an early pre-dawn hour. Hardly had I risen to a sitting position when I caught sight of Babaji Maharaj tearing as it were through the firmament and advancing in my direction. In a flash, he landed on his foot in front of me on the roof, put me at ease and articulated a divine phrase into my ear then and there. Having done that, he ascended on to the sky and disappeared promptly from sight. When he was thus inducting me on the roof, I could discern there the figure of Reverend Shree Vijaykrishna Goswami also. As Babaji Maharaj dissolved from view, I had the sensation of his mantra permeating into the very elements of my inner being and flushing me clean of all the scepticism I had about him. The perception came over me that I had gained the Sadguru I was hungering for and my life became hallowed as of that very instant. The doubts in regard to the personality of Babaji Maharaj that had assailed me during my sojourn at holy Vrindavan in the month of Chaitra vanished

forthwith. I converted wholly and instantly to the view that he was an omniscient Seer of the Supreme Reality.

Subsequently, towards the end of Sravan, I reached Vrindavan in a happy frame of mind along with my wife, a younger half-brother and Shree Abhoynarayan, and paid homage to Babaji Maharaj at the hermitage. He informed me that he would initiate both of us on the eighth lunar day of the month of Bhadra—Lord Krishna's birthday. That was due in some eight to ten day's time. Babaji Maharaj's behaviour in the course of those few days was an exact replay of what I had witnessed previously, but that could no longer engender any reservations in my mind. I accepted his outward behaviour as a mystic facade that transcended my intellect. One who was able to lay his eyes on me 1600 kilometers away in Calcutta while he was physically at Vrindavan, and offer solace and initiation at that faraway place—one for whom physical distance was no limitation—was certainly capable of liberating me spiritually. There could be no hesitation in surrendering heart and soul to such a great one. With those thoughts in my mind, I prepared myself yet again for initiation. At the same time, I also enquired of him if, in view of what had already happened at the Calcutta rooftop, a fresh initiation was still necessary. "Yes, I shall initiate you afresh." was the reply. As I therefore geared up mentally for a re-initiation, my wife made it known to Shree Abhoynarayan and myself that she had been already inducted once by her native and traditional Guru. And that, because of her profound attachment to that mantra, she did not wish to go for a new initiation from another Guru. Shree Abhoynarayan counselled her daily on the superlative majesty of receiving initiation from a genuine Sadguru, but she would not budge at all. Even as late as the night preceding Janmastami, during discussions with Shree Abhoynarayan, she insisted that she had been reciting that mantra for a considerable stretch of time, had thus grown to cherish it deeply and could not therefore switch over to any other. I spoke but little with her on that topic; I was convinced that since Babaji Maharaj had made known his intention of initiating her along with me on the Janmastami day, that was exactly what would happen, come what may.

On the Janmastami morning, after we had eased nature and bathed, Babaji Maharaj told me, "Go to the market and get new clothes, necklaces of tulsi beads and gopichandan\*. Your initiations are due this day. Accordingly I

approached my wife for some money, when she had this to say, "I shall also come for initiation along with you. Do please buy clothes and tulsi strings for me too." Amused, I asked, "Didn't I hear you say that you won't?" She was candid, "Yes, it is true that I was averse to a second initiation. Since this morning, however, I have developed this deep yearning for initiation. I shall therefore join you for initiation too."

Contemplating upon the glory of Babaji Maharaj, I repaired to the market, acquired a pair of new clothes, two tulsi chains and some gopichandan, and returned to the ashram. He initiated us, one after the other, in forenoon itself. First, he delivered a mantra into my ear three times in succession and bade me recite that routinely, never while wearing shoes. Next, he pronounced into my ear once again the same mantra as he had inducted me with on the roof at Calcutta and explicated, "You need not recite this mantra, it will recite itself spontaneously and bear fruit in due course." After my turn was over, he initiated my wife also, in my presence, with a mantra that differed from both of mine. This was how both of us, husband and wife, were blessed with Babaji Maharaj's grace on the lunar day of Janmastami in the month of Bhadra of the Bengali year 1301 (August-September, 1894 A.D. Christian year). I have taken the liberty of recounting these details from my own life solely because they illustrate in a large measure the majesty of Babaji Maharaj.

On day three after Janmastami, Babaji Maharaj embarked on the circumambulation of holy Vraja and took us along with him. The other members from the hermitage who also accompanied Babaji Maharaj were the two monks—Pushkardasji and Kalyandas—and our familiar heifer Ganga. Due to excessive—almost daily—rains that year in the region, roads had accumulated water and turned thick with mud at most locations. At one particular spot, I recall, one needed to walk only a short distance to sink knee-deep in quagmire. On reaching the day's destination, we hammered wooden pegs into the ground, set up the small tent that Babaji Maharaj had allotted for our use, and then erect and unfold his big umbrella for him to sit under. We would excavate a narrow trench, about three-quarters of a cubit deep, around the tent and the umbrella in order to prevent rainwater from the surrounding terrain from entering and muddying up the site. Those of us from Calcutta would lodge inside the said tent, armed with a bamboo mat and a blanket each for use as bed or seat. Babaji Maharaj's seat would be

installed under the large umbrella, whereas Pushkardas and Kalyandas would pair up together below a smaller one nearby.

The distance travelled each day varied usually between 10 and 15 kilometers, the first task on reaching a predetermined site being to raise the tent and the umbrellas. A bullock cart, fully loaded with our luggage and pulled by three bullocks, accompanied us. Because of the excessively slushy condition of the road, this was a tough job even for three quadrupeds. On arrival at the desired destination for the day and after fixing the tent and umbrellas, the sadhus went out in search of dry firewood. Whenever they came across dry timber on a tree, they chopped it down with axes and hauled it back to the tent, along with large-size cowdung cakes gathered from the villagers.

It is worth speaking at this point of a quaint custom—in vogue since the time of Nagaji Maharaj—that is practised during circumambulation times. A native of a locality named 'Paygam' within the Vraja area, he practised severe asceticism at a level vale near Varsana, fenced in from three sides by lofty mountains and known as 'Kadam Khandi', or rather 'Nagaji's Kadam Khandi' after the great sage. Having been unable to achieve a vision of God even after many years of exacting self-discipline at Kadm Khandi, he resolved in a fit of pique to leave holy Vraja and readied himself for departure with his ascetic's bowl in one hand and the pair of tongs in the other. Traditionally, the Vraja-dwellers nurture an innate sense of camaraderie with Lord Krishna, Nagaji being no exception. When therefore a vision of God still eluded him even after persistent austerity over many years, he reasoned that, since the Lord had himself won Supreme Fulfilment from that area, it was a sort of reserved territory, not open to others for the same purpose. "Very well, then," he sulked with a feeling of hurt towards his divine playmate, "I will move out of His reserved sanctuary, go away elsewhere and lose myself in meditation. Let me see how he frustrates me there." Hardly, however, had he taken but a few steps and was passing by a thorny bush—bowl and tongs in hand—when the immense mass of his matted locks got so hopelessly snarled in the barbs from all sides that he became immobile. That served only to aggravate his sentiments further and he thought to himself, "It's that rascal again and His mischief! I am willing to concede and pull out of this place, but prevents me from doing even that by letting the thorns entangle my hair. That's all right, I shall stay put in this very condition,

caught up in the prickles. Let me see how far He will go." Sensitive and tenacious, Nagaji Maharaj continued to stand there on his feet, bowl and tongs in hand, one day after another, for three days and three nights. On the fourth day at last, the Lord of the Universe, tender as He is to His devotees, appeared before Nagaji Maharaj in His Four-armed Manifestation, embraced him with two arms while employing the other two to extricate his hair from the thorns, and said, "Nagaji, please do continue to dwell here. Your prayers have been answered; the Object of your worship stands before you. I shall grant all your wishes." Transformed by the vision of God and His embrace into one who is agitated neither by grief nor by delusion, Nagaji Maharaj recited hymns in His adoration. On God inviting him again to seek a boon, Nagaji spoke, "If you must grant me one, then let it be so that 'half the sons and half the milk' in sacred Vraja shall belong to me. That is, of all the male children born in Vraja families, half will remain householders so that the dynastic lineage is not broken while the other half will renounce the world and augment the population of holy practitioners. As well, of the milk discharged daily by the cows in Vraja households, half will appertain to sadhus so that they can readily fight hunger and concentrate on celestial pursuits without let or hindrance." God was pleased and acceded to Nagaji Maharaj's petition. Nagaji asked, "Why should people believe that you have indeed bestowed such a boon on me?" God replied, "I shall myself enforce this covenant with you. If you will wander among the Vraja villages, I shall accompany you as your disciple, proclaim the boon all over and at the same time raid every household for a half share of its milk." With that plan of action, Nagaji (as Guru) and God (as the disciple) proceeded from one Vraja village to another—the latter proclaiming the boon, barging into the dwellings and snatching away half of their milk reserves. Those that refused to oblige soon discovered their stock of milk develop worms or their cattle drop dead. Impressed by the turn of events and also by the glowing visages of both the Preceptor and the Disciple, the Vraja-dwellers were convinced of the authenticity of Nagaji's boon and began happily committing half of their male issues to Nagaji for his following. Having thus accorded wide publicity to Nagaji's boon throughout the Vraja territory, God fulfilled His promise and disappeared from sight. Disciples flocked to Nagaji and sacred Vraja resounded with a swelling population of holy men. Till this day, the spell of Nagaji's boon has not dissipated in holy Vraja and, in quite a few instances when two sons are born to a family, the parents themselves deliver one of



them—even as a young lad—to some monk as his disciple. When that does not happen, the boy himself not infrequently runs away from home and surrenders to some hermit. In regard to milk also, Nagaji's boon is still operative. We witnessed the *modus operandi* during circumambulation wherein various bands of sadhus participate. As villages along the itinerary came up, each band picked one for itself and its sadhus—armed with pots and pans of all shapes and sizes—descended on the homesteads and helped themselves directly with the milk from the containers. Potrayed below is a typical scenario of how sadhus 'loot' milk.

A Naga\* sadhu makes his way into a village residence, vessel in hand. The owner is seated on a native cot under a neem tree—almost every house in Vraja boasts of one—in the courtyard, relaxing over a hookah. As he catches sight of the approaching Naga—all set with a container to hijack milk with—he chuckles and calls out to his wife inside, "Naga is here to loot milk." Promptly, the lady of the house wraps her sari around the waist in preparation for the ensuing battle. Without wasting so much as a word, the Naga bursts into the room and grabs the milkpot. In a sharp reaction, the milkmaid of Vraja gets a firm grip on Naga's forearm—one measuring the other. All the while, the master of the house continues to take it easy on his cot—smoking and tickled by the drama and speculating on the winner. Eventually, the monk turns out to be the victor, pushes the lady away, forcibly pours out half of the milk from its container into his own and emerges. Delighted by Naga's performance, the landlord felicitates him, "Bravo! you are a true celibate, Nagaji. Drink plenty of milk, it's good for you." In most such instances, the Naga hermits end up as easy winners because of their superior physical prowess, flowing from seminal control and sexual abstinence. But Vraja is the home of a fair quota of robust women as well, who can match the might of noted male wrestlers. In such cases, the Nagas do occasionally get the worst of it. Only the exceptionally strong among sadhus will take it unto himself to loot milk from a house that can field such a woman. I have it on the authority of some very elderly hermits that, quite a few years ago in some village, there dwelled an extraordinarily strong milkmaid whom no wrestler could subdue. It was only Babaji Maharaj who was able to overpower her, shove her out of the way and loot milk. Subsequently, whenever Babaji Maharaj confronted her, she would give in without a fight. For sadhus who are familiar to the household and whose bonafides are beyond doubt, the

milkmaids usually do not put up any resistance but allow freely to take possession of the milk, although at times they may initiate a mock combat purely out of fun. There is no doubt that a real altercation—even a physical fight—does occasionally come to pass, especially when a household is unfairly raided for a second time within the day or when the sadhus insist on looting even as the milkmaids appeal fervently on behalf of the babies or the ailing members in the family. But this was rare. Generally speaking, looting of milk was by and large a frolicsome affair as typified by my first year's experience. Subsequently for some years between, I and my wife accompanied Babaji Maharaj in circumambulation on alternate years and thus had the opportunity of participating in and observing many of them. Later years, as compared with the initial few, saw a gradual decline in their grandeur and ambience of joyfulness.

By the time we arrived at our daily destinations for rest and raised the tents and the umbrellas, sadhus would be back with looted milk and we would promptly consume our share. Once in a while, some monks pampered us with looted milk even before we reached the resting point. But such happy conditions prevailed only during the first one or two circumambulations. In the years to follow, milk became less and less amenable to looting, owing partly to the onset of scarcity conditions in the Vraja area.

I shall relate at this stage one or two special incidents pertaining to our first circumambulation, because they underscore some facets of Babaji Maharaj's personality.

I reported earlier that, after Nagaji Maharaj attained Supreme Fulfilment and had a vision of God there, Kadam Khandi—it is really quite far from Varsana—came to be known and famed as Nagaji's Kadam Khandi. As the curtain came down on his terrestrial drama, that was where his mortal remains were consigned to flames. On the fourteenth day of the waxing moon after Janmastami, all Vaishnav hermits converge to and install their seats at Kadam Khandi. The inhabitants of the Vraja region also assemble there to participate in a gigantic festival, while special thespians reanimate the celestial dance of Lord Krishna with the milkmaids. A distinctive sweatmeat called Malpoa—prepared out of white flour, semolina, clarified butter and sugar—is proffered on that day to God for Him to partake of. The food thus

sanctified is what the monks and the devotees consume later on. The day reverberates with songs and dances and general merriment. The concourse relocates next day some ten kilometers away on the banks of a water basin, Gaya Kund, in Kamyakvan. Between Kadam Khandi and Kamyakvan sprawls a stretch of lowland that usually accumulates water during the rainy season every year and turns slushy. The year of our first circumambulation saw such heavy rains and excessive amassing of water that it would be impossible, we felt, to negotiate that expanse with our bullock cart. Consequently, Babaji Maharaj decided that he would not pursue that route via Gaya Kund and Mohrana, but would deviate through Vithora and Khatavat, and then fuse eventually with the main body of the congregation. All others, it was further decided, would proceed as usual straight to Gaya Kund under the temporary leadership of Babaji Maharaj's sadhu disciple, Mahant Tilakdasji. In charge although he was of preparing food for Babaji Maharaj, Pushkardasji let it be known that he would rather join Tilakdasji and press ahead to Gaya Kund. It occurred to me that Pushkardasji's bifurcation would disturb the cooking routine for Babaji Maharaj. After the festivities and the evening worship were over, therefore, I cornered Sri Abhayanarayan and Pushkardasji, escorted them to a secluded spot near a hill away from the congregation and set variously about impressing upon the latter that it was inadvisable for him to forsake his duty to a great soul like Babaji Maharaj and go away elsewhere. What he replied was this, "I have been with Babaji Maharaj for nearly 20 years now, have witnessed manifestations of his occult powers and am certain that he has fully conquered lust. Nevertheless, he is not free of anger and greed for wealth, but possesses both in ample measure." I tried to counter that in this way, "Very well, you say that he is uncommonly irascible and quarrelsome. But, pray tell me what the symptoms are of an ill-tempered individual? If you happen to be sore with someone and an altercation follows, how do you feel immediately thereafter? Do you or do you not carry a grudge at least for some time? Can you, directly after the row, fraternize with that person freely and join him in jest and laughter—without any reserve whatever? He conceded, "No, a bitterness does persist for a while," I pressed on, "You have associated with Babaji Maharaj for twenty long years. Do tell me truthfully if you have at any time detected him nursing a resentment because of a fracas?" He pondered for a while and replied, "My dear sir, in fairness to him, I must grant that I have never seen him do that. One moment, he would be invective and vulgar— maligning even the

mother of the adversary and threatening to hit with a club, the latter retaliating with equal vehemence. At the very next, he would transform into a guileless teenager and engage his erstwhile antagonist in harmless small talk, hilarity and merriment. Not an iota of rancour would be discernible." "In that case," I said "You cannot equate his abusive and combative exterior to real anger; they are but components of an illusive facade. The illumined ones—Scriptures say—act the part of an artless boy, or a lunatic, or even a fiend. Ordinary ignorant people, unaware of their real nature, stay away and miss rare opportunities."

I asked him further, "You feel that Babaji Maharaj is avaricious and thirsts passionately for wealth. But will you please tell me what the signs are of one who hankers after riches? How does he treat a person that happens to be in a position to fulfil his desire?" Puskardasji said, "He showers deference and attention on him, and glues on to him." I enquired, "Please hark back on your twenty years of companionship with Babaji Maharaj. Would you, based on that long and direct experience, apprise me of your honest views on how he was disposed towards moneyed individuals?" He responded, "Babuji, in answer to your query, I can assert that his behaviour towards the wealthy one happens to be exceedingly uncivil. We are all quite unhappy with him on this account. Let me cite but one singular instance. The king of Vijina village had at one time come, along with his retinue to call on and to pay his respects to Babaji Maharaj. Rather than welcoming him politely, Babaji Maharaj seemed to fly into a rage and virtually drove the distinguished visitor away as if he were a stray dog. Hadn't you noticed how rude he was with you during your first visit to the hermitage? He never spoke to you nicely even for once. I don't see that he is dripping sweetness this time either." I smiled to say, "Is it conceivable that a person coveting wealth should so conduct himself with a wealthy man?" Puskardas was quiet for a while and then spoke, "Babuji, this tradition of presenting an illusive face has baffled me all along. Temper and rapacity are permanent features, abusive language and altercation with everyone go on unabated, money and material he hangs on to with such passion that no one can get within miles of them—he acts as if he fears embezzlement. Even Garibdas—who was such a superb soul, who dedicated his life solely for service to his Guru and who was indeed oblivious to all but his Guru—was in the receiving end of verily the same treatment. On the other hand, when somebody actually pilfer his cherished belongings, he seems totally

unconcerned and continues to deal with the offender exactly as previously, as if nothing has happened in between." Puhkardasji named a certain sadhu and continued, "He used to stay with Babaji Maharaj, participate with him in smoking hemp and hashish, and at the same time steal his possessions whenever an opportunity arose. Catching him red-handed many a time, Babaji Maharaj would verbally tear him to pieces, "You sister-teaser, how dare you do such a thing?..... ", ferociously implicated his mother and sister, and then promptly revert to their erstwhile camaraderie. He would never ask anyone to leave the ashram nor prevent anyone from doing so. He was all admiration for anyone who gifted even one pice and, whenever a wealthy person or a king was reported to be travelling to Vrindavan, he would make himself busy in advance computing the profits that might accrue from the visit or the number of monks whose regular board would be taken care of by the visitor or the amount of hard cash that he himself would be able to lay his hands on. However, if and when the caller did in fact show up, Babaji Maharaj would not even look at him. If anyone should suggest, 'Babaji Maharaj, won't you care to meet the king for once?' or 'The king seems to be headed this way. He will no doubt make obeisance to you and proffer some gifts,' Babaji Maharaj would instantly explode in fury of temper—as if recalling an old festering enmity—and yell, 'Rascal ! Let him come and I will surely fix him properly with my iron tongs. Am I his servant that I must do him honour? What does he want from me? Go to hell and stop badgering me.' Like one demented, he would thus launch into a torrent of disjointed and indecent diatribes. We were all quite fed up by such crude antics. Oh! I could cite so many other instances of his misbehaviour with well-to-do people." I reiterated my old plea, "Can you frankly believe that one craving for riches would conduct himself in this manner with another who has plenty to offer?" Pushkardas persisted, "That is not the point. If he is free from temptation for wealth why does he watch over his possession so very fiercely? And why would he, in day-to-day conversation, betray such acute obsession for money?" I tried to elucidate, "Mystic posturing by the great ones is beyond ordinary comprehensions; they camouflage their true nature through various kinds of illusion. Yet at times they do reveal themselves to a fortunate few that have earned their grace. Of a quite contrary trait of character would be those who are not genuinely liberated but who are mere pretenders. They too conceal their personality—in a reverse order. They mask their inadequacy and masquerade as omniscient—

quite unlike the authentic seers who hide their omniscience behind a veil of ordinariness. Try and recall that, during His descent in this very land of holy Vraja, Lord Krishna performed many a miracle, but invariably in a manner that left the Vraja-dwellers unaware of His real identity. Natives of Vraja had perceived Him only as human, and cherished Him as a friend, a lovable child or even as an amorous paramour. Sages with transcendental vision were the only ones who recognized Him for what He was. The external attributes of all-knowing saints delude ordinary people who, as a consequence, fail to perceive their inner reality."

All persuasions however proved futile, and Pushkardas said, "I am not equal to all that deep analyses. I wish desperately to visit Gaya Kund in Kamyakvan and shall therefore accompany Tilakdasji. I will be back with you in three day's time and expect that, for these few days, the matter of preparing food for Babaji Maharaj will sort itself out somehow." I pondered over Pushkardasji's attitude and said to myself, "I salute you, Babaji Maharaj. This person has renounced material life for the spiritual and has closely associated with you for twenty long years. And yet you have so concealed yourself from him that he stays wholly ignorant of your essential identity. I realize that you are beyond intellectual scrutiny and can be perceived exclusively through your own grace."

We returned to our respective seats but did not disclose any part of our conversation with Pushkardasji to Babaji Maharaj or anyone else. As the evening wore on, some sadhu lay down on their seats for rest while some others continued to pray. Around ten or ten-thirty—in the night, a hermit turned up from somewhere and set about administering a rub-down on Babaji Maharaj's lower limbs. After a while, he sat up, took out some hemp and asked the hermit to prepare it for smoking. While doing so, the sadhu asked, "Maharaj, your cook Pushkardas says that he will follow Tilakdasji to Gaya Kund. Who then is going to replace him in your kitchen?" Babaji Maharaj's reply was, "Yes, that is true, Pushkardas had decided to forsake the old man in favour of Tilakdasji's convoy; he has also complained to Babuji here about my fierce temper and insatiable greed. Well, that is that. What can I possibly do? Old and vulnerable as I am, the Lord will think of something for me." Taken by surprise at what Babaji Maharaj just came out with, I said to Shree Abhoynarayan, "Did you get that? Babaji Maharaj knows all about our

secret confabulations with Pushkardas." After partaking of the hemp, the sadhu went his way and stretched out for rest. Next morning, the congregation dismantled camp from Kadam Khandi, nearly half of its members opting out of the trek to Gaya Kund and joining Babaji Maharaj. A devout and orthodox brahmin presented himself and eagerly undertook to cook for Babaji Maharaj. Three days later, Tilakdasji and his flock met and merged with that of Babaji Maharaj at the appointed place, Genroi, on the circumambulation route. Along also came Pushkardas, back on his normal routine. We could not discern any difference in Babaji Maharaj's attitude towards him.

Some more episodes concerning Pushkardas will fit in nicely at this juncture. We learnt later that, prior to the incident recorded above, Pushkardas had on two separate occasions tried to poison Babaji Maharaj by serving him food laced with arsenic. Once he had sneaked arsenic in a connabis drink and proffered the concoction to Babaji Maharaj and three other prominent Mahants. On consuming the stuff, the latter lost consciousness and collapsed, but nothing happened to Babaji Maharaj although he had swallowed a much larger quantity. As Babaji Maharaj sprinkled holy water from his bowl and redeemed their senses, the three mahants demanded that Pushkardas be handed over to the police. But Babaji Maharaj responded thus, "This man will surely pay for his misdeed even without anyone taking an initiative. You have regained your faculties and sustained no serious harm. Then why do you, inspired as you are by renunciation, wish to lodge a complaint to the police?" The trio however insisted, "This person happens to be an assassin and must be delivered to the law of the land." But Babaji Maharaj maintained, "You nay do so if you wish, but it will not work. I will declare that I drank a lot more of the same stuff as you did, and nothing is the matter with me. Your complaint will thus fall through and fetch you only embarrassment." This the Mahants had to concede to, and Pushkardas got away scot-free.

On another occasion too, Pushkardas had served Babaji Maharaj with poisoned aliment which the latter had quietly absorbed without anyboby being any wiser. Pushkardas was under an illusion that the stout wooden girdle around Babaji Maharaj's waist was hollow inside and full of hoarded gold coins. He contrived to do away with Babaji Maharaj in order to lay his hands on the girdle concealing the golden treasure. The attempts at poisoning having failed twice, he devised a new plan of operation. As Babaji Maharaj

happened to halt at Agra for a few days during one of his peregrinations, Pushkardas—a native of that city—got together with some of the local thugs and finalized a ghoulish scheme. Finding Babaji Maharaj asleep one night at the base of a knoll, they got hold of a huge boulder weighing nearly a hundred kilograms, carried it collectively to the crest and heaved it across at the supine figure down below. The massive projectile struck him at the upper left arm causing severe pain, but he stood up at once clutching a heavy stick by the left hand. The villains promptly took to their heels, surmising incorrectly that the rock had missed its target, leaving the intended victim quite unharmed. Pushkardas however soon materialised himself before Babaji Maharaj, feigning total ignorance about the goings-on. The latter had clearly recognized Pushkardas as one of the miscreants but acted as if he had not, and relocated himself that very night along with the conspirator. The impact had severed one of his arteries and badly injured the bones as well. Although he improved after a few agonizing days, he had to live for the rest of his life with a nagging pain at the point of impact and the neighbouring arterial junctions. These episodes involving Pushkardas I learnt from Babaji Maharaj himself in the course of sundry conversations.

This background notwithstanding, it was the same Pushkardas who still cooked off and on for Babaji Maharaj and kept him company. No accusation was ever made and, as I asked him why, Babaji Maharaj had this to say, "My son, no one can inflict misery upon any other. We all harvest the fruits of our own actions, and suffer on account of past misadventures. What real harm has Pushkardas conferred on me? I am still as I ever was—unified with the Lord. What can he do to me that I should chide him or ask him to leave? I tell you truthfully, my son, I am beyond pain and pleasure." I listened to him in speechless wonder and silent inner prostration.

Several years subsequent to my first circumambulation, somebody informed me telegraphically that Babaji Maharaj was seriously ill and that I should proceed to Vrindavan right away. That very day I left Calcutta for Vrindavan along with Shree Abhoybarayan. On arrival, I found Babaji Maharaj slightly indisposed and totally lacking in appetite. A doctor had been called in by the local citizens, the wooden girdle had been sawed open, and he was wearing a linen loin-cloth (not his usual one, fashioned from timber). I gathered later that Pushkardas had, this time round, blended arsenic in excess of 20 grams



with the wheat-flour cakes prepared for and served to Babaji Maharaj for his meal. As he went out to rinse his mouth after consuming the said meal, his head suddenly collapsed and banged on a wooden stump nearby. Injured in the process, he came and stretched out on his bed, when the citizens noticed his bloated stomach and used a saw to remove the timber cincture—after having obtained his approval for doing so. By the time we arrived, the distension of his abdomen had subsided, although he had not regained any desire whatever for food. And he had not till then divulged to anyone Pushkardas's role in the whole diabolical affair. Earlier in Calcutta, immediately on receipt of the telegram concerning his illness, I had talked it over with some friends and well-wishers. Reverend Shree Vijoykrishna Goswami, who had learnt of it from Shree Abhoynarayan, had remarked, "Babaji Maharaj's physical frame enjoys mystic protection and is not vulnerable to ordinary ailments. I believe, he has been poisoned by some sadhu; he cannot fall ill otherwise." As I quoted this statement by Goswami, Babaji Maharaj broke into a smile and said, "See that? The distance to faraway Calcutta was no impediment for the noble soul in perceiving what betided us out here in Vrindavan. This time round, dear Pushkardas took no chances but blended 20 grams plus of arsenic poison with my brown-flour meal. This body of mine is now old and dilapidated, so it suffered." I was appalled, more so because Pushkardas, I noticed, was still Babaji Maharaj's cook and in custody of preparing his special diet as per doctor's prescription. I cogitated over the matter, conferred with Shree Abhoynarayan and finally spoke to Babaji Maharaj one day, "Sir, this Pushkardas has poisoned you on three separate occasions, yet he continues not only to reside in the hermitage but also to cook for you. This is altogether too much to put up with he ought to be turned out." Babaji Maharaj replied, "My son, he has now realized his own mistake. He was under the impression that the thick waist band of mine was loaded inside with gold currency—a strong enough invitation for him to do away with me. Now that the band has been cut open, he is wiser. Yet if you so wish, you may show him the door at once." I was in two minds. Pushkardas was a 'holy man' and a regular resident of the ashram, while I was a householder and a mere visitor; how could I ask him to withdraw from the hermitage? Babaji Maharaj noticed my hesitation and offered to take care of the unpleasant task himself. He rose from the bed, walked over to the room to the sacred fire and said to Pushkardas, "You are a poor cook. You add excessive salt in your preparations and you have also administered me

poison. Be ashamed and away from this place directly. "Pushkardas departed silently and, as the significance of Babaji Maharaj's words sank into us, we were staggered. To use extra salt in vegetables and to serve deadly poison with food were of indetical concern to Babaji Maharaj! The two reasons he cited for the dismissal were at par! Poison and salt were equally important, or unimportant !!

After Pushkardas, Mauniji took charge of the kitchen assignment, but appetite for food still eluded Babaji Maharaj. The attending physician expressed the view that medicines were inoperative because of overmuch consumption of hemp and hashish. Babaji Maharaj promptly offered to quit smoking altogether if that was what the doctor desired. Hardly had the doctor uttered, "That would be nice" when Babaji Maharaj was out with "Okay, I give up smoking hemp and hashish as of this moment." A habit of nearly one hundred years, he renounced it altogether from that point of time. He was so heavily accustomed to those narcotic inhalers that no other sadhu, I gathered, was any match for him. I had at one time escorted Babaji Maharaj to Giriraj on the banks of the Manasi Ganga river, where hermits assemble during the festival of lights. There, with my own eyes, I witnessed Babaji Maharaj smoking incessantly one helping after another of hemp and hashish from morning till ten in the night. Astonished that his eyes registered no aberration whatever, I had asked, "Babaji Maharaj, you have been sustaining yourself exclusively and steadily on that toxic smoke throughout the day. How is it that I cannot discern any abnormality in your eyes? Other sadhus who had joined you for only a few rounds have developed bloodshot inebriant eyes, while yours are as clear now as they were in the morning—unsullied by the massive daylong indulgence. Am I to conclude that intoxicants do not affect you?" Babaji Maharaj smiled as he replied, "Those that are touched by the Lord, my son, are touched by nothing else."

In any case, he forsook a lifelong habit as effortlessly as the doctor had asked for it, he gave up even common tobacco. We were all amazed as were the natives of Vraja. "No one else can discard a long-standing habit with such ease and finality," they lauded.

Although he left off smoking, Babaji Maharaj remained by and large impervious to medication. We called in a new physician, who opined, "It was inadvisable

to terminate an ancient habit so abruptly. He would do well to inhale tobacco smoke at least once in a day. "That was how Babaji Maharaj began smoking tobacco once every afternoon, a routine that endured up to the last. Somewhat to our relief, his appetite improved within the next few days and we went back to Calcutta.

I shall at this point chronicle a different incident that occurred at Paygan during a certain circumambulation. Not long after the hermits had forgathered at Paygam and installed their seats, a sage of hoary mien made his appearance and was greeted with considerable deference by Tilakdasji and many other Mahants. They declared that he was a supremely elightened soul, without an equal in the entire territory of holy Vraja. In response to our queries, we were given to understand that no one really knew where the sage dwelt—deep inside some forest perhaps—and could be seen only when he manifested himself out of his own gracious will. Many strange and miraculous exploits of his were recalled. As he settled himself by the side of a pond in Paygan at the periphery of the throng of ascetics, Shree Abhoynarayan went over, sat near him and set about conversing with him on sundry themes. That was a year of severe drought in Vraja and the tanks were nearly dry. What little water survived at the bottom was infested with worms and unusable. As they talked on various matters, Shree Abhoynarayan pointed out, "Sir, the water in this tank is thoroughly polluted with worms and unfit for any use." The seer countered, "That is sacred Yamuna gliding by, how can it be impure?" Nonplussed, Shree Abhoynarayan could only say, "It probably is due to my own unclean vision that I still keep on seeing only unclean water, alive with crawling fauna." While the noble seer chose not to pursue the topic, Shree Abhoynarayan procured some sweetmeats and offered it to him for his light repast. The sage retained some for himself and handed the rest to Shree Abhoynarayan for the latter to consume. He took that, went and sat by the tank and—while munching his fare—glanced casually at the residual water down at its bottom. Lo and behold, the tank had performed a vanishing act and had been replaced by a sparkling Yamuna, murmuring gently by—birds of many hues dancing lazily above her waters ! He rubbed his eyes in utter disbelief, but the spectacle persisted for a considerable duration. Confounded as he was, he soon realized that this was but a token of the sage's occult power, and paid him a lofty tribute. Very early next dawn, as our deity was being ceremonially worshipped with swaying lamps, I

noticed the noble saint come and take a position near our tent. After the service was over, he circumambulated Babaji Maharaj silently afar and prostrated himself full-length on the ground, the latter raising his right palm in quiet benediction. Shree Abhoynarayan enquired of Babaji Maharaj, "Sir, this is a highly consummate yogi, would you like me to invite him to your presence?" He smiled and replied, "My son, there isn't any need to call him for my sake. Even if his Guru, Brahma,\* should turn up Himself, I shall have no reason for inviting him to my seat. But, certainly, if you have taken a liking for him, do feel free to ask him over and entertain him with tobacco, hemp or hashish of which we have plenty. I have no objection whatever." Shree Abhoynarayan fell silent and the seer, after prostration, retired to his own station.

In his code of conduct, Babaji Maharaj adhered firmly to what the scriptures ordain and, as a Mahant, he was exceedingly severe with any monk who transgressed. I will narrate one episode as a case in point. That Paygam happens to be the birth place of Nagaji Maharaj was stated earlier. During the annual circumambulation, the congregation camps there for two days. According to traditional belief, Nagaji Maharaj had manifested himself in Paygam as the four-armed Vishnu on the seventh lunar day of the Pitri-paksha\* and had distributed sanctified rice to one and all. In commemoration of that hallowed event, a gala festival is annually organized at Paygam—which houses an icon of Babaji Maharaj as well—on the seventh day of that particular waning moon. On that auspicious day, Nagaji Maharaj is worshipped with an oblation of rice preparations and that sanctified food is later partaken of by the assembled hermits and the Vraja dwellers. As in the case of rice consecrated to Lord Jagannath at Puri, rice offered in worship to Nagaji Maharaj on that special lunar day is also free of caste discrimination. On that day, the natives of Vraja scramble and engage in friendly fights over the monk's leavings of the holy food—the caste factor remains inoperative. Wrestlers from all over Vraja converge to Paygam to exhibit their skill and prowess. The milkmaids arrive in numerous groups and spend a merry day, dancing and singing hymns on Lord Krishna. Traditional thespians enact celestial lores and the day passes in divine bliss. The conclave of sadhus encamped at Paygam for another twenty-four hours, covering the eighth day of the dark lunar fortnight, and is often provided by the natives with rice and pulse instead of the usual brown coarse flour.

The few of us from Bengal, who had accompanied Babaji Maharaj and had thus become a part of congregation, used to prepare our food separately in a place ear-marked for that purpose. Food for Babaji Maharaj himself was cooked by a brahmin hermit at a secluded site after segregating it on all sides with long strips of linen. It so happened one day that, after our cooking was over, we all took our meals, cleansed the dishes and the kitchenwares and came back to our tent. The time was nearly two in the afternoon, and food for Babaji Maharaj and the holy men was yet to be ready. At that kind of a juncture, with something on my mind, I approached the cordoned-off area where their cooking was in progress. As ill-luck would have it, one of the linen curtains enclosing the plot brushed against me. Instantly, Babaji Maharaj screamed, "Look ! Look ! This fool has defiled the entire lot of foodstuff ! I shan't have any part of it, throw it all away." The hermits protested, "How's that ? Babuji is not at fault. The cloth partition is way removed from the actual cooking spot and, while the screen did graze his body, he was nowhere near the ovens." Babaji Maharaj however insisted, "No, no, I shall not touch the stuff. Cleanse that spot and prepare brown flour bread for me once again. You people are out to outrage my spirituality." The hermits conceded, and told him that his wish would be attended to.

Thoroughly distressed by the mess I had been responsible for, I moved slowly out to a distant spot, sat down and lamented silently within, "It is sin enough that we have eaten before the Guru has—a misdeed we have been indulging in regularly. On top of that, I have now gone and spoiled his food at this late afternoon hour. Everything now will need to be cleansed before flour cakes can be reprepared for him. Certainly, he cannot have his meal before nightfall." I was thus bemoaning the predicament when Babaji Maharaj appeared there—sort of casual, looking as if for a spot to evacuate bladder—and was all but tenderness as he spoke, "My son, why do you torment yourself? You are well aware that I do not consume rice because it triggers in me a body pain that is linked with my old injury—thanks to those thugs. That happens to be the real reason behind my asking for brown-flour bread, and it will be ready in no time. Do not be sad; your body and mine are but one, physical contact with you does not disturb me in any manner. Outwardly, however, I am sometimes severe only in order to ensure that the aspirants adhere strictly to the canons enshrined in the scriptures." To demonstrate to me that he did not really nurse any sense of inequality, he

called out to me later one day as he was taking his food, all by himself. He made me sit by him, touched and gave me a brown-flour country bread from his plate, and continued to eat as he said, "Check this vegetable for salt." To a third party, it would have looked as though I was summoned merely to ascertain if the measure of salt used in his food was appropriate or not.

On another occasion, a concourse of sadhus had camped at village Karela, the birthplace of milkmaid Lalita—one of the eight intimate companions of Lady Radha. As a gesture of welcome, bands of Vraja milkmaids turned up in no time and threw themselves heart and soul into devotional songs and dances. Pointing at them, Babaji Maharaj said, "Behold their ecstasy and their profound love. It looks as if they don't have a worry in the world. Yet, if you should go and enquire at their homes, you will discover that many of them don't know where their evening meals will come from. Such selfless and divine gaiety one comes across only in this holy land of Vraja." The conversation veered round to other locales, when Babaji Maharaj spoke of hallowed Puri, "There once lived in Puri a great seer and mystic by the name of Raghubardas. I was in Puri during one of the annual car festivals of Lord Jagannath. The Lord had mounted the chariot, but would not budge any, although it was being collectively pulled by a vast throng of pilgrims. The British administrator came along and had an elephant harnessed for the task, but that did not work either. As he caught sight of Raghubardasji, he was mildly derisive, 'Hello there! Why does your deity behave so? I have commissioned a mighty elephant to power his car but it is still immobile. What am I to do now?' Without a word, Raghubardasji ascended the chariot, whispered something to the Lord's ear and, sure enough, it immediately began to clatter ahead. The white man doffed his hat in deference, salaamed and said, 'Raghubardas, you are genuine, and so is your Lord. Raghubardas was such a supremely evolved soul that he used to deposit all the sanctified food in his ashram in a large lidless earthen vat out under the open sky and partake of it himself as did the dogs and the birds and other stray animals.' Shree Abhoynarayan enquired, 'Babaji Maharaj, you are supremely illumined yourself. How is it then that you observe such an austere regimen in regard to what you eat?' Also present during that discussion was a prominent seer by the name of Madhavdas. Being an adherent of Paramahansavritti, he was quite uninhibited in his eating habits. Tickled therefore by Shree Abhoynarayan's query, he remarked, 'A fine issue to make! Here is a veritable Arjuna!' Babaji Maharaj

explained, "I pursued my path and the Lord has accepted me. Otherwise, I would have converted to his. His way in one, mine is another."

Circumambulation is an annual mission of collective pilgrimage when the hermits call on and proffer profound homage to the spots hallowed eons ago by the heavenly exploits of Lord Krishna and His milkmaids. Piripukur in Varsana is one such locale where the congregation lingers for three days. It arrives there on the eleventh lunar day, witnesses the 'boat' festival on the twelfth at a tank known as Prem Sarovar, follows it up on the morrow with the 'curd-looting' spectacle at Gahabharvan and then, on the fourteenth moves out of Piripukur on way of Nagaji's Kadam Khandi. The road of Kadam Khandi, at its Varsana end, skirts a prominent hill that is graced at its summit by a temple dedicated to Priyaji (Lady Radha). Being unable during one such stopover at Piripukur to visit the temple, I decided that—on the next day as everyone would take off for Kadam Khandi—I would snatch a few minutes, hasten up the hill, get a holy glimpse of and prostrate to Priyaji, and then try and catch up with the congregation. But that was not to be. As I loaded the bullock-cart next morning and was about to set out, I noticed that Babaji Maharaj's heifer Ganga, was left where she had been—apparently forgotten by everyone including her care-taker sadhu. I therefore took her along with me. As I reached the base of Priyaji's hill, I longed passionately to climb up and be in Her presence, but refrained from doing so lest the cow, left alone, should wander away and lose herself. I weighed the pros and cons of the issue and concluded that, since the cow ought not be left unguarded, I had to deny myself the pleasure of having a sacred vision of Priyaji at that juncture. I said to myself, "Priyaji's majesty derives from Her merger with the Cosmic Lord. Since my own Guru has attained the same crowning status himself, a vision of Babaji Maharaj stands at par with that of Priyaji. I shall therefore hasten along with my bovine companion and capture an eyeful of Babaji Maharaj himself." Hardly had I taken that clear decision and moved but a short distance when the other sadhus showed up and took custody of the cow, leaving me walking by myself. Before I had proceeded very far, I noticed Babaji Maharaj ahead of me, waiting on the road. Very happy to see me, he hailed cheerfully, "Come along, my son," as I closed the gap, prostrated and began walking in concert with him. His very first utterance directly after my prostration was, "A holy sight of Priyaji and one of a true saint are verily at par, there is no disparity whatever between

the two." That declaration by Babaji Maharaj unequivocally confirmed what I had concluded myself a short while earlier. As we walked together, I glowed in the warmth of his affection and he pampered me with various anecdotes and sage advice. For instance, he spoke at some length on how his own Guru used to behave towards himself and how he himself, in his turn, had treated Garibdasji. He piled accolades on Garibdasji, recalled many an incident typifying the latter's dedication to his Guru and finally said, "Son, Garibdas had matured into a saint par excellence. In order to test his mastery over temper and vanity, I used to accuse him frequently of various imaginary lapses and persecute him mercilessly. While he looked after me with total devotion and care, I would sneak into the kitchen, upset all his cooking arrangements and play havoc with sundry stores. And then, on his return, I would denounce him brutally in presence of everyone for all the disorder. Garibdas, however, never lost patience nor talked back, but would simply put everything back in order without a fuss. Wishing to subject him to one ultimate test, I waited for an appropriate opening. It came about during the next circumambulation. In order to shift camp from Nandagram to Kamoi—a distance of 16 kilometers—one has to face the sun and travel east along a route that is often muddy and water-logged. Garibdas's assignment on such occasions was to carry my gear on his shoulders to the forward camp, cook and feed 40 to 50 hermits, and then take time off to have his own meal. By the time we made it to Kamoi that year, it was nearly midday. Promptly Garibdas erected my umbrella, laid my prayer mat and organised the baggage. Later on, as the locals turned up with the raw material for our food, he bathed and embarked upon the rather colossal task of preparing the food—thick brown-flour breads for the monks in general and special thin ones separately for myself. With so many heads to take care of, it was quite late before he was done. Eventually ready by early evening, he offered the food as usual in worship to the deity and then invited me to partake of the holy meal. That was the right moment, I reckoned, to probe into the limits of his equanimity! He had been hauling massive loads for days on end from one circumambulation point to the next, and then devoting long and late hours near a kitchen fire in preparing food for a host of people. That must have, I calculated, severely provoked his body system and thrown it completely out of gear. Today was specially onerous because he had to endure the scorching autumn sun directly on his face, negotiate impassable stretches of road and then engage—with an empty stomach—in a prolonged and torrid spell with



a cooking oven. Garibdas would now be all set to blow up. That was an excellent blend of circumstances, I figured, to take a measure of his self-control, and went ahead for the holy food in response to his call. I sat down, palpated the brown-flour breads, declared them as undercooked and feigned acute displeasure. Screaming invectives at Garibdas, I flung them away and struck him on the crown with a stick. Garibdas collapsed to the ground, his head bleeding. Next moment, however, he rose, joined his palms, fell at my feet and begged, 'Babaji Maharaj, I am certainly at fault, please do grant me your pardon.' To be sure, the brown-flour cakes had been prepared with perfection and love, and I was being wilfully dishonest in impeaching him. Yet, Garibdas was all but humility; I was profoundly touched—and profoundly miserable as I recalled the pain I had inflicted on him. So much so that I could not swallow a morsel of food for several subsequent days. I was thoroughly pleased that Garibdas had come out with flying colours in the ultimate test and felt that he had qualified for a boon from his Guru. I toyed with the idea of offering him one but desisted because of an afterthought. Misery in one form or another is an essential component of life in this mortal world. Since he is so securely entrenched in divine bliss, Garibdas deserves to be despatched without delay to the Supreme Abode of Lord Vishnu—no less. This being so, I refrained from awarding him any other benefaction."

Babaji Maharaj recited assorted episodes illustrating his relationship with his Guru and the latter's abundant love for the disciple. So deep-seated was this love that the Guru never lost a chance to propel the pupil along the right path to everlasting beatitude—liberally hurling such snubs as 'scavenger' and 'cobbler' and 'fake stomach-oriented sadhu'. Confused by his utterances, I asked, "Babaji Maharaj, he was so abusive and yet you speak of his love!" He explained, "That, to be sure, is the hall-mark of pure altruistic love. The ever-benign Guru took on himself the sin of using an acerbic tongue solely for my benefit and my benefit alone—so that I cease to be provoked by insults and indignities, I triumph over anger and conceit and my heart is shorn of all impurities. Son, his was no physical infatuation, it was immaculate and unselfish love. The two are not equivalent."

## *Chapter Seven*

### **TEACHINGS AND DEMISE**

Occasionally, Babaji Maharaj used to recite the following verse in Hindi :

*Yearn for a Sadguru,  
To reveal Himself and dispel  
All darkness of nescience.*

Hearing him propound that view, I asked, "Babaji Maharaj, is it not possible for an individual to attain liberation except through the grace of Sadguru? There are those who delve into holy texts and apply themselves diligently to the manifold austerities prescribed in them. Isn't that worth anything?" Babaji Maharaj clarified thus, "My child, prayers can be quite effective in some ways and, pursued with devotion, can even lead to diverse occult powers—but not to salvation. That can be realized only as a benediction from a Sadguru, not otherwise."

Indeed, I can vouch from my own experiments in life that, even to develop a basic theistic outlook, one needs to lean upon the charity of a Sadguru. I have tested it time and again that, even if a mere boy should be around, I cannot indulge in any misdeed, or an indecent thought for that matter. In my own privacy, however, I have committed a variety of improprieties, reassured by a notion that no one would know. I have often allowed my mind to ride merrily along currents of immoral musings on the premise that nobody could possibly be aware. But, then, whenever I happened to be in the company of noble clairvoyant souls, I was ever apprehensive and took utmost care to keep wicked thoughts at bay. Alarmed at saints being able to read our hidden thoughts, I was ultra vigilant in their presence, whilst at other times I was much less concerned about my inner profligacy. Does that signify in me an authentic belief in God's existence? Professing by word of mouth to be a theist myself, I may insinuate another person of being an atheist and may even go to the extent of censuring him for his lack of belief. But am I really

one? Do I have a firm faith in His existence even as I keep on declaring so? If real faith does indeed prevail, how can I transgress and not repent? All-knowing and immanent, He is the Beholder of all thoughts and actions—such are verily the distinctive attributes of God. Should I have bonafide credence in such a God, how can I possibly violate any moral code in presence of God Himself—an infraction that I dare not commit in front of a five-year old or a mind-reading saint? By sheer definition, God is present simultaneously everywhere at all times and has total awareness of—indeed. He is a witness to—whatever we think and do. Ever in proximity, He watches over all my physical and mental processes. If this happens to be what I truly believe, how can I possibly commit an evil act or entertain an unholy idea? The fact however is that I am unable to desist from sinful thoughts and actions, and the obvious inference therefore is that, loud theistic proclamation notwithstanding, a real belief in divine existence eludes me still.

Let me report here some incidents from the lives of my wife and myself that demonstrate how a compassionate Guru implants this theistic belief bit by bit into the hearts of his ardent disciples. I reckon that my inherent atheism is rather stubborn and that is why the benign Guru has from time to time revealed to me his clairvoyance and supremacy. Otherwise, for a dry polemic individual like myself, it would have been a formidable problem to imbibe even the slightest bit of true theism. The only reason why I recount these events is that they would testify to Babaji Maharaj's unlimited compassion.

I was down with high fever in Calcutta and, as I suffered, an idea took shape. Since Babaji Maharaj smokes a lot of hemp, I decided to acquire some of that stuff, prepare a careful measure with my own two hands and offer that in worship to him. If I smoke the holy left-over, I told myself, I shall be cured of the fever and the bodyache. With this plan in mind, I had some hemp and one traditional earthen funnel fetched from the market, fashioned one regular dose of the narcotic and invoked Babaji Maharaj to accept the humble oblation. The hemp primed itself and continued to burn on its own, belching small whiffs of smoke. After some time when it occurred to me that Babaji Maharaj was perhaps done, I took the funnel and smoked the sanctified remainder. I had never treated myself to hemp earlier, but I sensed no intoxication although the dosage was rather liberal. On the

contrary, my body temperature came down to normal in a short while and I was back to natural health. On a later occasion too when I was afflicted with fever, I fell back on the same prescription and was granted a prompt relief.

Several months rolled by before I made the next trip to Babaji Maharaj in Vrindavan. After I had soaked myself for a few days in his exalted company, I was preparing to leave the hermitage on my way back to Calcutta one day when he had me summoned from my room to his presence. He was at that time smoking hemp along with some local citizens, held out to me the funnel he himself was using and said, "Here, take a few puff of this sanctified hemp." One of the natives asked, "Does Babuji smoke hemp?" Babaji Maharaj smiled and replied, "Not usually, no. But, sometimes when he is down with fever, he does think of his Guruji and make an oblation of hemp, and then smokes the sacred left-over." I was thrilled by his words because they confirmed that he had indeed accepted the offering of hemp I had made at Calcutta and that I was secure under his protective gaze in spite of the enormous physical separation.

I happen to be an advocate and once I had to leave Calcutta for a mofussil town on a professional mission. During my absence, there was a sudden upsurge in nocturnal stealing in Calcutta. Thieves would climb up to the upper floor, break into rooms through some window and pilfer commodities. The only two members at that time on the first floor of my residence—namely, my wife and her youngest brother, a minor—were frightened by the reports they heard of such nightly incursions. Accustomed normally to sleep at nights with all doors and windows open, she now took to bolting all of them—her panic accentuated by my absence. She was so very scared of thieves that, after nightfall, she would hesitate even to go downstairs by herself. One of those nights, it so happened, was so oppressively warm that she reluctantly decided to open one window temporarily. But, open as she did rather nervously, she caught instant sight of Babaji Maharaj standing directly outside, who smiled as he uttered, "Daughter of mine, why do you fear? Know that I am ever by your side." He faded promptly away, but only after thoroughly dispelling her fear and replacing it with abundant courage. She threw all the doors and the windows wide open, as was her wont, and went peacefully to sleep. Later, after my return, she recounted the event to me in minute detail.

Another experience relates to the occasion when my wife—the lone female member in the house at that time—was laid up with fever. My own bedroom was situated west of hers, with a small chamber in between. The interconnecting doors used to be left open in order to facilitate mutual communication as and when necessary. One midnight, her temperature rose sharply, causing an acute burning sensation all over her body. Although in deep distress, she bore it silently and would not even groan lest it interfered with my slumber. The malaise worsening inexorably, she was in profound agony and had reached the limits of her endurance when, all of a sudden, Babaji Maharaj materialised himself, lifted her on to his lap and began to caress her head. All her ordeal melted promptly away and she relaxed blissfully. As she felt better and was preparing to prostrate herself before Babaji Maharaj, he vanished in thin air as if on cue—leaving her frustrated.

On yet another occasion, I was riding an elephant, travelling from our country house to my in-laws' place. There were only two of us—the mahout squatting on the neck of the pachyderm and myself perched on its back. As the animal lumbered heavily along a trail, quite close to my in-laws' house, I happened to be absent-minded—not watching ahead. All of a sudden, I was jerked out of my reverie to discover—within inches of my face—the stout branch of roadside tree, half-way between the mahout and myself. The mahout had lowered his head and body—draping himself in the process over the beast's head and allowing the bough to overpass him. Minor offshoots from the main branch were already brushing my face and, with the elephant moving rather fast, there wasn't time enough for me to follow the mahout's example. Thrown wholly out of my wits, I closed my eyes with a sinking feeling that there was no way to save myself. Struck by that limb—I visualized—I would now crash to the ground, face and body lacerated by its rod-like protuberances. Eye-lids tightly sealed, I waited breathlessly for the inevitable to happen the very next moment. Incredible as it is, nothing at all happened—neither the big branch nor any of its minor appendages even so much as touched my body. By the time I reopened my eyes a split-second later, the branch was already behind me—the elephant having passed it by. I searched in vain for an explanation of this strange phenomenon. It was verily impossible to bypass the branch without colliding, yet I had done exactly that, as if it were empty space. There was no logical

answer. I decided to observe silence about the matter, because any discussion would have been futile. A few days subsequently, I was in Vrindavan with Babaji Maharaj when, without my asking, he said, "My son, how can a branch of some tree possibly hurt you? God keeps your company as your shadow does and saves you from harm." The words had the answer my mind was groping for. I was supremely grateful to be under the protection of a Sadguru whose compassion and power knew no bounds.

My post-initiation life is dotted quite generously with similar events involving Gurujii; further recitals seem unnecessary. Let me however borrow some from the experience of my elder codisciple, Shree Abhoynarayan.

At one time, Shree Abhoynarayan lived in northwestern India with a railway employee. The latter was quartered at a very secluded location—surrounded by a profusion of hills and woodlands, bereft of any human settlement within several kilometers. One day the employee left his lodge on a supervisory assignment—that being the nature of his duty—and so did his servant later in the afternoon on the plea of having to visit his native place. That being severe summer time, sleeping inside the room was out of question and Shree Abhoynarayan therefore took a cot out under a tree in front of the house and lay down to rest for the night. However, all alone in a pitch-dark night in an unfamiliar and unpopulated jungle territory, he grew a bit panicky—apart from being uncomfortable owing to the oppressive heat. Suddenly at that moment, he became aware of someone sitting by his head and fanning him with a palm-leaf hand-fan. Turning his head, he discovered that it was none other than Babaji Maharaj who was waving the fan. Non-plussed, he was on the point of getting up, when Babaji Maharaj dissolved from sight. The sequence repeated three times during that same night—which persuaded Shree Abhoynarayan that he was being watched over by Babaji Maharaj himself. Reassured by the turn of events and shorn of fear, he slipped into undisturbed slumber.

Dealing with promissory notes in Calcutta at one time, matters did not work out as expected by Shree Abhoynarayan, with the consequence that he piled up heavy losses and a massive debt. Fearing that the creditors would have him taken into custody, he fled from Calcutta and took to moving from one pilgrim center to another every few days. When this was the picture and he was temporarily lodged at Vrindavan, he received initiation from Babaji

Maharaj without asking for it. Sometime later, while spending a few days at Ayodhya, he slid into a mood of deep depression and mused, "How long can I hold out in this manner? I have been praying abundantly to God, if He really did exist, I would certainly have had a vision of Him by now and He would have relieved me of my miseries. I am now willing to believe that all our premises on God, religion and right living are but wishful postulates. Life seems altogether gloomy and not worth clinging to any longer. Tomorrow, therefore, I will walk up the bridge over the Saraju river, jump into the water and drown myself. That will certainly draw a curtain across my sufferances."

Having thus made up his mind, he stretched out on his cot. No sooner had he done so than Babaji Maharaj manifested himself in the room and chided him with these words, "You while away good time lying on your bed and then demand that God reveal Himself to you!! I prescribed a specific mantra for you at the time of initiation, why don't you recite that? Who ever told you that God is easy to attain?" Admonition over, Babaji Maharaj disappeared from view, and a frightened Abhoynarayan promptly sat up and set about repeating his Guru-given mantra. Shortly thereafter, he perceived himself engulfed in a blaze of divine radiance—profoundly serene and prevailing the cosmos—and went into deep beatific ecstasy. This supernormal condition persisted for some days and then dissipated one day on its own—restoring his normalcy. Several days later, as he travelled to Vrindavan and met Babaji Maharaj, the latter had this to say, "How is it now? Are you satisfied that God does exist? You need not worry any longer; whether you stay at home or elsewhere, no one will harass you for your debts. You can return home without a care." Shree Abhoynarayan went back to Calcutta and found that, true to Babaji Maharaj's prophecy, the creditors were all rather cordial.

Shree Abhoynarayan had been residing at holy Gaya at one time when Babaji Maharaj appeared in his dream, along with another holy figure, and said, "Here is a truly enlightened soul; it will be beneficial to you to keep his company." It turned out that he soon journeyed to Vrindavan and, by a chance combination of circumstances, met Reverend Vijoykrishna Goswami at the latter's abode and—immediately recognizing Goswamiji as the sage he had dreamt at Gaya—took up residence there itself. Some few days later, while roaming on the shores of Yamuna, he ran into Babaji Maharaj and said, "Sir, it was my good fortune to have your vision in a dream at Gaya." Babaji Maharaj was quick to reply, "Yes, I did come to you in a dream. You are now

convinced of its veracity because you have actually discovered the saint in question. He is a bonafide saint, as saints should really be. His influence will be propitious for you. Come, let me accompany you for a vision of his." So saying, he went and presented himself to Goswamiji along with Shree Abhoynarayan. As Goswamiji welcomed him with customary grace and offered him a seat, Babaji Maharaj opened a dialogue that would have been typical between two persons entirely unknown to each other. He enquired where Goswamiji hailed from, how long it was that he had been staying there, what he did for a living and so on. Shree Abhoynarayan was intrigued by Babaji Maharaj's visible conduct at that time, and was later told by Goswamiji that he belonged to the same calibre of super-saints as the hallowed Garga\* and Narada\*. There are other similar instances when Babaji Maharaj manifested himself before some of his disciples in order to stimulate their spiritual consciousness.

What is more, even after shedding his mortal body, he continues to grant us similar visions by way of reassuring us and keeping his memory alive.

Further recital of such anecdotes will only make the book unnecessary bulky. It suffices to add that Babaji Maharaj did not restrict his ethereal visions solely to his disciples. I narrate below one out of several instances in which some of our friends too had similar visual experiences.

Because of a common interest in matters of religion, I had developed friendship with a gentleman of name Shree Biharilal Chattopadhyaya, a God fearing individual, steadfast in devotion and noble in nature. Needing a change to a salubrious climate in order to arrest a severely deteriorating health condition, he once retired to a hamlet in the Santal Parganas and resided there for some time. After the sojourn, he returned to Calcutta, came to my Kambalitola residence and met me at the parlour. Hung from a hook on the wall above my usual seat was a portrait of Babaji Maharaj. Even as he entered the chamber, the photograph caught his attention and, visibly surprised, Shree Biharilal asked, "How strange ! Where was it that you came in contact with this noble saint?" " That happens to be a picture of my Sadguru," I replied. He went on to explain, "I was privileged to meet this personage at the village in the Santal Parganas where I stayed and have just returned from. He had installed himself for three days under a peepul tree near the dwelling I had lodged in. I used to spend some time with him everyday and bask in his love and affection." Actually, however, Babaji



Maharaj was at that time residing at Vrindavan; so I demurred, "Guruji happens to be currently at Vrindavan, there is hardly any likelihood of his having travelled to the Santal Parganas at this time. I am at a loss trying to figure out how you could have encountered him there." "I assure you solemnly," he insisted, "that I did have the extraordinary fortune of associating with this very saint for three consecutive days at the Santal Parganas in the most recent past. There is no scope of any doubt in this matter, none whatever." I was astounded by his assertion. Later on, when I was in Vrindavan and queried Babaji Maharaj about this mystery, he smiled and spoke thus, "Son, it does happen at times that some individuals, who are not my disciples, do indeed get to see me at locations where I am not physically present. You are not in a position yet to see through this enigma, but you shall be, in due course."

Subsequent to my own initiation, by and by, many from Bengal have sought and gained refuge in Babaji Maharaj. Most of them hail from rural sectors and are usually uneducated. Their habits and customs—indeed, the habits and customs of Bengalees in general—are many instances contrary to what the scriptures and the holy men lay down. Because they are piscivorous, Bengalees are looked down upon rather strongly in many districts of northwestern India. Babaji Maharaj was of course well aware of these unclean habits and yet admitted, out of compassion, many impoverished and helpless Bengalees as disciples. The following account throws light upon Babaji Maharaj's views on the practice of fish-consumption in Bengal.

One evening at the Vrindavan hermitage, I was present when Babaji Maharaj and some local inhabitants were discussing various issues. A topic that surfaced was the traditions of Bengal, and one of the participating citizens expressed the opinion that, quite apart from other matters, it was thoroughly reprehensible that even the Brahmins of Bengal dine on fish. I took exception, "You find it repugnant because it is foreign to your culture. I can similarly list several local customs that the Bengalees consider loathsome, in their turn. You drink water that is carried in leather containers; a Bengalee will be nauseated by the idea. Local Brahmins do not use water after urination; they defecate by the roadside and do not clean themselves with water until they reach a far away village. Women do not wash their clothes for many days and continue to use the same garments until they stink. Bengalees abhor such practice. Indeed, every region has its own

idiosyncrasies that are disapproved by people elsewhere." In reply, the Vraja-dweller said, "Even if we should concede that these practices are indeed objectionable, they do not violate life. Fish-eating, on the other hand, necessitates animal slaughter and is therefore terribly sinful." I rejoined, "It is God's own dispensation that animals generally have to live on animals. According to Hindu scriptures, plant life is also 'life'. A bit of an honest scrutiny bears out that, in common with all other creatures, plants are also characterized by a need for nourishment, respiration and sleep. Seeds are nothing but life in dormant animation. Grains of wheat, on which you live, represent life because, if sowed in proper soil, they sprout into plants. Water abounds in tiny animals, so does air. Because they are not visible to the naked eye, it does not follow that air and water are free of living creatures; they can be clearly seen with the help of a microscope. The very process of breathing air or drinking water, therefore, destroys myriads of these miniscule organisms. Verily, it is beyond human beings to eschew violence to life altogether. Nevertheless, slaughter is certainly sinful where it goes against scriptural mandate. Consumption of fish is not entirely forbidden by scriptures. On the contrary, some of them—Manu samhita\*, for instance—do recommend some varieties of fish as edible. Does it become of you then that you should castigate Bengal so extravagantly simply because her people are accustomed to fish-eating?" The Vraja-dweller tried a few more half-hearted arguments and finally gave up. At this juncture, Babaji Maharaj, who had so far been quietly listening to our dialogue, spoke. "Listen and I shall recount to you an anecdote that links neatly with the topic of your conversation. Here, in northwestern India, there once lived a devout brahmin of great erudition who was a mystic and an adept in sun-worship. Many were the students, including a young brahmin from Bengal, who studied Hindu philosophy and the Vedas under his expert guidance. The Bengali youngster happened to be by far the most brilliant, excelled in his ministrations to the Guru and was consequently the apple to Guru's eye. In course of time, he became an authority himself in all the scriptures and, like his Guru, an adept in invoking the Sun God. Probation completed, he bade farewell to his holy preceptor, returned to his native place, took a wife and became a householder. Being extraordinarily fond of this disciple and longing to see him in his new incarnation, the Guru soon undertook a journey all the way to Bengal. However, as he turned up at the disciple's dwelling and discovered that fish was there a regular item of cuisine, the Guru was thoroughly outraged. A

severe tongue-lashing later, he rounded off by saying, 'Had I foreseen that you would pander to such appalling habits, I would have never taken you in as a learner.' The disciple submitted in all humility, 'Guruji, I have not wilfully violated any moral code. Pray, do not be cross with me.' 'You consume even fish, what can possibly be worse?' charged the Guru. The disciple replied, 'Reverend Sir, why do you hold fish-eating to be an unholy custom? By your grace only, Sir, the sun God is merciful to me. It pleases Him to appear in this house everyday and partake of the fish preparation that I offer in worship. Would He be doing so if fish were forbidden as human food?' Unimpressed by those words, the Guru threw a challenge, 'That is preposterous. Very well, if you are able in my presence to invoke the Sun God and show me that He does indeed accept your offering of fish, then I will convert to the local custom and begin to eat fish myself.' Much delighted by his Guru's proposition, the disciple procured the best varieties of fish, had them prepared into a number of delectable dishes, invited the Guru and articulated the invocatory mantras calling upon the Sun God to appear. As the latter manifested Himself in front of the disciple and his preceptor, the young brahmin dedicated the edibles to the deity incarnate. The Guru was speechless with wonder as the Divinity indicated His acquiescence in all the food offerings and, repentant at having chided the disciple for no reason, spoke these words, 'My son, I realize now that I was labouring under a wrong conviction. People where I come from fiercely despise fish-eating and I was automatically conditioned to label this practice of yours as wholly disgraceful. Now that I have personally witnessed the Sun God accept such an offering. I stand corrected and will myself partake of that sanctified food.' From that day, the Guru also took to eating fish and was soon persuaded it is indeed gastronomically delicious too. Presently he took leave of his disciple to return to his native land and, having decided that he would introduce the practice of fish-eating in his homeland, he organised a meeting of the local social leaders at his own abode. There he proposed, 'It is not fair that you hate Bengalees because they are piscivorous. There is nothing really immoral in this custom.' The response was sharp and unanimous, 'Eminent scholar as you are, your wisdom has been negated by your excessive fondness for the Bangalee disciple. Otherwise, how can you possibly approve of this most horrible food item?' Guruji tried to explain, 'You have developed such a mind set simply because fish does not happen to be in vogue in this land of ours. In fact, I have observed with my own eyes that the

Sun God—whom you worship through the Gayatri liturgy—does accept fish offerings Himself. He would have never done that if fish were unholy.' The brahim stalwarts countered, 'Okay, if you are able to demonstrate to us directly that the Sun God does in fact acknowledge fish offerings, we will concede the veracity of what you say. Otherwise, we cannot endorse an ugly tradition, such as it is, based solely on your recommendation.' Guruji agreed forthwith. 'Tomorrow itself, here in presence of you all, I will invoke the Sun God with fish offerings and you will behold for yourselves how He reveals Himself and partakes of that oblation.' Next day, he had several fish recipes prepared, invited the villagers and, in front of them all, recited the holy mantras calling upon the Sun God to appear and to accept the offerings. But the Sun God did not oblige this time. Feeling befooled, the community leaders made no secret of their annoyance and returned to their own dwellings. Much embarrassed, Guruji went on fast and plunged into deep meditation on the Sun God. On the third day when the Sun God relented and made Himself visible to Guruji, the latter made his obeisance and complained, 'My Lord, I have worshipped you with an offering of holy food, but your non-appearance and non-acceptance have caused me much agony and discomfiture. The social leaders have rebuked and boycotted me.' To which the response of the celestial being was, 'Your oblation was out and out sacrilegious; how could I have partaken of that?' Guruji pointed out, 'I was a witness in Bengal to your acceptance of the fish offering. Why do you then condemn it now?' The Sun God declared, 'Fish-eating has prevailed in Bengal from time immemorial because it is not unholy there, the habit is harmless in that environment. Under the natural conditions of this region, however, use of fish as an item of food happens to be pernicious and has therefore been prohibited since time began. Know it for certain that consumption of fish is a severe transgression here in this country. That was why I did not acknowledge your fish offering.' Listening to that interpretation, Guruji was relieved of his nagging doubts and, by the mercy of the Sun God, was welcomed back into the folds of the society—his popularity none the worse for the interlude."

The narrative having come to a conclusion, Babaji Maharaj added, "The ancient traditions in matters of food in different parts of India evolved in harmony with local conditions. No harm therefore accrues from pursuing the time-honoured traits in regional food habits, nor should they invite contempt."

A Bengalee disciple had once asked Babaji Maharaj in my presence if it was all right for him to continue to eat fish and meat. Babaji Maharaj's answer was, "It is desireable to steer clear of animal flesh altogether. I do not explicitly forbid fish in Bengal, however, because its use in that province is widespread and traditional. Nevertheless, a Vaishnav should try and give that up as well. In any case, regardless of what you may do in Bengal, it is improper to consume fish in places of pilgrimage.

On some occasions, Babaji Maharaj's behaviour, with outsiders struck us initially as being rather on the severe side. It took us some time to gradually appreciate that being at once a Mahanta and a Preceptor, he was within his rights and competence to test—and to pull up where necessary—other aspirants in their spiritual pursuits. His manners were thus designed at times to conceal his own true nature, while, at other times, he would assess, and chastise if found wanting. And yet, his external rigour was often no more than a mere camouflage for inner compassion. To those who were spiritually quite advanced and yet short of the final goal, he was usually extra stern—only in order to ascertain if they had mastered their ego. Some illustrations follow.

An eminent sadhu had hardly entered the ashram one day when Babaji Maharaj thundered, "Why have you come? There is no room for you here." Well-known though he was, the hermit was meek as he replied with folded hands, "Reverend Sir, I am not looking for a place to stay. I have with me some hemp leaves that I want to crush in your grinder." Babaji Maharaj was not impressed, "Try some other place; you are not welcome here. You can leave right away," he ordered curtly and, turning to Shree Abhoynarayan, instructed him to shut the ashram door after the monk. Mildly unhappy and resentful, Shree Abhoynarayan who thought highly of the sadhu—bolted the door with some reluctance, merely as an act of external obedience. Thrown out of the ashram, the sadhu took his seat outside the closed door and set about reciting the Gita. Shree Abhoynarayan of course was unaware of this unexpected development and therefore took it for granted that the sadhu had moved away. In the meantime, Babaji Maharaj—who had gone for toilet—returned to his room, occupied his seat and engaged in some miscellaneous dialogue with Shree Abhoynarayan. Presently, however, he smiled and said, "My dear Abhoynarayan, that elderly hermit whom I had

expelled has not gone away, but is marking time outside the door. Go, let him in and bring him here." Shree Abhoynarayan went out to the ashram door, unlatched it and discovered to his surprise that the sadhu had indeed been waiting out there, studying the Gita. On being told that Babaji Maharaj wanted him inside, the aged monk came in, prostrated himself before Babaji Maharaj, processed the hemp leaves, partook in sundry conversation and eventually departed.

At another time, a renowned ascetic came to the ashram with this proposal to Babaji Maharaj, "Sir, I know of a splendid boy who deserves to be your disciple. I have pledged to show him a sage who happens to be four centuries old. If you should kindly permit, I would like to bring the boy here so he can behold you for himself." Instantly incensed, Babaji Maharaj shouted, "If you must fabricate in order to attract charity, do so with yourself, by all means. Why do you involve me in your lies? Who has confided to you that I have lived for 400 years? Why do you rope me in?" He was so very emphatic that the sadhu did not risk a reply, retreated slowly and sadly from the room and remarked to us, "There are saints and saints, I was only trying to pay him a tribute, but it misfired badly. Instead of being pleased, he blew up," So saying, he left.

We had the good fortune at one time to have Babaji Maharaj staying in our house at Calcutta. It came about that celebrated Bholagiri Maharaj also was abiding in Calcutta during that period. One evening, as we were seated near Babaji Maharaj discussing assorted themes, two gentlemen walked in and advised us that Reverend Bholagiri Maharaj was outside, waiting to see Babaji Maharaj. We surmised that both of them were disciples of Bholagiri Maharaj, and some of us went forward eagerly to bid him welcome. Babaji Maharaj however simply said, "Oh, well," abandoned the sitting posture and stretched himself on the bed, turning over on his side to face the wall directly opposite the entrance door. Reverend Bholagiri Maharaj came in, took in the scene of Babaji Maharaj lying with his back to the doorway and promptly began reciting hymns even as he stood there, palms joined together. We were also on our feet, rendered speechless by the singular turn of events. After a couple of minutes of that unique spectacle, Babaji Maharaj rose to a sitting position and affectionately prevailed upon Giri Maharaj to be seated next to himself. A large number of ladies had then assembled in our house and, as many of them evinced a desire to touch his feet in reverence, Giri

Maharaj came a few steps forward in order to let them do so. A sister-in-law of mine was one of them—the recipient of a few words of counsel from Reverend Bholagiri Maharaj, such as, "Do not get into an altercation with anyone." Babaji Maharaj noticed this and remarked, "What purpose does it serve, such advice? Will it be efficacious at this time?" At the conclusion of his communion with the ladies, Reverend Bholagiri Maharaj came and reoccupied his earlier seat and, after conversing with us for a while, left for his own abode. At the time of his departure, Babaji Maharaj laid his hands on the shoulders of Giri Maharaj in a gesture of friendship and equality. One day, later on, I asked Babaji Maharaj, "Reverend Bholagiri Maharaj came here calling on you. Aren't you going to pay a return visit?" The reply was, "Even though he is a devotee of Lord Shiva, he did not stand on prestige but took the initiative in coming to see me, a follower of Lord Vishnu. I ought to reciprocate."

During one of the Kumbh Melas in Vrindavan, an agent of some wealthy individual delivered a large number of invitation cards (tickets) to Babaji Maharaj. In order to partake of the invitation, many sadhus approached him, one after another, asking for and receiving a ticket each. However, in a short while, as a saint came by and requested one for himself, Babaji Maharaj shot out angrily, "Am I here for selling tickets? Do get lost, you won't be given any; I have none left. You are ever on the lookout for some lucre." The sage listened silently to the outburst and sat down, waiting. After a while, Babaji Maharaj, looking pleased, handed over one invitation card to him. As the saint took leave, Shree Abhoyanarayan and myself—who were there all along, witnessing the incident—asked Babaji Maharaj, "Sir, you had a large number of those tickets and had doled out one to everyone that asked for it. Why then did you decide to treat the saint in this manner?" Babaji Maharaj smiled as he explained, "Son, this saint is well advanced spiritually. I was rude with him in order to assess if, and how far, he can preserve his equanimity in the face of acute humiliation and tongue-lashing. You are too young yet to see through this."

A multitude of invited and uninvited guests had partaken of the holy food during the installation ceremony of Lord Krishna's idol at Babaji Maharaj's retreat. Lavish as the reception was, a huge quantity of the consecrated foodstuff turned out to be in excess, and this was taken up for free

distribution over the next two or three days. One of those days saw Babaji Maharaj grow livid with anger and drive away, one by one, many of the sadhus that streamed in looking for food. Observing Babaji Maharaj chase the hermits away despite having a generous stock of sweets, fried stuff and other edibles, Shree Abhoynarayan was mildly annoyed, but gave it no outward expression. Later on, as both of us sat near him in the room of the sacred fire while he smoked his hookah, Babaji Maharaj suddenly came out with, "My dear Abhoynarayan, you have been questioning why I have expelled all those sadhus rather than feeding them. Son, you are young and yet to learn. None of them was a true sadhu nor was anyone hungry. All of them had their meals at home and were simply masquerading—going around begging merely out of greed, in order to hoard the stuff. I did not spurn anyone who was really in need of food. A really starving hermit, you will see soon enough, is on his way here—go ahead and feed him well." Within the next few minutes, a sadhu of our ashram came up to inform Babaji Maharaj that a monk had arrived just then and was asking for something to eat—should he be entertained? Babaji Maharaj addressed Shree Abhoynarayan, "Here is a genuine ascetic for you. Call him and ask for his identity—you will realize immediately." By that time, the monk came forward on his own and prostrated himself before Babaji Maharaj, who enquired, "Which hermitage do you hail from?" "Dakorji," replied the sadhu. Content with the answer, Babaji Maharaj said, "See that, Abhoynarayan? That is a celebrated spiritual center. If you wish to probe further on his bonafides, go ahead and cross-examine him. You will be convinced that this individual is not a phoney but does justice to his holy attire. Take him along and let him dine well."

During one of the circumambulations of the Vraja territory, one impoverished and destitute brahmin of Giriraj had accompanied Babaji Maharaj, serving him with exceptional diligence and devotion. Afflicted with asthma though he was, he excelled all others in physical labour. Even before the circumambulation—which takes about 45 days—this brahmin had lived in the ashram for some time and zealously attended to its daily tasks. After the circumambulation too, he came back to and continued to stay in the ashram, but—because of a rapidly deteriorating asthmatic condition—he soon found himself wholly unable to take part in any of the ashram's workaday routine. While he was seated one day by the sacred fire, Babaji Maharaj appeared before him and took him severely to task, "Why do you hang around this



place? There is nothing you ever do, except lazing and collecting an unfair share out of the provisions meant for holy men. I say, you leave the hermitage—right away." And so on. Having no other alternative, that is what the brahmin did. Shree Abhoynarayan, who along with myself was present there at that moment, was thoroughly upset by the incident. "The brahmin had ministered to Babaji Maharaj conscientiously for as long as he could," he mused, "but is now totally incapacitated by asthma. To turn this penniless person out of the ashram in this condition is terribly cruel of Babaji Maharaj." Tormented within, he walked out of the chamber of holy fire and moved away elsewhere. He was lost in thought when Babaji Maharaj suddenly showed up in front of him and spoke these words, "My dear Abhoynarayan, like a child you cannot see beneath the surface. This brahmin from Giriraj happens to be a promising aspirant. Although in deep distress and nearly starving, he was never lax in his prayers. After I provided him with a shelter in the ashram and he had plenty to feed on, he has let the Lord slip out of his memory altogether. It will not be easy to reawaken his will to pray if he continues to live within the relative comforts of the hermitage. On the other hand, thrown out of security of this shelter, he will feel vulnerable and turn once again to God. He will not have to go without food, by the Grace of God. Nevertheless, perceiving himself unprotected, he will cling back to prayers for all he is worth. And this is exactly why I sent him away. You have no comprehension of what is genuinely beneficial." Shree Abhoynarayan's mental reservations and displeasure melted away.

Another day, in the course of a conversation, Babaji Maharaj remarked, "Those noble souls that have won ultimate liberation but still dwell in a human frame do so exclusively for the benefits of the others." Reminded of Kalyandasji—the ancient Mohant of an ashram at Davanal Kund in Kemarvan, who provided regular hospitality to many wandering mendicants—one of us opined, "Kalyandasji is a hermit of surpassing benevolence. Numerous are the monks who come to visit Vrindavan and find shelter in his retreat." Babaji Maharaj seemed unimpressed and had this to say, "I was not referring to this type of generosity; this has very limited value for either side. The donee is perhaps relieved of a minor, inconsequential hardship, while what the donor earns is a rebirth. It may be that the latter reincarnates as a king, escorted wherever he goes by a retinue of soldiers and attendants, and owning chariots and elephants and horses and a vast fortune. This is not the way of Enlightened Souls; they would never engage

in activities that lead to bondage and rebirth. Their idea of service or doing a good turn is to destroy the very roots of people's sufferings. Consequently, their modus operandi transcends the comprehension of common men."

Let me also narrate at this point an incident that illustrates how Babaji Maharaj used to hide himself behind a misleading exterior. Once, when I was myself sojourning at Vrindavan, a muktear (lawyer's agent) from Karimganj (Sylhet district) came to the ashram in order to have a direct vision of Babaji Maharaj. On arrival, the gentleman found me seated outside the room and touched my feet. Almost immediately Babaji Maharaj came out of the room, elaborately groaning and whimpering, as if he was under some acute physical distress. Indeed, so disquieting was the scenario that the gentleman forgot even to make an obiesance to Babaji Maharaj, spoke of a remedy or two as palliatives and was gone—barely a few minutes after arrival. Hardly had the gentlemen departed when Babaji Maharaj was back to his normal form—jovial and communicative—with no evidence that we could discern of any discomfort. I puzzled over the rare misfortune of the man who was denied even the basic privilege of touching, and collecting the holy dust of Babaji Maharaj's feet. Such drama, it can be stated without exaggeration, was indeed a matter of daily occurrence. Many of the other holy aspirants, I have observed, feign an artificial solemnity when visitors are around. Babaji Maharaj was typically the opposite. To disciples and non-disciples alike, he used to wholly conceal his true nature and always act as the part of a spiritually ignorant individual absorbed in work a day routine; this was his second nature as it were. His disciples and admirers presented him with a variety of clothes and garments from time to time which he would simply tie up into bundles and preserve—almost never gifting any to the monks in the hermitage even if they needed one badly enough. He would rather distribute an occasional piece or two of superior linen to some of his house holder disciples, but almost never to the sadhus in the hermitage, although, locked up in the cabinet, the textile material would often spoil. I was unable initially to divine Babaji Maharaj's purpose behind such an attitude on this issue. Later on, with passage of time, I began to gradually comprehend its inner significance. Generally speaking, I refrained from asking Babaji Maharaj explicit questions on any subject, because he had let it be know directly after my initiation that he would guide me by inspirations from within rather than oral instructions. This esoteric counselling, was what eventually gave me the answer. His unspoken aim was to ensure that the spiritual aspirants dwelling

in the ashram under his care do not develop any temptation for the alluring gifts received by him, nor become lax thereby in their religious pursuits like common extroverts, nor convert the hermitage into a camouflaged sanctuary for luxury and mundane delights. Indeed, in many instances these days, shrines and monasteries have degenerated into centers of opulence and pleasure in a way that surpasses materialistic households, barring only a few that still have a focus on asceticism and devotional activities. A small number, it is true, do maintain a regular study of the scriptures, but inner purity and an unwavering faith in or love for God are hard to come by. Quite a few in these misguided centers not only indulge in sumptuous living, but also consider the householders to be morally bound to provide the wherewithals—in terms of money and material—needed to sustain this extravagant life style. Babaji Maharaj was naturally keen that his own cloister does not degrade to the same fate, and his behaviour towards the monks was governed wholly by this one consideration. This was how it appeared to me. He used to often eat during the dark hours of early dawn, claiming that he felt hungry only at that hour. This was a trick he employed effectively to awaken everybody around the middle of the night and compel them to leave the comfort of their beds, finish bathing and get moving with their assigned duties at the kitchen or the temple or elsewhere as the case might be. At other times, he would feign worry about the likelihood of burglars paying a night-time visit, and achieve the same result. For serious seekers of God, Babaji Maharaj counselled two to three hours of sleep and only one decent meal in 24 hours as more than adequate. He was of the opinion that adherence to these restrictions on food and sleep gradually makes the body light, free of sloth and fine-tuned for ascetic pursuits. On the other hand, he was not in favour of torturing the flesh in the quest for the divine. He had told me specifically in connection with a certain incident that religious practices that encourage excessive discomfort to the body are based on ignorance; they do not please God. The incident is recounted below.

During a circumambulation, we had one morning walked about 16 kilometers to encamp at midday at a locality of name Koshi. In the afternoon, some of the sadhus offered to take me to a place called Shesa-Shayi—some seven kilometers from Koshi—to let me have a holy view of Lord Shesa-Shayi, installed there. Persuaded by the idea, I readied myself for the trip, but Babaji Maharaj restrained me, "It is enough that you are partaking of this

circumambulation. Your body will be overstrained if you should now undertake this to and fro trek another 14 kilometers or so. That will be the path of nescience—not favoured by God." Because of his objection, we dropped the proposal.

Long association with Babaji Maharaj convinced me by and by that he was a living embodiment of the Gita, which proclaims :

*Those who surrender to Brahman\*all selfish  
attachment are like the leaf of a lotus.  
floating clean and dry in water. Sin cannot  
touch them. (5/10)*

*The wise have equal regard for all.  
They perceive the same Self in a  
scholarly brahmin, an outcaste, an  
elephant, a cow or a dog. (5/18)*

*Such people have mastered life. With  
even mind, they rest in Brahman who  
is perfect and the same everywhere. (5/19)*

(Adapted from E. Easwaran, The Bhagavad Gita,  
Nilgiri Press, 1987, 240 pages : Blue Mountain Center of Meditation : Box  
477, Petaluma, California 94953, U.S.A.)

His activities persuaded me that he was verily the incarnation of the lofty conceptions portrayed in the Gita.

A sage or a swindler, a prince or a pauper—everyone he treated as an equal. Let me elucidate through a couple of examples.

A king, visiting holy Vrindavan, had lodged for a few days in a house not far from the shrine of Lord Gopinath. When, out of a special reverence for Babaji Maharaj, the king solicited an interview with him, the latter turned up himself at the royal residence. He was given a red-carpet welcome and an exalted

seat of honour, while the king himself settled directly on the floor and ministered to Babaji Maharaj with abundant awe and adoration. On his way out by the ground floor, after bidding farewell to the king, Babaji Maharaj caught sight of the security guard seated by the entrance. As the watchman prostrated, Babaji Maharaj smiled and perched on the ground next to the guard, took out some hemp from his satchel and prepared a measure. They smoked and conversed as equals for some time, before Babaji Maharaj decided to get back to the hermitage. The king alone knew what he thought of such camaraderie in his own palace with his own gate-keeper on the backdrop of his own high-power felicitations of a moment earlier. Be that as it may, it is usually beyond ordinary mortals to treat honour at par with dishonour as in this case.

A teenage neophyte from the hermitage on the Davanal Kund at Kermarvan wanted at one time to pluck, for medicinal use, some leaves off a pomegranate plant at Babaji Maharaj's ashram. The latter objected, saying, "My plant is too small yet; I can't let you gather its leaves. Try elsewhere", He began behaving with the boy as his equal, as if transformed into one himself. The young sadhu also lost sight of Babaji Maharaj's seniority, engaged in back and forth altercations—as he would have done with another boy of his own age—and eventually turned abusive. Babaji Maharaj responded exactly on the same wavelength—returning the tirade with superior vigour and obscene epithets. This drama went on for some time, ultimately the boy threw in the towel and left. It was with some effort that I could keep a blank enough face. Babaji Maharaj was thrilled by the verbal encounter and, like a youngster, preened, "So! He wanted to pick leaves from my tree! I have given him his due deserts! How did you like that?"

Myself and some two or three of his other disciples were at one time journeying by train along with Babaji Maharaj. We occupied a compartment immediately adjacent to that of Babaji Maharaj, with only an iron railing in between. It so happened that, before we boarded the train, Babaji Maharaj's bogie had two Mohammedan passengers who has alighted temporally and gone somewhere. Finding it vacant and unaware of the two Moslem travellers, we had deposited Babaji Maharaj in there and climbed on to the next carriage ourselves. In a short while, however, the two followers of Islam reappeared and, as soon as they ascended the coach, the train began to move. Hailing from Agra, powerfully built and middle-aged, the pair

promptly set about needling Babaji Maharaj. The latter descended instantaneously to their level and—on their own terms—counter-attacked them with equal vehemence. Mutual acrimony, often embellished with vulgar invectives, stretched out over a period of time until it dawned on the duo that they could not win that way. Altering course, they took out some cooked beef from a bundle—expecting that it would leave their adversary without a riposte and compel him to move to another coach. They were sadly disappointed, however, as Babaji Maharaj charged, "Your food is fit only for savages. You go ahead and devour that, how am I concerned? I will take my own prescribed diet." Before the two Moslems came in, we had given him some guavas for nourishment during the train journey. He now took them out, sliced them one by one with a knife and, as he chewed some pieces himself, he also reached out to us in the adjoining carriage and passed some on, as holy remains. He had told me at one time that, during long railway journeys, emergency measures in regard to food are permissible for health reasons, and, whenever such a need arose, he did partake of fruits and roots along with us in trains. Having failed in bullying Babaji Maharaj into submission, the two practitioners of Islam fell silent, and detrained soon afterward. Pleased like a school-boy, Babaji Maharaj was all smiles, "Those two had fancied that they could scare me into vacating my seat. Why should I be afraid of them? I could have mauled them single-handed. Am I a weakling that I should be daunted by them?" Observing Babaji Maharaj at that time, we were hard put to withhold laughter.

Revelations of such childlike simplicity were by no means rare. One morning, after Babaji Maharaj bathed, applied gopichandan as prescribed and then clothed himself with a length of quite ordinary linen, Shree Abhoyanarayan spontaneously paid a compliment, "Babaji Maharaj, you do look so very handsome in this dress." Instantly tickled, Babaji Maharaj confided, "Yes? But you have yet no idea of how attractive I look when I wear my special robe, sewn out of a superior fabric. I will show you one of these days and you will then realise how fabulous I can look." We were all amused by the naive response.

On another occasion, one of Babaji Maharaj's disciples—who happened to be a near relation of the Sovereign of Tripura—presented him with a length of choice handloom material from Manipur and appealed, "Babaji Maharaj, this piece was knitted specially for you by the ladies of our household. It will

give us enormous pleasure if you should use it yourself." Immediately, he picked up the article, wrapped it around his torso and said, "Of course, I will certainly use this exquisite creation, and even go out to let others have a look." So saying, he strode off to the Loi Market—a kilometer and a half away—and invited anyone and everyone to come and inspect his wrapper, "See here? What excellent texture!—The good ladies of the royal household at Tripura wove this for me themselves." His disarming simplicity and winsome words charmed everyone; they spoke in one voice, tenderly as if to a child, "Yes, Babaji Maharaj! That is a lovely shawl you have on!"

When in company of materialistic individuals, he would converse with them exactly as one of their own. Even with thieves and lechers—if they came and frankly confided their owes—he did not shy away from discussing with them, without rancour or reservation, their special problems precisely as though he was one of them himself. An excessively amorous woman from Bengal called on Babaji Maharaj at one time and engaged in suggestive tete-a-tete over several successive days. Finally, Babaji Maharaj was one day so outrageously lascivious in his talks with her that the worthy female blushed furiously and left, never daring to reappear.

He was equally at home with, and untouched by, the veritable sinners of the amoral world as well as the illumined seers of the supreme spiritual realm. I never found him to be wary of, or making any preparations for, the visit of even the most renowned of sages. He was as easy and natural with them as he was with common folk. An example follows.

There resided in holy Vrindavan a relatively diminutive sadhu who used to call on Babaji Maharaj from time to time. I had the good fortune of beholding him many a time; he was nick-named 'Kalpanti' as, according to a conviction prevalent among the monks, he was one kalpa\* old. Even with him, Babaji Maharaj was wholly free and informal—no different in any way from what he was with rural callers. I could never detect that he made a distinction.

During his first sojourn at Vrindavan, Reverend Vijaykrishna Goswami used to come and visit Babaji Maharaj from time to time. Every so often, he would come and prostrate himself, take a seat along with others, stay put for a long while without articulating a single word, reprostrate and then leave. To an external observer, there would be little communication during that interval

between Goswamiji and Babaji Maharaj, although the latter would be seen conversing with the rest of the gathering. Shree Abhoynarayan was curious and enquired of Goswamiji one day, "When you are with Babaji Maharaj, I notice that all you do is sit in engrossed silence, never raising or discussing an issue. Why?" Goswamiji had this to say, "But I do. I do raise issues and he provides me with the answers through inner prompting." "What do you mean, inner prompting?" Shree Abhoynarayan wanted to know. "He speaks to me in my heart, just as you do with your lips. And I can hear that, just as I can hear you speak," offered Goswamiji in explanation.

Countless sages of legendary fame had assembled for the Kumbh Mela festival at Prayag during the Bengali year 1300. Some of them, anxious to have a holy view of Babaji Maharaj, would appear before him, prostrate themselves from some little distance and withdraw. Relaxed as usual, Babaji Maharaj would calmly raise his palm in benediction, just as he would in case of everybody else. No difference was ever discernible in his manners.

During the installation ceremony of the divine idols at the Vrindavan hermitage, a procession was taken out one day with Lord Krishna and his consort, adorable Radhikaji. As Babaji Maharaj and many of us peregrinated along with the procession and reached a locality in Vrindavan known as Goutampara, hordes of local cowherdesses descended upon us for a holy vision and surrounded the idols, singing and dancing in joyous abandon. When this was the scenario, I suddenly became aware that Babaji Maharaj was perspiring all over, profusely and incessantly—sweat streaming down like monsoon rain from every pore of his skin. Never before had I witnessed anything even remotely similar to such torrential perspiration. As I ran to wave a palm-leaf hand-fan, Babaji Maharaj smiled, "Son, this will not do. This perspiration is not because of summer heat; fanning will not help. It happens to be a fever induced by the ecstasy of divine love. This heavenly spectacle of the frolicsome milkmaids promenading around shining Radhikaji has set me afire, releasing the floodgates of sweat. I have experienced such attacks earlier as well. Once it persisted ceaselessly for one full month, but produced no sweat. Instead, the body temperature shot up to a flash-point and the hair on my head and body stood on end like barbs all through. The palm-leaf fan of yours cannot prevent this sweating." He spoke those words with total detachment, as if discussing someone else. I had already known of his month-long fever of love and its manifestations from my eldest codisciple,



Garibdasji. Babaji Maharaj's visible behaviour was always in one-to-one harmony with the nature of his external contact of the moment; internally, however, he dwelt permanently in a childlike state of indifference and non-desire. Conversing on this topic, he had once told me, "Son, elephants have two sets of teeth—one for exterior display and the other—which is inside and which no body can see—for masticating his rations. Likewise, saints also have two faces: one for external consumption and the other for internal inquiry. The latter remains hidden from common view."

Two years subsequent to my initiation, a new shrine was constructed at the hermitage and an idol of Lord Krishna was installed. A day or two later, myself, my wife and Shree Abhoynarayan sat conversing inside a room at the ashram, when Babaji Maharaj—who had till then been seated in the chamber of the sacred fire—turned up unexpectedly and stood at our door. As we scrambled up to our feet, he targetted me and spoke, "Good man, know it for certain that this idol of Lord Krishna is all-powerful. Go now and ask from Him whatever your heart longs for. Do not hesitate, tell Him freely of your desires." Palms folded, I said, "Babji Maharaj, I yearn solely for your pleasure, that is all. What can I possibly want if I have your blessings? What extra boon shall I petition for?" "You speak truly," said Babaji Maharaj, "all your longings can indeed be fulfilled by my grace, and that's how it is going to surely turn out. Nevertheless, it also helps to verify occasionally. Listen to me: go and sue Him for whatever you long for." Without further ado, I departed for the temple and prayed silently to the deity for the consummations of my spiritual aspirations. As I concluded, Shree Abhoynarayan also came along and prostrated before the Lord, having been directed by Babaji Maharaj to do as I had just done. I had of course no idea of what specific boon they had pleaded for. Babaji Maharaj had returned to the cabin housing the holy flames. But, hardly had I gone back and taken a seat in my old room when Babaji Maharaj reappeared at the door, enumerated one by one all the boons I had implored the Lord for and guaranteed their realization. He blessed me with some additional boons and finally declared, "Should any of these fail to materialise, this sainthood of mine is then not genuine." Shree Abhoynarayan and my wife also were blessed by him in much the same manner, although I fail to recall today what they exactly were. I had never questioned them on what specifically they had sought for from the Supreme Lord nor did we ever engage in any discussion on this theme. I recollect only

one of the boons that Babaji Maharaj had bestowed on Shree Abhoynarayan, "You shall win true passion for God."

During casual conversation one day, Shree Abhoynarayan posed the following question to Babaji Maharaj, "You camouflage yourself and hide your real identity so perfectly that common people, lacking in spiritual wisdom, remain entirely unaware of your occult power and supremacy. Even we are fooled at times and begin to doubt you. Why must you do that?" Somewhat saddened as it were, Babaji Maharaj replied, "You too, Abhoynarayan, speak this way! Very well, you name the miracle and I shall have it happen. \*\*\*But then, you will not have me around after that. I will dissolve out of sight." Non-plussed, Shree Abhoynarayan enquired, "Why do you speak so? Why should we have to lose you?" Babaji Maharaj elaborated, "If I should exhibit even a fraction of my supernatural mastery, myriads of men and women will close in on me from all sides, like insects rushing to a flame. They will tear me to pieces and make it impossible for me to stay put at this or any other place. That will be my fate wherever I might choose to be." Comprehension dawned upon Shree Abhoynarayan and he spoke no more.

That it was beyond average mortals to gauge Babaji Maharaj's inner nature from his visible conduct becomes amply clear from his own utterance of the preceding paragraph. It is therefore quite unnecessary to fatten this volume with additional material on his outward appearance. Verily, some of his acts were so far removed from the limits of common comprehension that nobody who had not himself witnessed them could possibly accept them as authentic. I am therefore not inclined to include in this book any specimen of that variety. Frankly, I doubt that everyone who goes through this publication will be able to reconcile himself or herself even to the tales narrated herein, relatively less baffling though they are. Accordingly, for the benefit of spiritual aspirants, I shall record some of Babaji Maharaj's teachings, before terminating this section.

Sincere, diligent and steadfast ministration to saints and idols of God were advocated by Babaji Maharaj as the best course for the common cadre of spiritual seekers. Two hours during predawn darkness and two hours at dusk of silent and focussed repetition of the Sadguru-given mantra are more than adequate, he maintained. Strictly speaking, the right for genuine prayer comes only after the mind has been stilled through enduring and selfless

service. Altruistic service promotes purity of heart, discourages sloth and stimulates mental concentration as commitment builds up concurrently. Babaji Maharaj expressed clear displeasure at one time when he caught me dilly-dallying on a marketing assignment on the plea that I happened to be in prayers at that moment. On another day, Babaji Maharaj spotted a local servant of the hermitage standing on one leg and reciting some mantras. Wishing to allocate some useful task to him, he asked, "What is it that you are busy doing?" "I am engaged in prayers, Sir," came the reply. Babaji Maharaj smiled, "Prayer is yet a far cry for you, you are not ready for it. I say, you just take care of the duties allotted to you."

Very humbly one day, I appealed to Babaji Maharaj, "Sir, I am hardly ever able to delve deep into meditation, nor am I in a position to devote long hours in reciting the holy name. And the mind keeps wandering." "Yes, I am aware of that," he replied, "You should not really expect at this stage to enter a state of profound contemplation. Your ability is yet limited. I do it for you by proxy." Finding that the 'serpant power' within my body, while ascending from the base of the spine, was being obstructed at the heart, I drew Babaji Maharaj's attention one day, "Sir, the upward flow of my spiritual energy is being thwarted at the chest level." Babaji Maharaj said in explanation, "Yes, there is a lotus in that centre of consciousness, refusing passage." Somewhat impatiently perhaps, I suggested, "Please, Sir, won't you very kindly help me and remove that barrier?" Sharply he reacted, rebuked me fiercely, and said, "No, I certainly won't." Unable to fathom the cause of his ire, I fell silent. A little while later, however, he volunteered the explanation, "If I should right away undo this knot in your heart, you will no longer be in a condition to accomplish the many tasks that lie ahead of you. I shall take care of it at the right time."

In the matter of God-realization, he opined, the end-results do not differ for a householder and a hermit who renounces the world. A hermit who practises the prescribed austerities develops sundry miraculous powers to serve people with; the householder usually does not. That happens to be the only difference. In either case, ultimate liberation from bondage or unification with the Lord can be gained solely through the grace of a Sadguru—the two systems are identical in this regard. Performance of domestic duties as stipulated in the scriptures, braced by an abiding fear of God in the heart, is

what he commended for the householder. Repeatedly did he enjoin that the easy way for an individual to win spiritual well-being is to make himself aware that God is ever with him, watching.

As this mind and heart gain purity, the aspirant ascends seven spiritual stages, from one to the next. Babaji Maharaj was wary of talking about these divine stages, only once it was that I had the good fortune of listening to him expound on them. Out of the seven, only the first five are discussed in holy books, it being exceedingly rare in all ages that one rises beyond the fifth. I shall therefore restrict myself to a brief outline of only these five. A bit of contemplation on these stage may help common aspirants contain the conceit over their own achievements. On the other hand, the lofty ideals may even stimulate greater care and dedication in Godward pursuits.

- First Stage** : The seeker who resides in the first stage shuns like poison all attachment to worldly loss or gain, surrenders heart and soul to a Sadguru and yearns to visit holy places. These conditions must be natural and permanent, not subject to ephemeral fluctuations.
- Second Stage** : "Who am I? Who is the cosmic Prime Mover?" Contemplates the aspirant that is lodged in the second stage. Spontaneously and impelled by his very nature, he wonders about and meditates incessantly upon the Creator and Controller of the infinite variety of cosmic phenomena, animate as well as inanimate. Here again, as in every stage, these cogitations must be effortless and unwavering—not given to sliding back. Like a thirsty individual who looks frantically for water everywhere and cannot rest until he has swallowed some, the person occupying stage two cannot relax until he has known himself and the Supreme Lord of the universe.

- Third Stage** : The faithful devotee who ascends to this stage has perfect and unflinching comprehension of the essential nature of God's omnipresence and omnipotence. He learns once and for all that God, as the original and only Cause and Source, pervades and empowers the entire panorama of the living and the nonliving throughout the far corners of the universe, inclusive of the seeker himself. Logical analyses also may beget the same conclusions, but that is short-lived intellectual exercise—a very far cry from the abiding inner enlightenment that characterizes Stage Three. He transcends all worldly limitations and gains mastery over the supernatural.
- Fourth Stage** : Equal vision and uninterrupted beatitude imply Stage Four. The holy inquirer who inhabits this level perceives everything as the manifestation of God Almighty, and his sense of distinction between one entity and another therefore dissolves altogether. He sees One in many and many in One. Such individuals are extremely rare. Pleasure or pain, loss or gain—nothing can dislodge him from an everlasting state of celestial bliss.
- Fifth Stage** : Transcendental love for God, as epitomized by Sage Narada, is its beacon. The aspirant who levitates to this level shines with spontaneous selfless (causeless) love or devotion for the Lord and His creation. In Sanskrit, this is known as Parabhakti' or 'Naradiya Bhakti' after Sage Narada who attained this stage by virtue of a boon directly from God. In this stage, the seeker achieves perfect purity of mind and heart, and is no longer liable to slip downward to lesser levels.

The next two higher stages, sixth and seventh, unfold automatically with time. Recalling Babaji Maharaj's reluctance in this matter, I refrain from describing the attributes characterizing these two top levels. In this connection, Babaji Maharaj had also revealed the stages ascended to by the

more prominent of the seers of ancient times as well as by some of the modern day nobles like Guru Nanak, Tulsidas, Sridhar and others. It will be indiscreet to publicize those facts. In truth, no amount of scholarly scrutiny can uncover the essential nature of these illumined souls. Only those that have earned mystic vision can really judge these transcendental parameters by virtue of their own inner evolution and experience. I conclude this section by reiterating Babaji Maharaj's view that the activities of such exalted souls as dwell in stage seven surpass the limits of common human intelligence. Their deeds are bound to frustrate all attempts at rational analyses. They are adored and worshipped by all and sundry.

### SHEDDING THE MORTAL FRAME

His earth-bound mission finally fulfilled, Babaji Maharaj discarded his age-worn body at first light on Magh 8 of the Bengali year 1316 (1909 A.D., Christian era). Less than three months previously, as I had approached him in Vrindavan to tender farewell on the eve of my returning to Calcutta towards the end of the month of Kartik, he had these words to say to me, "My son, lend me your ears. This body of mine is no longer in good shape; it is rather unstable. If and when you receive a telegram, leave for Vrindavan without delay," Saddened, I reminded him, "But, Babaji Maharaj, you had promised me at one time that you would yourself shift to the new temple that is now under construction and then get me to leave my profession to be here by your side. Completion of the structure will however take a lot more time yet, and your assurance can be fulfilled only thereafter. How can you possibly forsake your body at this juncture and let your words founder?" "Don't you worry," replied Babaji Maharaj, "My words can never fail to fructify. But then, don't you forget either what I have just told you." After a few more words, I set out for the railway station on the way to Calcutta. Healthwise Babaji Maharaj had looked normal enough at that time—I could not discern no reason for suspecting otherwise. Nevertheless, barely two months after my return to Calcutta, I received a write on Magh 9 conveying the message that Babaji Maharaj had breathed his last. That very evening, I boarded a mail train at Howrah and reached the Vrindavan hermitage on the morning of Magh 11. I noticed tears streaming down from the eyes of the ashram livestock, which—I was told—had been going on ceaselessly since Babaji Maharaj's demise. A tear-like fluid, I also observed, was oozing out of

the lotus eyes of the ashram idol of Goddess Radhika, Both the images had donned a pallid and dismal appearance and the hermitage as a whole had been shorn of its serene ambience. I gathered that, throughout the day on Magh 8, Babaji Maharaj had no complaints, except that he had not evacuated himself during the late afternoon hours as was his wont. After midnight, he had risen himself, roused his devout attendant Ramphal to ask for and swallow some water, and spoke his last words, "There you are, my dear Ramphal, I have now taken a drink from your hands—that is taken care of. You can now go back to sleep. It is also time for me to go." Unable at that time to grasp the significance of those words, Ramphal dropped off to sleep again. Soon thereafter, a local brahmin chef (Kashiram) and a monk (Kashidas) woke up with a start and discovered that the entire hermitage lay suffused with a brilliant radiance. Startled, they made their way into Babaji Maharaj's chamber and found him seated upright on his bed, motionless and without respiration. His body was ice-cold to the touch, except only at the sagittal suture (crown of head) which was warm. Some were of the opinion that Babaji Maharaj was in deep trance (samadhi) while others felt that he was in the process of casting aside the physical body of flesh and blood. However, by the approach of dawn, the residual warmth at the crest of the cranium had also dissipated. Finally, on the morning of Magh 9, the holy men and the dwellers of sacred Vraja gathered together, transported his mortal remains in a grand procession to the shores of the Yamuna and consigned it to flames.

After familiarising myself with all that happened, I made a trip to the Yamuna who, I noticed, had enlarged herself to claim Babaji Maharaj's cremation site as her own. I fished out some of his residual bones from beneath the water cover, installed them in our hermitage and, later on, relocated the lot to the new temple during its inauguration.

In pursuance of local tradition, a holy feast in memory of Babaji Maharaj was organized at the monastery on the thirteenth day following his demise. Goddess Radhika's ocular discharge ceased as of that day, the persistent melancholy of the Lord and His Consort dissolved and their benign glow returned to normal. Lady Radha's eyes needed to be substituted by a new pair because, due to continuous secretion over a number of days, the originals had suffered a slight disfigurement.

Indeed, Babaji Maharaj's divine exploits during his lifetime are as illusive of human intellect as those associated with his demise. I had failed to grasp the significance of his last words—as recorded earlier—spoken to me on the eve of my last goodbye to him, and had even entertained second thoughts after his disappearance about his utterances coming alive. But now, years later, after I have been retired, brought out to Vrindavan and transplanted at the new hermitage, it dawns on me that his words cannot but bear fruit. It would in fact be no exaggeration to brand even the act of his shedding the physical form as but a scene from an overall celestial drama. Even today, from time to time, he manifests himself to some of his disciples and converses with them as naturally as he used to when he was physically alive. The revealed Vedas repeatedly affirm that God-united Souls do not suffer physical deaths but attain immortality. Can there be any doubt that Babaji Maharaj too did not undergo an ordinary 'death', but was granted the everlasting life promised by the Vedas? Besides, when he was still in the land of the mundane, saddled with a human anatomy, he used to materialize himself concurrently at various places performing various functions, exactly as demanded by the individual situations. Which of those diverse bodies, we may very well ask, underwent the dying process?

The land of ours, Bharat, is trully blessed, for it is being continuously sanctified by the advent and divine activities of such self-realized Souls as Babaji Maharaj.

***Om, Thou art that***



## GLOSSARY

- Anatadev** : Another name for Lord Vishnu.
- Astanga Yoga** : The eight-fold path of training one's body and mind—for spiritual liberation described in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.
- Bala Gopal** : Lord Krishna in His infancy.
- Bengali Year** : Vaishakh, Jyaishta, Ashad, Shravan, Bhadra, Ashwin, Kartik, Agrahayan, Paush, Magh, Falgun, Chaitra.
- Bhutsvar Mahadev** : Another name for Lord Shiva—Lord of the spirits.
- Brahma** : One of the Hindu Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara (Shiva)—responsible respectively for creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe. The Trinity forms the second line of celestial hierarchy.
- Brahman** : Total Godhead, the Divine Ground of existence, the impersonal Supreme Reality. Compare with Brahma.
- Garga** : An ancient sage of great fame. Preceptor of the Yadavas, Lord Krishna's dynasty. Chief Astronomer in King Prithu's court.
- Ghat** : Man-made stairs leading to the water in a tank, lake or river—for washing and bathing.
- Ghee** : Melted, clarified or fried butter.
- Gita** : See Shreemad Bhagavadgita.
- Gokarna Mahadev** : Still another name for Lord Shiva.

- Gopichandan** : Pale Yellow ground material or soil from Gopitalao (Lake of the milkmaids) at Dwarka. Used by Vaishnavites to draw or paint sectarian marks (tilak) on the forehead and 12 other locations on the body. A darker, inferior, variety of Gopichandan comes from Shyam Kund of Vrindavan.
- Guru** : Spiritual preceptor or master. Sometimes also termed as Sadguru in order to underline the genuineness of his or her supreme spiritual status. 'Guru Maharaj' and 'Babaji Maharaj' are highly reverential ways of addressing or referring to one's Guru. 'Baba' means father.
- Guruji Maharaj** : See Guru.
- Hanumanji** : Chief of the monkey tribe that helped Lord Rama recover His wife, Seeta abducted to Lanka by its demon-king, Ravana. A devotee par excellence of Lord Rama and a symbol of superlative power. Hanumanji enjoys the status of a demi God.
- Hatha Yoga** : A system of physical and breathing exercises, founded by Gorakhnath, for developing a perfect body for further spiritual progress through Kundalini Yoga.
- Janmastami** : Birthday of Lord Krishna—eighth Lunar day of the dark fortnight in the Bengali month of Bhadra.
- ji** : An honorific suffix to the name, for the elderly and the superior, equivalent to the prefix 'Mr' of western parlance.
- Kalpa** : According to Hindu cosmogony, creation and dissolution of the universe alternate endlessly with a periodicity of 8640,000,000 years. One Kalpa = duration of one creation = duration of one dissolution = 4320,000,000 solar year = one day or one night of Brahma.

- Kshatriya** : Warrior class, administrators and rulers. Second in hierarchy among the four traditional Hindu castes—brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya and sudra.
- Kumbh Mela** : Literally 'festival of the pitcher'. A religious gathering of Hindu renunciates of all traditions, held in twelve-year cycles—that is, every three years in rotation at Prayag, Hardwar, Nasik and Ujjain.
- Mahanta** : Abbot, monk-in-charge of an ashram.
- Mantra** : A compact Sanskrit invocation to the Supreme Reality or any of the lesser Gods and Goddesses; a mystic/spiritual formula for communicating with or praying to the Transcendent.
- Manu Samhita** : A treatise on the Hindu code of customs and laws based on the Vedic tradition. Composed by Manu, the patriarch of mankind. Six hundred B.C. to 300 A.D. according to western scholars, much earlier by Hindu belief.
- Naga sadhu** : A sadhu belonging to the Nagaji Maharaja denomination.
- Narada** : The most popular of Puranic (ancient) sages, who figures in numerous mythological tales of various ages. Son of Brahma born and reborn in many incarnations, inner member of the celestial circuit, Sage Narada was the Guru of Sage Nimbarka. Author of some musical works and inventor of the Veena (lute). Writer of

Naradiya Dharmashastra—Narad's Book on Religious Law.

**Nimbarka** : Vaishnavism has four traditional sects or branches—Nimbarka, Shree, Vishnuswamy and Maddhwi—based on subtle differences in basic philosophies and spiritual practices. More than 5000 years ago, Sage Nimbarka founded the Vaishnav sect that bears his name.

**Paramahansavritti**: A severe variation of ascetism wherein the seeker employs no effort whatever to secure any of his material needs. For instance, he or she would not ask or beg for even his or her food but accept only what comes forth spontaneously. Also known as Ajagarvritti, because an ajagar (python) never pursues its prey.

**Pice** : Old pice, equivalent to one-sixty fourth of an Indian Rupee.

**Pitri-paksha** : The dark autumn fortnight preceding the Durga Puja festival, celebrated during the sixth (Ashwin) or seventh (Kartik) lunar month of Bengali year. Sacramental offering of drinking water is made during this fortnight to the deceased ancestors.

**Ramanandi** : Belonging to Ramanand or Shree sect. See Nimbarka.

**Sadguru** : See Guru

**Samadhi** : Union with the Lord, Self-Realization. Deep concentration or trance in which the mind becomes still and is transcended. Duality of subject and object disappears. There are grades of samadhi—'Jad-

samadhi' is of lower grade, 'Nirvikalpa' samadhi is the highest possible. Samadhi can also mean a grave or tomb.

- Saraswat** : One of the several versions of Sanskrit grammar.
- Seed-mantra** : A sacred sanskrit letter that acts like a seed. Planted in suitable soil (a human individual), it gradually unfolds into a spiritual tree.
- Shaivite** : Followers or devotees of Lord Shiva.
- Shree** : Formal or reverential prefix to a name, like 'Mr' in western English-speaking culture. Literally, the word means prosperity, beauty or loveliness. 'Shree 108' signify 'Shree' repeated 108 times and is reserved for spiritual giants.
- Shreeji** : Shree Radha, Lord Krishna's consort in charge of the principal Nimbarka chapter.
- Shreemad Bhagavat** : Lifestory and teachings of Lord Krishna, the most important of Vaishnav scriptures.
- Shreemad Bhagavadgita** : Song of the Lord. A conversation in the epic, Mahabharata, between Arjuna and Lord Krishna, that took place at the battle-field of Kurushetra just before the start of the great war. Contains the essence of Hindu religious thoughts. 'Gita', in short.
- Smriti** : That which is remembered. A summary designation of non-revealed scriptures of great religious authority, such as, Vedangas, Smarta sutras, Puranas, Nitishastras, the epics, etc.

- Surasagar** : A Hindi book of devotional songs/verses composed by the blind 15th century saint-poet Surdas (a contemporary of Emperor Akbar).
- Tulsi** : A variety of basil—an aromatic herb—considered sacred and medicinal.
- Vaishnavite** : Followers or devotees of Lord Vishnu or Lord Krishna.
- Vishnu Shharsanama** : Thousand names of Lord Vishnu, a hymn.
- Vishram Ghat** : A famous bathing place (stairs) on the Yamuna at Mathura, 'Vishram' means 'rest'. Legend has it that Lord Krishna rested here for a while after slaying Kamsa, the demon king of Mathura.
- Yogiraj** : A king among yogis, a great saint.