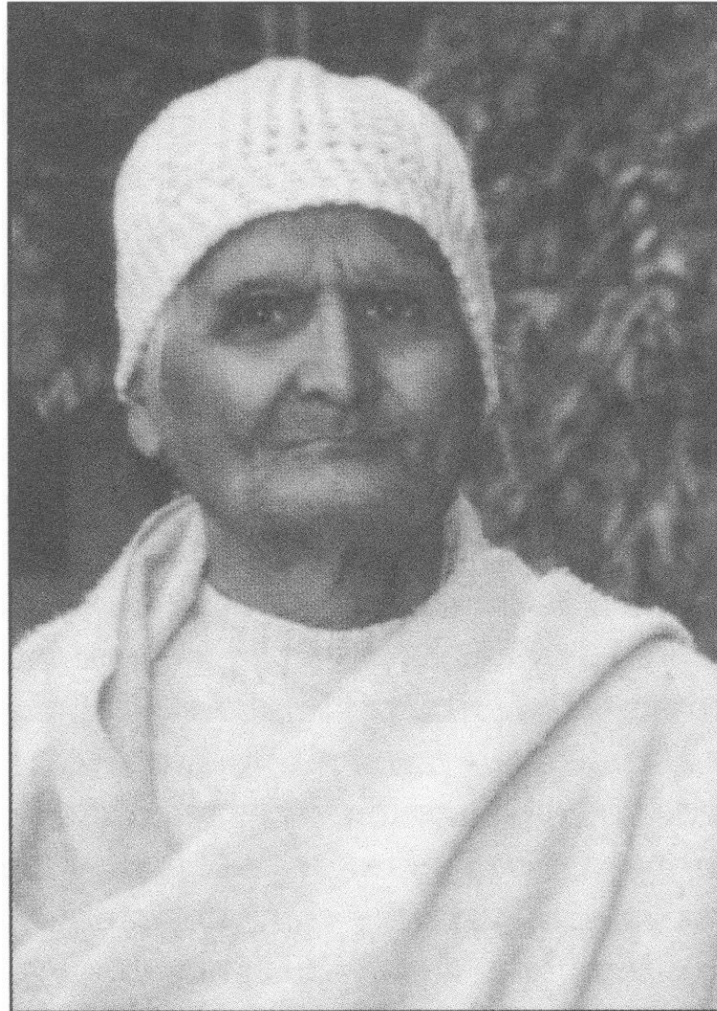


Excerpt from
The Near and the Dear
by Dada Mukerjee



K.C. Tewari

Shri K. C. Tewari, also known as Kishan or simply as Tewari, was from Nainital. Born in a middle-class Brahmin family, his education was different from most of the

other devotees of the educated class who had assembled before Babaji. Like them, he had attended schools and colleges to qualify himself for his livelihood, but he also had a second type of education, one that takes place in the family. This consists of religious and spiritual lessons and is considered essential for the children of orthodox Brahmin families. The first type qualified him to be a teacher, which was his livelihood, but the other — scriptures and religious literature, with their rituals and practices — was for living a purposeful life, the blissful life.

I have emphasized this aspect of his education because it came to be used in his life with Babaji. Even now many devotees approach him to derive benefit from it. Recitations from the scriptures, demonstration of worship, rituals, and meditation were encouraged by Babaji for the edification of the devotees. The return from Kishan's formal education came in the form of money, but the return from the other is intangible and can only be expressed as self-elevation and in assisting others in their spiritual quests.

There are many seekers who are drawn to him for his expertise in puja and rituals, but for me it was actually like armor, keeping me away. But I have still derived many benefits from my association with him, the foremost of which has been his help in my attempts to understand some of the deep mysteries that were enacted by Babaji. I have always looked toward Kishan to derive such benefits without worrying about what I had missed by not utilizing his knowledge of meditation and rituals. However, I have used

my resistance to his teaching of meditation as a suitable device for accusing him of miserliness toward me, to the enjoyment of everyone sitting around Babaji.

In addition to Kishan's practice of meditation and rituals, which kept us at some distance from each other, there was one more thing that stood in the way of our getting close. It was the differences in our age and status, so in spite of the common interest and enthusiasm for hearing more about Babaji, some distance came to exist. We have already seen the case of Hubba as an illustration. His high age and austere living was an important factor in maintaining some distance between us. Hubba could not fraternize as freely as Tularam or Jivan had done. The same considerations stood between Kishan and myself: I was older and both of us were teachers, but in status he considered me to be his senior and he would not forget it.

In spite of all these factors, I was given my share of the benefits derived by him in his life with Baba. It was from him that we heard all the details about the Hanumanghar temple. He had been a resident of Nainital, very close to Baba, and one of those who, along with Haridas and others, had been associated from the beginning with the construction of the temple.

The area where the temple sprang up was far away from the heart of the town and had been avoided by the local people, not only because of its distance, but also because it had formerly been notorious as a graveyard for children. The fear of evil spirits and inauspicious creatures kept

people away. Babaji rid the people's minds of all fear, banishing the ghosts and evil spirits from the whole area, by installing Hanumanji as the guardian for the protection and well-being of all.

The importance of this temple was heightened because it provided the first suitable place for the devotees to assemble. They were rewarded by getting to spend some time with Baba as well as having a place for religious congregations, prayers, worship, and bhandara. Baba's visits were few and far between, but for some of his devotees, the temple became a hive for them to swarm around. This may have inspired Baba to create other such hives in different parts of the mountains to provide people with facilities to congregate for religious practices, creating a network of such institutions with their powerful inspiration and opportunity for the good life, the life with God.

Kishan said that the work at Hanumanghar brought many people together to participate in that noble venture. Everyone had a role to play and enjoy, and the participation gave them so much thrill and excitement and a feeling of dedication to a noble mission that they forgot the petty things that kept them apart. They felt in their hearts that Hanumanji played there, and came to believe that he was coming to assist them and guide them in all possible ways to build the bridges in their lives. Hanuman became their chosen deity not so much from their knowledge of the scriptures as from their participation in the construction of

his temple. This also helped them in another installation, the installation of Hanuman in their hearts.

Babaji was involved in everything. No work could be done without him. Just as in the Ramayana, when the monkeys built the bridge across the ocean to Lanka, Ram watched from the shore; the monkeys did all the construction, with Babaji sitting there as a spectator. There was a powerful lesson concealed therein for every devotee of Baba to learn: Babaji was seldom present in his form, but he was always there as the ubiquitous spectator. By remembering him all the time, seeking inspiration and guidance from him in our work and working with full energy and trust, our success is assured by him. When the crisis comes and the work baffles us, if we can pass it on to him to tackle, expressing our helplessness, he will deal with it. The devotees had to learn this, Kishan said, at the very moment they were feeling that they were in their highest glory.

The inauguration of the temple was to be celebrated in the most fitting manner, with pujas, havans, and prasad for everyone. The news spread over a very large part of that area and people started coming. Everyone worked with a missionary zeal, and was convinced that their preparations for the bhandara, which was soon to begin, were faultless. There was a sense of jubilation in having managed a difficult task, and a few of them started speculating about the laurels that were awaiting them.

When Babaji arrived that evening, everyone joined in giving him an account of the work that had been completed.

Every detail was given. The prasad that had been prepared was enough to feed any unknown number of visitors. They then took Babaji around to see for himself all that had been described. Babaji was pleased, and sat and listened with great satisfaction as they talked about their arrangements for feeding people. Then, as if to get a minor clarification, he wanted to know on what they were going to serve the food. It was as if people who had been going along, merrymaking on the road, suddenly got pushed into a ditch. Not one of them had remembered to get leaf plates!

What could be done at this short notice? People had started gathering, and feeding was to start within a few hours. There was no market nearby. Haldwani and Bareilly were far away and the markets there would be closed for the night. It was hard to accept that a big engine could not start if even a small part of strategic importance was missing. Gone was the cheer and jubilation. Everyone was motionless. One could imagine, on a much larger scale, how the monkeys had sat on the shore of the sea after losing all hope of success in their search for Sita.

Babaji sat silently with them. Seeing him like that, many became disturbed and started making all kinds of speculations about his silence. It was his bhandara. They had been pushed into it by him. They were there only because of him, but now that they were faced with such a crisis, he was sitting indifferently. They might be responsible, but why should they be punished when he could remove their crisis? Minutes passed, and the sun set

in the horizon throwing everything and everyone into a gloom. No glimpse of light was forthcoming from any direction, so they sat silently giving up all hope. In the meantime, the moon was rising as if trying to make a dent in the gloom, but no one took any notice of it. Such was their despair.

The darkness was disappearing fast with the rising of the moon in its glory. Babaji was looking at something far away, which soon became noticeable to the people sitting with him. Pointing into the distance, he asked them what they saw. Scrutinizing carefully, someone said it was a caravan. The owners were carrying their loads to the market on the backs of donkeys. When they came nearer and the loads could be seen, someone shouted that they were leaf plates! Babaji directed a devotee to go purchase all their packages, thereby ending the crisis over the leaf plates. He told them not to haggle or bargain with the merchants, as they had been rescued from their deepest gloom.

The light came and removed the darkness. Everyone rushed about full of cheer; the problem had been solved. The packages of leaves were carried by the enthusiastic workers onto the ashram premises. Few took notice of the miracle that had been wrought before the eyes of everyone. Where did the leaf vendors come from? The timing and the route were so precise that one could not help but think that some unseen hand had manipulated everything to deliver the leaves to the temple at the critical hour.

At midnight the work was going on at a high tempo. Babaji was sitting surrounded by a few devotees. Haridas, who was in charge of the celebration, approached Baba. He wanted to say something to him, but couldn't get the courage to speak out. Babaji asked him how the work was going. In reply, he said that the ghee was exhausted but many more puris still had to be made. At the rate people were coming, their stock of puris would soon be exhausted. Here was a new crisis, not of leaves, but of ghee. It was the same problem again — the middle of the night, markets far away, and the ghee was needed immediately.

Babaji's response was immediate. He started shouting and yelling at everyone that they were all useless, and it had been a mistake for him to get involved in their drama. Had he known before, he would not have come to the temple at all. As all of this was going on, poor Haridas stood speechless as did everyone else. He sent Haridas away since nothing could be done at that time of night. They would have to wait for morning. This served as a damper and came at a time when the devotees had been feeling secure that everything was running smoothly. In the absence of ghee, they would not be able to prepare any more puris, so they all went to rest.

Babaji was sitting in a corner of the temple grounds along with Kishan. When everyone had gone, he asked Kishan to fill up two empty tins with water from the tap and leave them on the path leading to the temple. He was asked to do the preparation in secret; he would be sent away for

good if he talked about it to anybody. Kishan did as he was told.

The next morning there was a flutter. Haridas was the first to notice that there were two tins lying outside on the road. Seeing that they were full of ghee, he was happy; now they could resume the preparation of puris. He rushed toward Babaji to tell him of the miracle, but when Babaji saw Haridas coming, he started shouting that everyone was negligent and careless, leaving things here and there, allowing them to go to waste. They had been crying for ghee, but no one cared to keep the tins in a safe place. Such were the persons who were doing bhandara of Hanumanji! We had also heard about this miracle of Babaji's from many others who were present there, but the most important role was played by Kishan, who served as the instrument and also as a witness of the miracle.

Hariakhan Baba and Sombar Giri Baba also did havan and bhandara with water which automatically turned into ghee in the process. The great saint Sai Baba had arrived at Shirdi as a teenage boy and had settled at a mosque there. He used to go to the small market nearby begging oil for his lamp. There were certain peculiar things about his behavior that attracted the attention of the people there. He would come to the market and spend as little time as was needed to get oil for the lamps. He would not talk or fraternize with anybody, only ask the shopkeepers for oil, and nothing else. His visits became a daily affair.

One day the shopkeepers decided not to give him any oil because of the way he behaved with people. He returned to the mosque without pleading with anyone. Some of the shop keepers who were curious to see what he would do without oil for his lamp, went to the mosque. They saw that he took a bowl of water, dipped the wicks in it and lighted them, then placed them in the lamp. He poured water in it to serve the purpose of oil, which it did because it was already oil and no longer water! Here water served the purpose of oil in the hands of Sai Baba, whereas it had served as ghee with Hariakhan Baba, Sombar Giri Baba, and Neem Karoli Baba.

There is an identical case with Jesus who turned water into wine to serve the guests in a marriage feast. Jesus came to Canaan in Galilee to attend a marriage celebration. His mother was already there. While serving the guests, the wine was exhausted and his mother asked him to help. He called the servants, and showing them six big stone jars, asked them to fill them with water. Each one of the jars had a capacity of thirty gallons. When they were filled with water, Jesus asked the servant to draw some water from the jar and take it to the steward for his approval. It had become wine and was served to the guests to the satisfaction of all. The quality of the wine was verified when someone said to the host, "This is remarkable! Most people serve their best wine first, and poorest wine when that runs out; but you have saved your very best wine for last!"

Although Kishan would visit Allahabad with Babaji every year, his stays were short. He had his duties at college and his duties to his family. He considered himself a junior in rank among the devotees, so he had some hesitation in sitting with the elders. But this was also to his advantage. While others were busy with their stories, Kishan would step into Babaji's room and sit with him. Babaji did not discourage him. Sometimes Babaji would get him to talk by asking him about certain events or incidents, then intervene with questions and comments. Whenever Babaji wanted the story to be relished by the people sitting there, not only useful, but palatable, he would add some sauce by contradicting certain things said by Kishan or rebuking him to be an old badmash (wicked one). The devotees came to know that these abuses were not seriously meant; they were to serve as sauce and pickles for the relish of all. The result of this was that many sought to be with Baba when Kishan was with him.

Kishan's knowledge of scriptures was useful for everyone. If any reference was needed about religious matters, Babaji would ask Kishan to explain. Similarly, whenever any talk centered around sadhana and yogic practices, he would ask Kishan to demonstrate by entering into meditation. In Allahabad this display was used sparingly, but it became otherwise in Kainchi and Vrindavan with the coming of the Western devotees. They were very keen to practice meditation and samadhi. If a doctor visitor happened to be there when Babaji put Kishan in samadhi,

Babaji would ask him to examine Kishan and see if it was genuine or not. In spite of all efforts, no one could break the samadhi. Ultimately, Babaji would have to bring him out of it. These demonstrations of what the Western devotees came to call the “yoga of meditation” would be full and perfect. Those who were interested to learn and practice it were directed to various centers where courses on meditation were conducted. Rather than by learned and lengthy discourse, Babaji’s method of teaching was to provide actual demonstrations before their eyes, inspiring them to learn and practice.

There were certain important lessons that could be learned from a careful observation of the whole process and the choice of Kishan for imparting this teaching. Babaji would never permit those who sought his help to venture into samadhi without the necessary preparation. If they did, the risks would be very great with little chance of success. They had to be taught what preparation was needed and why it came only to a few. Kishan served the purpose because samadhi was an outcome of the life that he was living. He had undergone a rigid religious and spiritual education, having done many practices. This kind of education is the first and essential ingredient in building a purposeful life.

We all want to drink clean and pure water. That is a good intention, but several conditions need to be met: one must know what is pure water, where it is available, and the method of collecting and serving it. The conditions

necessary to living a purposeful life are the knowledge of what is a good life, where and how to get that knowledge, and how to make the necessary preparations. Babaji emphasized the value of religious education and practice, the age when it is to begin, and the role of the family, especially the parents, in the scheme of education.

Sometimes children would be sitting before Babaji with their mothers. When he asked the children to recite the Hanuman Chalisa, some of the children sat silently, as they did not know it. Babaji brought this to the attention of everyone there, saying that previously these things had been taught in the home. He charged that parents no longer had interest in such education, nor time for the children. The old people used to know the stories of Ramayana, Bhagavat, and Purana and would teach everyone. But rarely do you meet such persons now. Parents send their children to school, pay for their education, and think that is all they have to do. From this point of view, Kishan's family education served as an important preparation for things that were to come.

When Kishan came into contact with Babaji in his youth, he had been suffering for a long time from trouble with his lungs. This stood in the way of his settling down to a traditional family life, getting married, and earning a living. Babaji took up his case in full earnest. He was cured from his illness, which had already become chronic and had defied all remedy. After that, his marriage was arranged.

But there was something more that was needed for him: he needed help in strengthening the religious and spiritual practices which he had started in early life. The essential requisite for such practices was making tapas a part of the routine of life. This brings rigid control over various habits — food, sleep, and the company of people one seeks. The first victim in this process was his food, which became strictly regulated. He had to part with grains in his diet. This was difficult, as they were the main contents of his daily food. But Kishan took it up and has stuck to it all these years, which is a suitable tribute to Babaji.

Kishan's habit of not taking regular meals caused some distress with Ma and Maushi Ma. When he was at Allahabad, they became very close to him, admiring his religious practices, and did not want him to starve (as they considered his eating habits). They questioned how could one live with so little food. But this helped him admirably in keeping his body fit and trim and freed his mind from the unnecessary bothers about the variety and quantity of his daily food.

Ram Thakur would not eat for days together, and if persuaded by his devotees, he would oblige them by accepting a spoonful of sugar or honey. His body was healthy, like a normal human being of his age, but with energy that was not available to any one of them. When Ram Thakur was pressed for an explanation he said, "This body has been given to you on loan by the money lender.

You have to pay him interest. But he is easily satisfied if you regularly pay him very small amounts.”

This is actually the case with all great saints. Babaji’s food habit was almost solely in connection to his dealings with his devotees. He would eat for many reasons, such as not to cause any pain to an affectionate mother who had cooked for him, or to make some people learn to cook and feed others. The main purpose of collecting and preparing food, he would often emphasize, should not be as much for eating as for feeding. This was demonstrated all the time in his ashrams as well as in the houses of his devotees.

Some people who had seen Kishan in his earlier days, when he was sickly, would talk of Babaji’s kindness for him, and sometimes suggest obliquely that Babaji was partial to Kishan. It was true that Babaji’s kindness helped him, but it is also true that Kishan obeyed Baba and practiced what had been prescribed for him, which was rather rare among the devotees. It is not true that Babaji was partial to Kishan or that Kishan is the solitary example of Babaji’s care and kindness. Everyone who approached him got the appropriate treatment.

Kishan did not have much time to spend with Babaji or to go on long journeys with him, but the time that he did spend with him and the places that he visited in his company provided him with rich experiences. We take a few of these as he narrated them to us.

While traveling with Babaji, they came to the house of a well-known devotee to stay for a couple of days. Many

visitors started coming, and Babaji was tied to the house for most of the time. One morning, Shri Swami Karpatriji arrived — a renowned mahatma, a renunciate, and a staunch believer in the scriptures and religious practices and rituals. He was respected not only for his knowledgeable teachings of the scriptures, but also for his authorship of many worthy books. But he was also feared because of his temper and his insistence on the faithful observance of the rituals and worship in the temples. He had come to be known as a crusader because of his excessive zeal in preserving the sanctity of temples and places of worship. At the time he came to meet Babaji, he was actually crusading against the temple doors being thrown open to all, particularly those who were barred entrance by birth (caste).

Karpatriji greeted Babaji with full respect, saying Baba was one of the wisest and seniormost among those who had dedicated their lives to the preservation and propagation of the sanctity and purity of Hinduism's unique character. He said that Babaji was actually a pillar of their religion and he was seeking his help in foiling the attempts of those enemies of Hinduism who wanted to defile the temples by allowing the *harijans*, the untouchables, to enter. He put all his arguments before Babaji, and then with full confidence and persuasion he tried to draw Babaji into the fray. He urged Babaji to raise his voice in protest and opposition.

Babaji gave him the full chance to plead his case. And when he stopped, Babaji came out with his volleys of accusations and abuses against the sadhus, the so-called

“guardians of Hinduism,” fighting against throwing the temples open to all castes. He went on and on, heckling these short-sighted ones whom he declared to be the enemies, and not the protectors, of Hinduism: “The temples are dedicated to God; they belong to everyone and not to any individual caste or sect. The temples are places for prayer and worship. Maintaining the cleanliness and providing the facilities for pujas and worship and inspiring people to perform their bhajans and kirtans are the main duties of those who claim to be the friends and protectors of Hinduism.”

“What you actually find there is that the doors are often closed and the temples are never cleaned fully, as no one bothers about them. The murtis are not washed or bathed regularly and are not properly anointed, as enjoined by the rules. There is no bhajan, kirtan, and discourses done as regular practices to attract people, nor are people given any prasada, coming as the grace of God. This is how you want to run your temples? It is a sad spectacle to go around these temples, almost deserted without any care being taken. For some interested ones it has become a money-making institution which is taking advantage of the faith and religiosity of the worshippers!”

Babaji said he himself had seen the fate of such deserted temples where, in one of them, a dog entered in search of eatables and urinated on the murti. Then holding Karpatriji on the dock, he fired his questions: “You are a saint, well versed in the scriptures and fully aware of the

rules and rituals. How much time do you spend in the temples, in pujas, bhajan and kirtan? You have no time for that as all your resources are diverted to fight a political battle, preventing the entry of those who want to come and worship and sing their bhajan and kirtan. Do you want the temples to remain closed and deserted? You do not do what you should for the temple, but you want to stop others from doing. Do you think I have lost all my senses? You want me to do much damage by yielding to your requests. These conflicts are actually snares for sadhus who have the true interests of religion in their hearts. You will not find me joining the fray.”

He stopped as if the job was done and no more missiles needed to be shot. There was silence all around — no whispering or movement anywhere. Everyone was trying to understand what they had seen and heard. Karpatriji just sat silently. Perhaps he was wondering how all this came about. He was all love and adoration and greeted Babaji with his choicest bouquets, but in return he had received only brickbats.

Time passed and everyone woke up, as if after a long spell of bad dreams. Then Babaji resumed his work. Addressing everyone in the room he said, “You must all know him. There are few persons in these areas who have not heard his valuable discourses. There is no branch of your religion in which he is not a master. People actually get intoxicated when they hear him speak on Ramayana or Puranas. He has written innumerable books which are read

by thousands of people. He is a great saint, who has dedicated his whole life to the benefit of the people. His speeches and books are all meant to make people religious-minded and devoted to God. A great saint he is.”

Some prasad was brought and Babaji offered Karpatriji first and then distributed to others. Here was the happy ending of the drama, which was very turbulent in the middle and had threatened to end like that.

The main framework of the story came from Kishan, who has repeated it many times because of my interest in it. But the very heart of it, not only the gist, came from Baba himself. We used to visit the Ganges daily in the afternoon. Ojhaji would drive us there. He would stay behind with his car, and we two would move to the bank, sitting there till it was dusk. That was the time when Babaji would explain whatever was needed for me to know about anything that was disturbing me. The story of Karpatriji came in several sittings along with the role of sadhus resorting to political agitation. Babaji’s stand on these issues was very clear: the temple is a place of God, and should be open to every heart. The utmost care is needed to maintain its sanctity. The cleanliness of the murti and the decoration with colorful clothes were essential for maintaining the purity and the sanctity of the temple and attracting worshippers and devotees. If the people whose duty it was to look after these arrangements did not bother about them, the result was that the temples ceased to be places for purification, and

people actually came to be repelled by them. Inner purity cannot come in an unclean and hostile environment.

About the role of sadhus, Babaji was emphatic. "Their tasks are distinct from those of householders and social workers. It is not for them to enter into your kitchen to prepare food for you and your God, nor to open the cowsheds to attend to sick cows. These works can be easily done by others; sadhus are not needed for them. Their withdrawal from the day-to-day lives of the people is of utmost importance to society. The real help from sadhus comes when they are all engaged in their own task without getting involved in the quagmire of social life. Then and only then can society derive the greatest benefit from sadhus. It is for this reason you have to honor their roles, and allow them to do their work without any interference, not dragging them down to drive your chariot. Their work is for the good of the whole creation. The incense stick can give its odor by standing aloof; you need not take it before everyone to inhale its smell."

Babaji never kept us ignorant or hid from us the way to fulfill the aims of our life. But we were not interested in learning or in being enlightened on the basic problem of life. Whenever we were with him, our ears and eyes were busy with other things. Certainly, we were not concentrating on his talks. We were more interested in his gestures and spicy and pungent remarks without caring to discover what precious teaching was hidden in them. He had to talk and harangue all the time when he was sitting with us. If he sat

silently, giving us the chance to calm the agitation of our minds and take his teachings to heart, it would have been misunderstood by those who would think that Babaji was indifferent to us.

One who was really interested in deriving the most benefit from their time with Babaji had to be patient to hear and see him at work. His whispers and every gesture of his eyes and fingers all carried his teachings and helped the diligent and faithful observer. The result of this was that those who concentrated their attention on Babaji only, derived much, like the wise and active farmer raising a rich harvest. By no stretch of the imagination can we believe that we were denied the benefits from his precious possessions. Such ideas or statements were due to our sheer ignorance and perversion of mind. Gracious had he been, and gracious he is — gracious to everyone. His grace floods in every direction for the benefit of his devotees.

In 1961, Babaji was here for his winter camp, and there were many devotees who had come to stay with him. One night it was past eleven and Babaji was in his room with doors closed from inside. All those staying in the house had finished their meals and taken to their beds. Didi and I were busy finishing some work of the household before we could retire. Then I heard the sound of the door to Babaji's room opening. Kishan was busy opening the door to go outside, and Babaji was standing beside him. Hearing my footsteps, he turned toward me and seeing me staring at him with full attention, asked *Kya? Kya?* (What? What?) But without

replying, I went to bring Didi to see this for herself. Babaji was standing there, but we had the experience of seeing Hanumanji, who was showing himself through Baba. Babaji had no blanket. His dhoti was drawn tight to the waist, serving as a langoti and the tail end of the dhoti had been twisted and was hanging like a long tail. Taller than he actually was, he had to bend his head to go through the door. His arms were excessively long, reaching below the knees, and there was no bulging belly or white mustache or beard. The belly had sunk to a normal size, and the beard and mustache had turned black.

He waited until we reached there, perhaps to give darshan to Didi also, and then he went out with Kishan holding his hand. We stood at our place watching. It was not even two minutes later that they returned. The way in which the whole thing happened left no doubt in my mind that the aim was to demonstrate that Hanumanji was with him and that Hanumanji and he were not different. Many of his devotees believed that he was an incarnation of Hanumanji; actually, Hanuman himself. I had heard them talking thus with all attention, but it was too much for me to believe them at that stage.

Babaji returned to his room, as his work, whatever that might have been, was done. But for us it was otherwise. This was just the beginning. The culmination came in Kainchi on June 15, 1968, before the Hanuman temple. It was a long journey, but that night I was made to set my foot on the road. For a long time we could not sleep and went on

talking, trying to understand the implication of all that was shown to us, but it was not easily coming. Instead, all kinds of questions arose.

The next morning when we met, Kishan could not say what brought Babaji out of the room. Babaji had been lying on his bed, with Kishan sitting on the floor before him. “He was not talking. Suddenly he said, ‘Let us see what is outside.’ Coming out to the porch, he cast his glance on several sides and then said, ‘Chalo.’ Kishan had no idea of what had happened so far as Didi and myself were concerned, and I did not give him any inkling of what was agitating my mind.

There was also no hint from Babaji about what had happened the night before. I got busy with my daily routine. It was a holiday, and Didi and I stayed home. Babaji was in his room. It was late in the day when I finally entered Babaji’s room. He was lying on his bed talking to Kishan, who was sitting on the mat. I stood there listening, and Didi came and stood listening as well. He asked Didi, “Kamala, please scratch my back. I do not know why it has been itching for so long.” She came forward, and bending down over him, reached her hand out. She thought that it was going to be so easy, but she was given a lesson. However she might bend or stretch, her hand would not reach the middle of Babaji’s back. She could not understand what was happening, and actually started perspiring wondering what she should do. Babaji came to her rescue saying that her work was done, and she should stop. It was a relief for her,

as she could then come out of his room to regain her breath. I stayed in the room participating in the talks that were going on.

In the evening she told me of her experience of the giant body that had been before her on the bed. She could not imagine that it could be so big that her hand could not reach around. Recalling the experience of the night before, she said that she was now convinced that he was Hanumanji, not by what just happened, but because it was a continuation of what was wrought before. She had had doubts, and for the whole day she had been obsessed with them. It was just to help her remove all doubts from her mind that today's episode came. She could rest with her belief. But it was not so easy for me. I had to wait for my time.

Didi's experience came to be known by other devotees, and came up for discussion when we sat together in our satsang. No one had any difficulty in believing it to be true, and emphasized again and again that Babaji was actually Hanumanji. We became the recipients of many congratulations from the devotees for our good luck. They said that Babaji had been exceedingly gracious by revealing himself before our eyes. The matter ended for the time being, but it remained in the background. Whenever there was a reference to Babaji being an incarnation of Hanumanji, the whole episode would be raked up, adding grist to the mill.

It was a few years later that another incident, equally important, was enacted in the same room, in the same posture on his bed, and again with Kishan sitting before him on the mat having no idea what was happening. The incident was a mystery in the beginning, but worked to convince me that he is actually Hanuman, and all my questions came to an end with this acceptance.

We had returned from Kainchi in early August. It had been my practice to study late at night sitting before my table. I had to enter my room through Babaji's bedroom. There was a door in between which was always kept open. The outer doors were closed but never this one. Sitting in my chair, I could see the bed in his room. In some unguarded moments, I felt that he was on his bed, although bodily he was not there. Such experiences had become common, so I did not pay much attention to them. It was past midnight when I would go to sleep, and everyone in the house was in deep sleep. It had been my regular practice that after my study I would bow on Babaji's cot, putting my head on it and rubbing my hand on the leg of the cot as if touching his feet. I would always complete this ritual however late it might be or however busy I was with anything else.

One night while rubbing the leg of the cot, my hand came on some scratches and a dent. I had never noticed anything like that during the whole decade that I had been doing this. The idea cropped up that this was like an oozing abscess. I took this leg of the cot to be Babaji's leg,

therefore I was suddenly made aware that this must mean there was an abscess on Babaji's leg. The problem was that only a couple of weeks back I had been with him, and there had been no indication of any abscess on his leg, nor could it have developed so quickly into such a putrid state.

That was the start of my conflict, and I was faced with a challenge about my faith and belief. My belief was that the leg of the cot was actually Babaji's. There was the scratch and the dent on the cot leg, but there had been no boil on Babaji's leg. I was fully convinced of that. So all this led to the unavoidable conclusion that the leg of the cot was not Babaji's, that these two were different. This also meant that all these years I had been mistaken, sadly mistaken, in thinking the two to be the same, and all my rituals were futile and useless — a clear indication of my misplaced faith born of sheer ignorance. I could not mention this crisis of faith to anyone, nor could I end my questioning. The mind was agitated and there was no break from it. Always the questions I was faced with were, "Was I mistaken? How did I come to think that they were not different from each other? Did Babaji have anything to do with it or was it all due to my own foolishness?"

Noticing it one day, mother asked me what was bothering me. However much I tried to deny that there was anything worrying me, she was not convinced. Maybe the easy way of ending the conflict would have been to acknowledge the blunder I had committed and banish the whole idea from my mind. But it was not easy to do that. It

would mean parting with all the faith and belief that had been built up over the years, faith which actually had taken me closer to Babaji and opened my heart to him. To continue believing as I had was difficult, if not impossible, but to part with it for good, to throw it away, was unthinkable. This came to be the crisis in my faith. I began to feel as if all was lost.

While I was struggling with this state of agitated mind, Babaji came one evening accompanied by Kishan. I was happy about his visit as always, but there was an element of surprise because it was “unscheduled,” as we had come to call such visits. What was more, it would be something like a break from the torture which I had been suffering for twelve days.

It wasn't until late in the noon of the next day that I was free to be with Babaji. I had returned from the university, and after changing my clothes, I entered his room where he was alone with Kishan. He glanced at me, permitting me to stand near his bed, and resumed his talk with Kishan. He had thrown a feeler to Kishan, making him talk with all seriousness. I was not paying much attention to Kishan's talk, but scanning Babaji with my eyes. He was reclining on his bed in one of his favorite poses — resting his head on the palm of his raised left hand, the left leg spread full, and the right leg bent at the knee. The dhoti was drawn close, keeping the thighs of both legs exposed. There was no blanket or bed sheet over his body, and I could see the

bulging belly, all very smooth as if carefully massaged with oil.

I had been looking at him the whole time since I had entered the room. I had no idea that unconsciously my eyes were searching for something; suddenly they became fixed at some place on his exposed right thigh. There was an abscess, deep and wide, with blood oozing out. My attention was caught and I was just seeing it without taking it into the mind. I did not know that his eyes were fixed on me, but seeing me look at the abscess, he asked, “Kya, Kya?” When I turned my attention from what I was seeing, it all vanished in a thrice, leaving no trace, neither on the thigh nor in my mind. It was something like the photographer who has taken the photo and then left it aside, covering it fully.

So I was drawn into the conversation with Kishan. This continued for some time. Didi returned from her college, bringing with her a few colleagues who were keen to meet Babaji. Everyone got busy with their work, including myself.

In the evening some devotees came and the time passed with everyone enjoying Babaji’s visit. At night, while taking his food in his room and sitting with Ma and Maushi Ma, Babaji said that this was not a good time for him to come here — he had some work at other places — but he had to come because I was remembering him. “I felt that my work could wait, but a visit to you could not be delayed.”

Then Ma said, “We remember you all the time; can we do without it? When you come the whole house becomes full of persons, full of things, and full of *shanti* and *ananda*

(peace and joy). So we pray to you, Baba, visit us more often. You come in the winter, and then you forget me and Maushi Ma.”

Baba came out with his defense: “I also remember you all the time. Ma, who can forget the one who gives you food? But what can I do? I do not get any time at all.”

The talks continued for some time more, for the enjoyment of all sitting with him. Kishan was enjoying himself and adding a few rejoinders here and there. This used to be the highest bliss for Ma and Maushi Ma, and they would often say out loud, “Baba, the joy that we get by sitting with you cannot come from anywhere else. We sit in our puja room every day but cannot fix all our attention to that; the mind goes everywhere, to everything else. We feel unhappy that we cannot sit with our *Ishtadev* (the form of the Lord to which one is devoted) with full attention. But when you are here it is different. All our attention goes to you. We forget everything else.”

Just as Ma had finished, Maushi Ma said, “Baba, we do not know God. We know only you. You do not leave us.” He was listening patiently and giving them the chance to open their hearts to him. They were sent back to feed the persons staying in the house. When they left the room Babaji said, addressing Kishan, how deep their love was for him; they were busy for the whole day with work for the household, prayers, and pujas, but they never forgot him, so he had to come to them when they were keen for his darshan.

After our meal, I sat with Kishan for some time and talked about everything that had happened that day, but with no reference to what passed after I had entered the room late in the noon. Kishan had no idea of what was hidden in my mind or what tricks Babaji was playing to cover up the things that were worrying me. And on my part, everything had been erased from my mind by the time we retired late at night.

The next morning when I met Babaji, he told me that he would be leaving in a short while, and everyone came to know of it. Ma and Maushi Ma pressed him to stay for the day, but he had to go; it was very urgent for him. But he made the concession to them that he would eat first, so they should go and cook for him. Everything was carried out as desired by him, and he left at ten with Kishan. No one knew what had brought him here and what he had accomplished. Even I had no idea until two weeks after he had gone away. We were living our lives as usual. I continued to spend the hours at night in my study, and late at night when retiring for sleep, I would bow at his cot and rub my hand on its leg as was my regular habit. There were no dents or scratches now; it was all smooth, nor was there any trace in my mind of the experience I had undergone only two weeks back.

Then one night after bowing at the cot, I rubbed my hand on its leg and touched the dent and passed over the scratches. The idea of the abscess came back with a shiver as before. I took it to be the abscess on his leg. While

thinking like this, suddenly the whole picture of what had been seen two weeks back came in a flash! So it was an abscess on his leg, and I was not mistaken in thinking like that! The leg of the cot actually represented the leg of Babaji, so when I offered my worship to the leg of the cot, he acknowledged that it was given to him. The foot of flesh and blood might not be present before me, but so long as the other was with me to receive my worship, I had nothing to worry about.

What could be said of the miracle of turning the leg of a cot of dead wood into a human leg of flesh and blood? It was not a dream or an hallucination or fantasy, but actually the leg of a living person sitting in the full view of others in broad daylight. How and why was it done were the questions bothering me now. I became restless and could not go to bed. I was reminded several times that it was very late, and that I must sleep, but who could sleep? I started loitering on the verandah, disturbing the sleep of others. The night passed like that, without any sleep or rest for me.

The next day I was pressed to explain what had made me restless. I gave a brief resume of the whole incident. They heard me with patience and interest, and then they smiled as if to emphasize that for such a simple thing, why did I have to strain my brain so much. They said, "After all, what is not possible for Baba? What could he not do? He is so kind and gracious that he did it all out of his love for you. You were suffering, and he had to remove your suffering. He had to save you when you were going to lose your faith in

him. You were thinking him to be just like another human being when he is actually God — for all of us, and not for you alone. Why can you not believe it?”

So simple was their argument that there was nothing for me to disbelieve or disagree with, so the agitation passed. But something was left behind for me to work out. I never had an interest in speculating about his real nature or my relationship with him, and what keeps him busy all the time. But these new thoughts took hold, engaging me all through these years, and have helped to make my relations with Baba rather deep and purposeful, as if for the first time. I have come to realize what he was for us, and for all who came to him and remember him. It was an insight, though a feeble one, of what he was and what it was that kept him tied down to us. The queries continue to be pleasant to my mind.

I engaged in thoughts that were unknown to others, but were not unknown to him. A good part of my time with Babaji was directed in assisting me to seek answers for myself. His help came through raising various topics for discussion in his gatherings with the devotees and sometimes through talking with me alone. The lessons I have learned and the conclusions I have drawn are all tentative; I cannot produce any conclusive proof to justify them, but I offer them anyway.

The first one is that Babaji knew everything about us and what we were doing or thinking. There was no barrier of time or space for him. We might not know what was

awaiting us, or what was working inside our minds, but he knew it all. It has been called the omniscience of God. The great saints know everything that is going on in the universe. And Babaji's omniscience was there for us to see.

My second speculation is that he was also omnipotent — all powerful and all potent. He could accomplish any task without hindrance or handicap. When anything that is done by these saints passes beyond our knowledge and expectations, we call it a mystery, a miracle. But for them, these miracles and mysteries are as simple and common as breathing.

Babaji knew everything that was happening with me here. He was present at the appropriate time and transformed a piece of dead wood into a living leg of flesh and blood. Does this not testify to the potency of his power to transform and transmute as necessity arose? And then proceeding further with my search, I discovered that it was sheer grace which came to my rescue, unmotivated and spontaneous, solely to assist an ailing soul that was remembering him. I came to these tentative conclusions in my own way, but something in the nature of a confirmation came after a few months.

When the next winter came, Babaji arrived, followed by many devotees. Within a few days, large numbers of visitors started to assemble in the evening, and regular sittings and discussions started as before. These gatherings and discussions were valued for their education and were never dull or barren. One night a discussion started about God.

What does He do for us, and how we should approach Him? While the discussions were in full swing, Babaji threw a query: "Should we ask God for anything? What do you think about it?" Everyone enthusiastically gave their opinions. The consensus was that we should ask God for whatever we might need. Then he said, "*Achcha*, achcha, this is your judgment. Then he turned to Ojhaji, who was sitting there listening with interest, and asked him what his opinion was. Ojhaji came out with this categorical statement, "Nothing should be asked from God. This is certainly not for true devotees to do."

This was strange, and the protests came from all directions. If we were not to ask Bhagwan for our needs and acquaint Him with our problems, then to whom were we to go for help? Babaji looked at Ojhaji to take the field and help everyone correct their ideas about God and His grace.

Ojhaji replied, "Whenever we want anything from someone or want someone to do something for us, as we do all the time in our everyday lives, we have to first acquaint them with our problems and the reasons we are seeking help. After this we have to plead for the help which is not easily forthcoming. When there is no response, we start begging and shedding tears, and fall at their feet hoping to bring mercy to their hearts. But are we to do the same with God? To think of God in this way is the greatest mistake of our lives. This is not a life with God, but a life without God. With that kind of belief in God, all our prayers and worship are directed to the wrong place.

“This does not mean that God does not know about us or is not doing anything for us. He is in His place and doing His work. But we still have to do our sadhana, our spiritual practice. We have to purify and ennoble our lives and install God in our hearts. This is the main aim of life. Because we often fail in this, we start accusing God of failing us. Our main task is to acquaint ourselves with what God is doing for us, and to mold our lives by installing God in our hearts — not by acquainting Him with our problems and crying for His mercy.

“When we want to take a journey, we have to make all kinds of preparations. But first, we must know the place we want to reach and the person we want to meet. The same thing happens when we pray to God to come to our help. We take Him to be ignorant, with no knowledge about our problems, so we start acquainting Him about us. Secondly, we plead, beg and shed tears not knowing that He is love and mercy incarnate. He knows everything by Himself. When the ignorance is removed and faith is created in our hearts, no asking or pleading is needed anymore. We can live with God and enjoy His mercy without worrying about what we have to acquaint Him with, what we have to ask from Him, and how we have to plead with Him. We may need to do this in our dealings with society, but not in our religious and spiritual lives with God.”

Ojhaji finished his talk. Everyone was listening, and some persons were preparing some questions or arguments to refute what he had said. Babaji was observing everything

and was well aware of what was to come. When the discussions were completed, Babaji commented, “How nicely Ojhaji has explained everything to you. He is right when he says that nothing should be asked from God, nor is there anything with which God needs to be acquainted. When one knows everything, what new thing can you bring to His notice? It is useless to try to do this. Moreover, God is gracious and always shows His mercy to everyone. When you get what you want without asking Him for it, what is the use of asking? You always ask for useless things, wrong things, and sometimes for harmful things, that is why you do not get them. You ask for things out of ignorance. He knows what is useful for you and what should be given, and what is useless and harmful and should be denied. And you people accuse God, without caring to know why your desire was not fulfilled. This is your habit, your practice. You must have full faith in God; He attends to everything when you have faith and depend on Him.

“The main purpose for your religious practices of pujas, prayers, bhajan and kirtan is not for asking or begging from Him, but to be with Him. There are people who never think of God or sit silently and meditate on Him. But when they do their rituals, like singing bhajan and kirtan and visiting temples, they take this to be their worship and time with God.

“This is helpful for them, as they keep aside time and money and other things for God and for His puja and prasad. When they are not doing these pujas and prayers,

they spend their time and money in other ways, not directly for God or for spending time with Him. So this helps them to round out their whole lives. It brings discipline to do all of one's duties and then save something in time and resources to be spent for God. In the beginning it might start in a small way, but with regular observance, it becomes very dear to them. They feel it is their time with God, and they spend more and more time in their pujas and prayers.

“This feeling of being with God and working for Him brings devotion to their hearts. He becomes dear to them. They become interested in pleasing and serving Him out of their love for Him, not for asking anything for themselves. They spend more and more time in pujas and rituals, and many others begin to derive benefit from them. They draw more persons toward God, help to teach them discipline in their lives, and to devote their lives to the service of God and His children.

“This is the best form of religious education for the people. They learn from demonstration and practice, not from books and lectures. How many persons can read? How many persons can purchase books? Those who are to teach you must know what they are to teach and what you need and can understand. And they must teach you out of their love of God and love for you, not for making money by taking the name of God. It is difficult for most people to find such persons and be taught by them. The best way is to go on with one's pujas and prayers. Meditation and yoga are

not for everyone, but bhajan and kirtan are for everyone without any distinction.

It was late already and it was time to disperse. Babaji sent everyone away and then returned to his room. For him the subject was discussed before everyone, and nothing more was to be added. When everyone finished their food, we sat in our satsang as usual. Many persons wondered why Babaji had talked in such a simple way, with so much interest, about the things that were uppermost in their minds. Ojhaji only commented that this was his method, and he was always doing it in some form or other. When we failed to derive benefit from it, it was not Babaji's fault but because we were not attentive.

Everyone had his own experience to express and comments to make. It continued till two o'clock, when Babaji came out of his room to go to the bathroom. When I came to take him to the bathroom he told me, "When you get a chance to talk, you forget everything. I do not know what this is all about. You talk to the students during the whole day, but even then your talks are not finished. You even keep busy at night. Now let them go."

Everyone enjoyed the reprimand, as if they had been waiting for it. We all took to our beds. Our talks were not completed, only postponed for future sittings. As I have said before, these satsangs were of immense benefit for me and much of my knowledge and understanding came from them.

There was another lesson hidden in the episode of the abscess on the leg — a mystery, an enigma, defying all my

attempts to understand or unravel it. However, I did not give up hope. Hints were forthcoming that showed me the direction to search. These were hidden teachings for me, and he wanted me to continue with my inquiry. Even now it goes on; there is no question of being finished with it.

Mantras, *dikshas* (initiations), and the teachings in enigmas not only give us wisdom, but also give us the bliss of his company in our secret hearts. Such instruction and initiations come from the guru and are the means of contact, a token through which to communicate with him.

Looking at it from a sober point of view, the whole idea of the cot leg being Babaji's must be due to some mental aberration and not the working of a balanced mind. The matter would end there if I could rest with that explanation. But the result of this "mental aberration" was that it served as a means of contact and communication with Babaji, and drew him to me. The success achieved by that process raised the question: was it all an accidental and meaningless concurrence, or was it intentional and manipulated by him?⁵ The way the whole episode worked left no doubt in my mind that it was his way of dealing with me.

By accepting that to be so, I went a step further. So long as I have trust in him, I can use such tokens or instruments to contact him and transmit my wishes and expectations to him. If this is granted, then the conclusion cannot be avoided: such symbols prove useful for the devotee's purpose in the same way that murtis or idols are useful if

the devotee has absolute faith and devotion, however absurd and meaningless they may be to others.

There was also another question: From where did the idea come into my mind? Was it due to ignorance, or was there some inspiration or prompting from somewhere else, say Babaji, in this case? This question was picked up by him, and he made me realize that it was all his doing. We need not enter into the question of how and why he did it. Simply knowing that he did it is enough to remind us that in times of any conflict or crisis, we can look to him for intervention. That is all there is to learn in our life with him.

We may look at the use of these tokens as a means of communication between the transmitter and the receiver, which is taking place all the time. Everyone chooses his own method of communication according to the nature and urgency of the message and the facilities or options available to him. The use of a network of telephone lines or telegraph is a must for the politician and stock market operator, but delivering a message in person is the most convenient way a schoolboy might contact his friend next door.

There are innumerable methods of communication. Simple or complicated instruments might be used by different persons. When the giver and receiver of the message are in close proximity, the verbal method is considered appropriate. But that can not be so when the message is to travel across the country, or when the it is to

be transmitted high up in the horizon where no telephone or messengers can reach.

When the stock market operator sits in his office with telephone receivers all around him, it might look as if telephones are all that count in his life. He cannot be careless or indifferent if he expects to be aware of what is going on in the market. For his purpose, the instruments chosen are justified. This same man might use his hand for shaking another's when he wants to give a message of friendship. He might send his message of love and affection to his son when he returns home by embracing him. What is wrong if he uses different instruments for different purposes? There cannot be a universal yardstick that applies to each different situation.

This may be the secret of the relationship between the guru and his devotee, and between the worshipper and his deity. The simple conclusion is that these things, symbols and murtis, serve the purpose of helping the devotee, even though such faith in objects has been condemned all through the ages as the outcome of sheer ignorance and crass superstition — the product of primitive minds.

The disciples who forward their prayers to their masters and the worshippers sending their prayers to their chosen deities have their individual techniques, and use the appropriate instruments for their contacts. The wood that served as the leg of Babaji's cot appeared to me as his leg. I chose that, or the choice was made for me, and I put my full faith in it. It served my purpose. I knew that it was not

actually Babaji in person, but it worked for me on his behalf and took my prayers, appeals and offerings to him. That was the only way open to me during his physical absence. I would never imagine that the two were identical, standing for each other in every respect. Had that been so, there would not have been any interest in meeting Babaji in person, awaiting his visits or running after him. But it helps me to be with him, which would not be possible otherwise in his absence.

Sometimes the idea came to my mind that the leg I had chosen as the messenger did not really carry the message to the master, wherever he might be, in the same way as a postman delivers the message at the residence of the addressee. Perhaps instead it served the function of collecting the message and keeping it secure, like the use of a post box in the post office for collecting letters. All I know is that it works now as it worked during those crucial days and I can rely on it to carry my prayers and messages. Focusing the agitated mind on a certain point or token and holding it there is certainly a step, even if it is a preliminary one. Then using that concentration for contemplation and meditation on the preceptor or chosen deity takes one much ahead in his religious practices and education. It is like seeking the help of Hanuman for approaching Ram.

A traveller reaches the bank of a stream which he has to cross to complete his journey. He needs a boat to carry him. He does not make one for himself, but uses the one that is available there. He may take much care to test its

soundness, but the journey cannot be undertaken without that knowledge and trust. If upon boarding the boat one is haunted by the fear of the boat going down and being lost in the stream, he might become so obsessed by his fears that he cannot concentrate any longer on the person on the other shore. He might even cross the stream and not meet the one to whom the journey was undertaken because he was not able to hold the picture of that person in his mind.

Swami Sivananda gave a graphic description of the miracle that pure faith can bring about. A great saint had a number of young disciples, all dear to their master. But there was one who was especially close to his heart because he had enough faith to carry out the master's instructions without any hesitation. The guru used to talk of visions of God. One day this disciple prayed to the master that he should also be given a vision. The guru was amused and gave him a mantra for *japa* and an idol of Shiva to worship. He said that if he performed his worship and *japa* with concentration and devotion to the idol before him, he would have Shiva's darshan. The young man did as was directed by the master. One month passed with no darshan. He was disturbed and went to the master, saying that he must have Shiva's darshan and that the guru must help him.

The guru knew what was going on, smiled, and gave him an idol of Krishna, saying that in place of the Shiva idol, he should worship this one for another full month with *japa* and devotion. The month passed, but again, no darshan came. He did not give up hope. With greater determination

he went to the master and asked again for his aid, which he felt could do everything for him. His faith in the idols of Krishna and Shiva was gone, but his faith in the master remained undiminished.

The guru smiled again. He knew the disciple was ready and that the time for darshan had come. He gave him an idol of Mother Kali with instructions to install it on his puja table in place of the Krishna murti and to begin another month of puja and japa. With fresh energy and enthusiasm, he started this new stage of his sadhana. He removed the Krishna murti to the shelf with the Shiva murti, and installed the Kali murti on the table. He lit the incense sticks, and while waving them before the Devi, he noticed that the fumes were rising to the shelf where the Shiva murti was consigned. He tried to stop this by changing the position of the incense sticks, but without effect. Getting enraged, he threw the sticks of incense away and stood before the Shiva murti which, he felt, had already received the incense for one full month but had refused to give him darshan. What business had Shiva to share it now, when he was offering it to the Mother? Collecting some cotton from the shelf, he inserted cotton into the nostrils of Shiva, trying to plug them up. Suddenly the murti disappeared and Shiva himself stood there, smiling with full mercy and compassion!

The astonished disciple asked Shiva what he meant by this behavior. For one whole month when he had worshipped him with the incense, he had taken no notice, but now when he wanted to stop him from inhaling the

incense given to the Mother, he came before him. The reply was prompt, "You did not worship me as Shiva, but only as an image, and you threw me away just as a common metal object when your expectations were not fulfilled. But now your behavior was different. I was no longer just a statue to you, but a living murti whose nostrils you were trying to plug so the odor meant for the Mother would not be stolen." This is the miracle of faith.

The sum and substance of this whole narration of Swami Sivanand was to display the glory of faith in the guru and faith in the murti as the Lord himself. It also demonstrated the role of the murti in sadhana and religious practices. The Lord is to be approached through something concrete and tangible which your prayers and pujas can reach. The token or the idol might be made from any of the elements: clay or stone, wood or metals, whatever might appeal. But the idol does not change from symbol to murti, the real presence of the living God or guru when it is made. This is actually the role of sadhana: to bring about the transformation of the wooden leg into the leg of a living human being. Many things might go into one's sadhana, but the essential ingredients, as Babaji used to say, are "devotion, faith, and patience."

In the market life, the token of money in the form of currency or bank notes, checks and drafts is universally used. As a token, money is a title to something not already in our possession, until it is changed into the things we desire.

I'm reminded of the night Babaji was sitting with some devotees at a place in the hills near Nainital. A devotee came with money to offer Babaji. He put it before him and said it was for him. Babaji was thinking of the uses to which it could be put, but it was not suitable for those so Babaji asked the man to take it away. Babaji's plea was that he could not use it for his dhuni as he did not keep any sacred fire. He also couldn't use it as a comfortable cushion for sitting. It was totally useless to him. The man tried to correct him, saying that money was used for getting the things that you might like to have. Babaji then asked him to get some apples by using the money. The man said that was not possible because it was late at night and the market was far away. Then Babaji asked him to take the money away since it could not bring some apples to him.

The tokens used in different countries for money differ from each other, but that does not entitle one to consider his own money to be real and others false. Something like this has been at the root of the denunciation of murtis and symbols used by people of different religious faiths in their practices. The practitioners of the religious life who use tokens do not deserve to be derided as ignorant.

Tokens in the form of symbols or idols have been in the religious practices of every people. Portraits, pictures, crosses and candlesticks have served the purpose as a medium for many to reach their goal. Other kinds of tokens, such as buildings with minarets, arches, and graves kept alive with flowers and incense sticks serve the purpose of

some practitioners. This is just like the shape, size, or texture of the tokens used as money in human life. The money given to Babaji was of no value to him at the time, but to the donor and the others sitting there, it was not only valuable, but almost like a deity.

The criterion that determines the value of things in our spiritual and religious life is the individual's judgment regarding its suitability for his purpose. The token may come from anywhere or anybody, but its use and value is entirely determined by the one who is to use it. Even in a case of full trust and faith in the master, the disciple is asked by the master to test, judge and verify in every possible way the suitability of the token given to him. The gracious guru takes all care to help the disciple and not to force anything on him that he is not ready for. However, in some rare cases, that might be necessary to save the overall sadhana of the disciple, just as the surgeon might have to amputate some limb to save the whole body from decay.

The great gurus do not forget to emphasize to their disciples that *sravan* (hearing) the teachings must be followed by *manan* (inquiry) before the *nidhidhyanan* (application) can begin. Very great emphasis is laid on the middle part, inquiry, before acceptance and application. This was the method of Babaji in his teaching; whatever came was put to a rigid test before acceptance. For a disciple, whatever comes to him in aid — tokens, symbols, murtis, or

mantras for his sadhana — is valuable if he considers it to be sacred for him after it passes through all his tests.

No one using a murti, or allowing and encouraging its use in prayers and worship, considers it to be one with the ultimate reality. But the murti has its use in helping to develop knowledge and bringing us into the presence of that reality. The one stands in relationship to the other as *sadhya* and *sadhan* — the end to be attained and the means to be used, the path and its end. If we aim to reach a summit, we take the help of steps to climb. The summit and the steps are not identical. For those who are already there and also for those who do not want to be there, the stairs have no use, but those who are at the bottom and want to reach the summit can solicit the help of the stairs.

The ultimate reality, the Supreme One, is not cognized by the senses nor expressed in words. Those who talk about it say it is infinite, formless, all consciousness and bliss and other such things. The reality is known only to the realized soul or the great mystics, who are very few in number. The *sadhak* (spiritual practitioner) may have the full vision of God as his goal — a vision of God as He is, the Infinite. When he has his vision, he is face to face with his God. There is no aid or murti there. But this comes only at the culmination of his journey. So long as he is on the path, some aid in the form of a murti or symbol is helpful. When he reaches his goal, he can dispense with the aid in the form of murti or symbol.

Once there was a great saint, a realized soul, living on the banks of the Ganges in Uttar Kashi, high up in the mountains. When he was in his hut, the sadhus from adjoining places would come to him for spiritual instruction. His discourses on the Vedas, Upanishads, and other scriptures were highly appreciated and benefitted innumerable seekers after truth. One day while sitting with the sadhus for his discourse early in the morning, he told a disciple that he wanted water to drink. The disciple, who was a faithful follower of his master and of very sharp intelligence, was surprised at this order. It was very cold and drinking water might be painful; moreover, the master had never asked for drinking water in the morning before this. But obeying his master, he went to the Ganges nearby and filled his lota with water for him.

His master was already engaged in his discourses with the sadhus when the disciple drew his attention and offered the lota to him. The master shouted, "I wanted water from you, not from your lota." Everyone was surprised at the outburst, but it actually came as a great revelation to the disciple and answered a puzzle in his mind.

The master was a realized soul. He knew everything about reality, the ultimate and absolute, the supreme Brahman. His discourses were perfect and complete in every respect, the disciple felt, except for one thing: why did the master talk about deities and rituals which were not relevant for the understanding of the ultimate? Now the disciple realized the value of the lota in serving water. For

one who has reached the stream, the lota is not needed, but when you are away from the stream and want to drink, the lota comes into use. So too those who do not have their realization of Brahman must have some aid. The vast majority of the people are not on the bank of the river. All the murtis and idols of their gods and goddesses serve the same purpose as the lota in bringing spiritual water.

There are two other incidents which happened at Kainchi and have given entertainment to many in which Kishan's role was important. Although he did not participate in the play, he helped by putting the ball on the field. The first one that I relate here took place in Kainchi in late summer.

One night I was sitting in my room with some devotees enjoying our satsang. The whole atmosphere in the ashram was quiet. With the closing of the main gate, only a select few visitors came. The ashramites had retired to their rooms after finishing their food, and there was little movement in the ashram campus, giving the impression that it had become one with its surroundings. While sitting in our room, we heard loud laughter and heated arguments and shouting coming from the mothers' room which was adjoining ours. Babaji was sitting there along with Kishan. We knew this because most of the shouting came from these two and the mothers joined in with their laughter. We could not know what the subject was that had created so much enthusiasm, with both the participants trying to win over the other. This often happened with Kishan, who had the special privilege

of challenging Babaji every now and then. Kishan had earned the much coveted tribute of badmash (wicked fellow), Babaji's word of endearment for him. Such mock fights were very entertaining for those sitting with them. They were valuable because they brought out many events or incidents which would not be known otherwise. The story I narrate now is the outcome of the sittings in the mother's room that night.

While we were busy in our satsang, Kishan had entered our room, shouting with great excitement. He said they had been with Babaji and while talking of certain incidents, questions and arguments were raised in order to draw Babaji into a broil for the enjoyment of all. While everyone was busy hearing him and keeping eyes on him, someone looked at his feet. This was not unusual; one often looked at his feet. This time, it was noticed that the soles of his feet were pink in color. When he was asked about it, Babaji tried to cover up with his blanket and then tried to silence everyone by accusing them of being interested in trifling things instead of what he had been talking about. What was the use of wasting his time in talking when they themselves were not interested in his talk?

There followed a lengthy sermon on good manners, especially for the ladies. Babaji said, "When someone comes to meet you, or when you are sitting with someone, you do not know how to behave. Sit silently before him, hear him patiently, and then reply to his question if he asks you something. Then if you have something to tell him or to ask

any question, do that. This is what is called good manners. But you do not know this at all. If anyone comes to meet you, you rush toward him and do not allow him to sit but take your seat first. You are not interested in hearing him, and begin to examine him, looking all over his body. What you people do I have seen before. This is very bad manners.

“I was talking to you. What was my mistake in it? Not only were you not hearing what I had to say, but on the other hand, you started staring at me. Is it good and decent to peep and peer all over the body? What is on your minds? How should I know what was on my leg? I am not like you. I don’t care for and clean my body all through the day. I have so many things to do.”

Kishan continued, “We listened with attention, but our eyes were still fixed on the soles of his feet, and we repeated our question after he stopped talking. He replied most ungrudgingly and in a calm and placid tone, as if in return for our excessive curiosity. He said that while going by the car in the morning, he had got down to urinate. He had to walk over the sands that had been deposited on the road by the over-flooded river. Then he had to walk a little distance to find a clean place to sit. Then he got into the car, spent the day with the Soni’s in their house in Bhowali, and returned in the evening. And now sitting with them talking, he learned from them that there was a pink color on the soles of his feet. He had no knowledge of it, nor did he have time to look at it. What would be his interest in

examining his soles? Now because of their curiosity he had taken notice of it.

“Babaji said that at first he could not understand how it had gotten there, but now he knew. He said he had walked some distance on the sand which was a yellowish-pink color, not like the color of the sand that we know. Now he understood that it was the color of the sand that had come onto his foot. It was so simple a thing, and we were making so much fuss about it. This was our very nature, getting interested in all kinds of things and then, when we do not understand them ourselves, we trouble others. That is why we were troubling him all this time.

“When someone challenged his explanation, Babaji said that he had spoken the truth. ‘If you do not believe in my statement, then go and inquire from Dada whether I walked over the colored sand on the road. Dada was with me. Then you will believe me. You do not believe me, but you believe everything Dada says to you. You can go to him.’”

So Kishan came rushing. He told us what had happened in their sitting with Baba and asked me to verify whether the red marks on his soles were the result of walking on the colored sand. When I verified his statement, Kishan was disappointed to a certain extent. The high enthusiasm was gone, and he stood still, vacillating about what was to be done now. But when I continued, he listened very carefully, his mood changed, and he rushed back to Babaji. I had said that Babaji was correct about his walking on the sand, but then I added that I had also walked on the sand with him.

There had been red marks on his soles but nothing on mine. This is what Kishan wanted, and he rushed back with it. We also moved in behind him when he asked the question, "Why was there no mark on Dada's soles when both of you had done the same thing?" The laughter broke out, spreading over the whole place and drawing more people there.

Babaji was laughing. He behaved as if he had lost his case and there was nothing more to do about it, so he was retiring from the fray. But after repeated questions he said, "Dada is in league with you. He looks at you, and he does as you want him to do. He does not care for me." But when they pressed him to tell them the whole thing, he said, "Do I care to remember what happened in such a minor affair? I remember nothing about it. Moreover, what have you to do any more with me? You go to your Dada. He will fashion a story for the enjoyment of all, without bothering about what is correct or not. This is what you people enjoy. You ask him and he will agree. I have nothing more to do with it nor is there any use sitting with you. I shall go to my room and sleep in peace, away from your shouting and jubilation."

The sitting ended. Some went away with Babaji, and I also got up to go. But Kishan was still there, and he joined with others in their interest to hear the whole story from me.

The story began one morning during the summer at Kainchi. Barman had come from Delhi in his car and was staying in the rest house nearby. He would come to the ashram in the morning and stay there for the whole day.

One morning when he was sitting with Babaji along with others, Babaji stood up, caught hold of my hand and moved. He asked Barman to come with him. Others also wanted to join, but he stopped them all. Only Barman and myself were with him. Coming to the gate, he got into Barman's car, which was waiting there, and asked the driver, Habib, to start. We were going ahead, but did not know what was to be our journey's end. It might be Ranikhet or Almora or any other place. Then Babaji asked Habib to turn to the right, and Barman inquired whether we were going to Karkarighat. Had he known, he would have brought his camera. Without giving any reply to him, Babaji focused our attention on the river nearby, which was in high flood and striking the rocks below. The water which was rising as high as springs attempting to reach the sky was not clear nor muddy, but of yellowish color and full of sand. We had travelled several miles by its banks but had taken no notice of it. We noticed it only when Babaji brought our attention to it.

After that, we became very interested in that and in nothing else about our journey. Babaji was talking about the flood, wherefrom it comes, where it merges with other rivers, and all about it. Then he said there was such a flood in 1921. He had seen it while he was moving in these areas. And after that, this one had come after five decades.

Our car stopped. Many vehicles were standing nearby, stranded. Seeing Babaji, many persons came to him and said that they were on the way to the Almora side, but had to stop because the road had become unsafe due to the

flood. They urged Baba not to go any further ahead on that road. He heard them and then said that we would go and see for ourselves, and if going proved risky, we would return. So we moved on and covered several miles driving in the sand deposited on the road, until the car got stuck. After Babaji had come out of his seat, we also got out of the car. He caught hold of my hand and said, "Chalo."

Barman was very much perturbed. The car would not move in spite of all efforts. He appealed to Baba to do something to rescue the car. There was no one coming that way from whom help could be sought. Babaji did not stop, but moved ahead, saying that they need not worry, a gang of road repairers would come and help him to extricate his car. It was difficult for Barman to believe this, and he said that no such gang had been seen over the whole way they had covered. While this was going on, Babaji and I kept moving ahead. We moved quite a long distance, and looking far behind us, I noticed that Barman and Habib were struggling to get the car out.

We moved further along and could not see them anymore however much we might strain our eyes. Babaji stepped aside to urinate and then stood there silently, looking at the mountain ahead. I also stood there with my eyes blank. I cannot remember what I was thinking. After some time, he said, "Let us return. It is already late. We have to go far and do not know how long it will take to return." While we were returning, Babaji was not talking, and seemed to be brooding over something in his mind.

After some time we joined Barman and Habib, who had freed the car and were waiting for our return. They were happy to see us and narrated the hard time they had with their car. They had given up all hope of getting the car out of the deep sand when half a dozen road repairers who were returning this way came to their rescue. With their help they were able to get the car out. Habib drove slowly and then suddenly stopped. Just in front of the car, a big slab of the road had cracked and was about to fall down. We were looking at the flood, marvelling, when we heard Babaji advising us, "Take the name of Hanumanji. Remember Hanumanji." He asked Habib to move slowly, saying that there would be no danger for us. So Habib moved his car; just as he passed the slab of road, it fell down into the river. Babaji was silent but he knew how dangerous our move had been and how miraculously we had been saved. After we had gone some distance, Barman pointed my attention to Babaji's palms, which had turned pink. I had noticed that before and also the soles of his feet, but I stopped Barman from talking about it.

When we reached the gate there were many persons assembled on the road awaiting Babaji's return. The ashram was also full of visitors who had come to see him. There was a car waiting at the gate and Soni's son, Bikram, was standing there. Babaji got out of the car and began shouting and abusing me: "You do not care for the time of my engagement. We were to go to the Soni's in the morning. You knew that. It is noon now, and they have been waiting

for me. Bikram came on time, but there was no trace of you.” The shouting had its effect in keeping the people away.

We got into Bikram’s car, but Babaji would not allow Barman to join us. When we reached the forest rest house at Bhowali, the whole family of Mr. Soni was waiting for Babaji. They had some relations who had specially come for Babaji’s darshan. Babaji said that he was late because I did not remind him that we were to be with them for the day. It was already late, and there was not much time that could be spent in the drawing room sitting with him.

After a few minutes, Babaji asked Mrs. Soni to bring his food. The food was brought, and while eating it, he was all praise. He said how much he enjoyed it, and moreover, everyone who has taken his food here talks about it. The time spent on food, and talking in such high terms about its quality, served several other purposes than just feeding him. Whatever they had missed waiting for him, was fully compensated. The pensive mood was gone, and everyone was cheerful. Moreover, by the time he had finished his food, it had gotten so late that the others whom he had kept waiting were sent to eat, and Babaji took rest. The bed was laid for him. He sent me away, asking me to finish my food and return to him, and not to sit with the others opening my bag of gossip. He said that they were all tired from waiting so long for him and making arrangements for his visit, and my gossip could wait for some other time as they must have their rest.

I finished my food and came back to him. He was on his bed, covered with a bed sheet and lying with eyes closed. When I entered, he did not open his eyes but only indicated the place where I was to sit. Mrs. Soni came, saw Babaji was asleep and looking at his soles noticed the pink color, faded but still distinct. She asked me by her gestures, since Babaji was sleeping, how they came to be like that. My reply through the gesture of my hand and mouth was that she should not talk about it. Then she whispered in my ear that her sister and others were waiting for me in another room, and I should go with her and sit with them. When I tried to get up to accompany her as she requested, Babaji said, "Where are you going? You must stay here near me." So I had to keep sitting there.

The time passed like this until Mrs. Soni said it was time for tea. Babaji got up and said he had had a good sleep which he needed much. We assembled outside for tea; everyone in the house was waiting for Baba to come out and sit with them. He had several anecdotes to narrate for the enjoyment of everyone. He was talking all the time, without giving any chance to anyone to talk or ask any question. It was getting late, and looking outside, he suddenly said that it was time to return, as he had been out for the whole day and had kept so many persons waiting. So there was no question of staying any longer. Everything was managed so neatly. There had been no chance for anyone to ask any embarrassing questions regarding Mrs. Soni's

experience of the pink soles. We got into the car, and Bikram drove us back to the ashram.

It had been while sitting with him that they had all noticed his soles being pink, even though by that time they had much faded and the marks on the palms had vanished. The marks had been very deep when I first noticed them, sitting with him in the car. By the time Barman noticed, only the palms were actually red, and they were not so red as in the beginning. The same was the case of Mrs. Soni when she saw the color of his feet in her house late in the day.

The story was told. I had to repeat it several times while I was in Kainchi. It was being retold through many mouths with numerous additions and alterations, according to the interests of the narrator and his audience. Babaji knew everything that was going on. The next day I was alone with Babaji in his room when he said, "You have narrated your story to everyone. You are busy for the whole day in making everyone happy. Whenever anything comes before you, you cannot rest until you have narrated it to others. You should not talk to everyone of everything that happens before you. Particularly those things that cannot be easily believed should not be talked about at all. You start relating your story to everyone without any thought of whether it can be understood or believed by them."

I was standing by his cot looking at him. After some time I just ventured to say, after feeling bold enough, "Hanumanji saved us when we had no chance of coming back alive. Hanumanji actually took us out of the jaws of death."

Looking at me he said, “Hanumanji is always busy doing his work. What need does he have to tell anyone? He is only interested in doing his work.”

There was also another occasion when Hanumanji saved our lives. In 1972, during Holi, we were going to Chitrakut by taxi. Babaji was sitting beside the driver, and Siddhi, Jivanti and myself were in the back. We were nearing Chitrakut when a fully-loaded truck collided with our taxi, smashing the engine completely. We all escaped with only a jerk. People came rushing to us. Babaji was saying, “How Hanumanji has saved all! What would have happened? Ma would have asked me, ‘Baba you took my son and daughters with you and where have you left them behind?’ Kamala would have said, ‘What have you done to me?’ What reply could I have given? But Hanumanji has saved everyone.”

While sitting with him many questions would run through my mind, and even though there was no interest in seeking a reply to any of them, there was some interest in playing with them. When one picks up sugarcane from the roadside stall and extracts the juice by crushing it with his teeth, he gets the joy of the juice and also the joy of chewing and noticing how the teeth work. So I did not come to any conclusion about whether he was actually Hanumanji, or what it was that prompted him to take us for a ride on the Almora road and the Chitrakut road knowing fully well of the danger waiting ahead. I do know that he

was not unaware. Why did he do it? Even though it is better to leave these questions alone when they arise in the mind, one always returns to them. But they remain a mystery. When it is no longer a mystery, then one no longer need return to it.

People who visited Babaji in his ashram might have noticed how very busy he was in looking after every aspect of their lives when they were with him, not merely food and shelter and the physical needs of comfort and rest, but also the needs of mind and spirit. Some people may not miss his talks, filled with their sober undertones about our duties and responsibilities, but everyone misses the sallies and shouts, abuses and sarcasm, that he used freely on his chosen few. This was entertainment, recreation for all around, and a sure cure for a dull and overtaxed mind. Babaji used these devices to teach something valuable, adding sauce and spices to make the talks palatable, just as food is made appealing for those who would not otherwise go for it. Sallies, sarcasm, jokes and humor in expert and benevolent hands are the best nutrition to take. Babaji never forgot that. The teachings given by these methods are remembered, and much benefit is derived from them.

Those who do not feel shy to admit that Babaji's teachings have been valuable and are still with them, confess how sometimes Babaji forced the teachings on them, even when they were not interested. These people bear testimony that life with Babaji was not merely of cheer and free from worries, but was also a life of moral and

spiritual enrichment. Sometimes the teachings served some specific purpose for an individual. Food for the body was given through others, but food for the mind and the soul all came through him alone.

Jokes and humor are enjoyed more when some individual, well known and nearby, is used as a target for the abuses and sallies. Babaji had many such targets handy, and I happened to be one of them. In the beginning there might have been some trace of embarrassment on being put on the dock, but it disappeared in no time. It was an innocent humor, and was known as such by everyone near to him. It was different with the others, the newcomers and outsiders, but with the devotees, it was a favorite treat from Baba and they would collect as much as they could. The attacks or abuses came in different ways under different conditions, but it mostly centered around the foolishness and lack of intelligence of Dada.

“You do not have any brain, what would you understand?”

“Your Dada is a fool, he cannot understand anything.”

“He has been teaching students all through his life. In the process he has spent however much intelligence he had. I do not know how he can teach without any intelligence.”

“If you want, you can put some brains in him, but it is beyond my power. When I try to tell him something he not only does not hear me, but gives his sermon to me.”

These were the major part of the abuses and were always kept handy for use.

Sometimes abuses or criticisms were used to express what was hidden in the minds of others. There were some people who, while collecting their prasad, felt that they had not been given enough. No indication of this was given to anyone. When I came out with the packets, Babaji took one from my hand, opened it, and scrutinized the contents in the packet. How many puris? How many pieces of potatoes? Then he raised his face fully displeased and hurled the abuses, "Dada has become a confirmed miser. Can anyone give so little prasad to people? I do not know wherefrom he learned it. I could never think of doing such things. He is bringing disgrace to all."

The abuses served their purpose. The people with the complaint in their minds were satisfied. Babaji knew their problems, and this was also consolation given to those who had some ax to grind with me. It was also a warning for those engaged in various work in the ashram that nothing could escape his notice.

There were many persons coming and going, all taking away their prasad packets. People repeating their visit were not refused another packet. Some persons who were sitting with Babaji felt in their hearts that this was a waste of money in the name of prasad. So much was being given! So many times! Then Babaji came out with another outburst: "Dada will squander away everything. He is completely undependable. How can one who cannot take care of his own things, protect yours? It is a mistake to expect such things from him. It is so much prasad! Full packets given to

anyone, when the whole of it is not eaten, but thrown away? But what can I do when he will not obey me at all?"

There were many other incidents, mostly relating to the preparation and distribution of prasad in the ashrams, for which I was used to justify Babaji's actions. Preparing and serving prasad was a very elaborate affair and under his strict vigilance. The quantity, variety, quality, purity and time and methods of distribution of the prasad were all decided by Babaji. Puri and potatoes, sometimes supplemented with halwa and sweets, were commonly used. One day, however, Babaji told me that there were many bags of *gram* and they should be used in preparing prasad. The gram was soaked in water for the night, and after being washed and cleaned, was fried with spices. But before it could be given to anyone, Babaji checked it himself, emphasizing the importance of prasad.

In the afternoon, when the Prasad, the *chana* packet, was being distributed, he took one for himself, which was very unusual, and put some in his mouth. He was all praise for it and finished half of the packet. He said in Rameshwaram and many other famous temples such prasad was distributed all year round. Whenever he visited those temples, he would take it. Not only was it very pure and sacred as prasad, but it was easy to carry and eat. It was not so with puris and potatoes. It became something of special pleading in favor of its use, but he knew no doubt it served its main purpose as prasad, but it did not serve the other purpose: a whole meal for the stomach. The result

was that he told me that we would not have any more chana the next day, and that puri and potatoes were to be given. This was done accordingly.

He continued, “We have so many bags of gram and spices. But we cannot do it as Dada wants me to stop that and give puris. Dada does not take chana as prasad. There is no way of arguing with him. He will do what he likes to do. So what can I do? I told him to do what he liked.”

Then he asked someone sitting behind him whether he had had the chana before and what he thought of it as prasad. When he said that it was good, Babaji raised his finger and said that now we see that there was nothing wrong, but still he had to discontinue it. This continued for some time more, and everyone sitting there enjoyed it. We all knew that puri and potato prasad was used by many as a whole meal. The talk of puri was more enjoyable and tasteful coming out of Babaji’s mouth than the taste of the puri in your own mouth. I was standing beside him but was looking at the old devotees sitting there. They were all looking at me, giving me all felicitations for sparking off this dialogue unexpectedly.

These are a few of the examples of how I was used as the target for Babaji’s choicest missiles or reprimanded for unpardonable foolishness. During the last year of his stay in Kainchi, they became almost a whole-day affair. One day he was doing this while he was alone in his room with Siddhi Didi. She asked in mild protest why he abused me when I had done nothing to deserve his abuses, nor was I present

to hear or reply to them. He rebuked her by saying that she had nothing to do with this. He was abusing Dada. He wanted to test if Dada got angry any more. It was entirely between Dada and himself, so how did she come into that? Many times when things were going on like this, Kishan would be present in his room along with a few others.

While talking to mothers and Didi one day, Babaji said to Didi as if in confirmation, “Dada does not get angry anymore.” Didi agreed, but added a small rejoinder that sometimes it returns. But he was emphatic: no, it was not so.

I knew from the very beginning that these sallies were not only harmless, pure, and innocent humor for the enjoyment of so many persons, but also an important teaching for me, however hidden it might be from others. It was to save me from my growing estimation of myself and my pride at the rising crescendo of praise that was coming from many quarters. If he had not put me on my guard from the very beginning, I would have fallen an easy victim to my high and inflated self-esteem, and my pride and anger would have been the end of everything valuable in my life. This idea of saving me had taken root in the early days and became more firm day by day.

What a grace it was! Let it be far from my mind that I was the solitary recipient of it — just the opposite. His grace goes to everyone coming to him. We only have to collect it. It took me much time to realize that the ever-gracious one, who is gracious to all, has given us all shelter.

An incident which took place in May 1972, in Kainchi, also comes before my mind in full vision, as if on the television. Babaji had spent the whole morning giving darshan to visitors. Then he entered his small room, as was his practice, before taking his bath and food. Finding Babaji in the room and the door open, several persons entered, including some elderly ladies who had been waiting for him. The room became full. An old lady sitting there moved toward me and wanted to touch my feet. I would not have it. She was old, like my mother, and I could not think of it coming to me from her. I tried my utmost to avoid it, but she was persistent. Seeing this conflict, Babaji shouted why was I not allowing her to bow? What was the wrong in it when she was so keen? When I said I did not like it, again he asked me why. I made my case by saying that she was of my mother's age and was worthy of my respect, and that the thing which I fear most was that this will make me proud. "I will become vain and arrogant."

His reply was quick. "No, you will not become a victim of pride."

I cannot say that I have been able to succeed in my venture, but I just want to emphasize that Babaji was cognizant of it and gave me protection through his unfailing grace.

Along with their use as enjoyment for all, in the later days there was also another purpose hidden behind Babaji's abuses and sallies. People were accustomed to them and relished them as the very sauce of life, but could not

understand why this sudden spurt. He started using them in the latter days of his life at Kainchi, more or less indiscriminately. They were used extensively with anyone and everyone as the target. In the sittings with the mothers no one was spared. Babaji was using them solely for the purpose of diverting everyone's attention away from him. Others must not be curious or interested in him and his doings anymore. No one must realize where he had reached and what was to come. Everyone must be kept in darkness about him and his moves.

How could this be done? The lesson was taken from the wise mother's way of dealing with her ever solicitous, active children while she goes about doing her own work at the same time: give them toys to play with, new toys, more toys, so that they are tied down with them with no time to look at her. Baba had withdrawn within. Life was more or less a shadow play for him. He had no interest in anything or in any person. The body was there and its activities continued, but everything was being done under pressure, under some compulsion, and people must not suspect what was going on. Their minds must be turned away from him and kept engaged in other things.

One day he was sitting on the porch in the morning surrounded by devotees. A Western lady who was staying in the ashram came and took her seat in a corner. She was old and well-known among the Western devotees who had come to Babaji. Talks were going on in Hindi, and although she could not follow, she focused all her attention on him.

Perhaps Babaji wanted to discourage this. He began asking me all kinds of questions about her. Then he asked me to inquire about her age. I told him that this must not be done because it was not proper etiquette and, moreover, what had he to do with her age?

The next afternoon he was sitting before the showers in the back of the ashram. The main gate was closed so there would be no more visitors to meet. At these times Babaji was in no hurry for anything, and there was no need for any vigilance about the entry of visitors, distribution of prasad, or tending to the special needs of devotees who had come from outside. Sitting there in the afternoon along with Babaji, everyone was enjoying their time with him.

The old lady came and took her seat toward his feet where I was standing. She got settled and tried to guess what was going on there. Babaji looked at me and told me again to ask her the same question about her age. He was reclining on the cot, resting his head on his upraised hand. When I said such questions were considered to be bad manners, he sat up and started looking around. "Well, well, they do not disclose their age. But what is wrong with it?" Then, turning to Kali Babu who was sitting before him, he asked the others why Kali Babu did not disclose his age. Everyone started laughing and enjoying the joke. Kali Babu also joined with them without being the least nervous or embarrassed. He had already become conditioned after going through many such experiences. Babaji continued,

“Old people who want to get married again hide their age, but that is not the case with Kali Babu.”

This was already too much for Kali Babu, and so to end it I said, “You also do not tell anyone your age, so what is wrong with Kali Babu?” This brought fresh laughter from everyone, and Babaji agreed that he also did not disclose his age. That was enough for that day.

There were other such episodes which were enacted when he was in his room or sitting with the mothers. As he started spending more time within the room, setting aside his habitual program of staying out and giving darshan, they became more inquisitive about it. He had to be protected from their gazes and queries.

Our time at Kainchi was coming to an end. Didi’s college vacation would be over within a few days, and we were to return. Didi’s sister had also come. She had decided not to return to her office, but to spend her life in Kainchi and Vrindavan under the shelter of Babaji. Didi and her relations were worried about her decision. They felt that this was not the stage of her life when she should take to religious life, giving up her duty toward her family and relations. They did their best to persuade her, but with no effect.

One day while Babaji was sitting inside his room with many around him, Didi spoke of this problem. Didi was upset and felt that Babaji should persuade her sister to return. Babaji heard what everyone had to say about it and then pointing to Didi said, “Didi is very smart. She will not

leave her sister here. She will handcuff her and drag her away. Don't you people worry about it."

A chorus of laughter was the response that came. People were looking at Didi with great admiration for how Babaji had appreciated her ability. The sitting continued for some time, and within a few minutes after they had left Babaji's room, the incident reached everybody's ears in the ashram. Babaji had scored something that would keep him safe for a day or two. Babaji's prophecy was correct. Didi's sister returned to her job at the expiration of her leave.

Every year, provisions for the ashram would be collected during the months that Babaji was in Kainchi. But in 1973 it started much earlier and was more or less completed by June. The most striking thing was that the year's provisions were ordered in a large quantity, out of proportion with what used to be done every year. One indicator of this was that seventeen truckloads of firewood were purchased, which was unusual for the normal needs of the ashram. The wood was in big logs, which were to be cut in pieces. The woodcutters came, but some of them did not have axes. Babaji told me to give money to Bhairav so he could bring axes from Haldwani. They were brought at night and I kept them on the shelf in the prasad room. Handles had to be provided for them before they could be used.

When I went to Babaji's room the next morning, the mothers were all there. He asked me what I had done to get the axes needed in the ashram. I told him that I had them but before they could be used, the carpenter would have to

come and fix the handles in them. He asked me to bring them to him as he wanted to see them. He looked at one ax and turned it on every side, saying it was good, but instead of handing it back to me, he pointed it at the head of the mother sitting near his cot. Waving it, he said, "You useless one, I will kill you."

I asked him not to do so. He shouted, "Why not, why not?"

I said, "Who would feed you if you kill her?"

He came out with his outburst, "Oh, she feeds me? She eats so much that by her ceaseless eating she has become a round wooden rolling board for bread. What do you know?" The immediate return was giggles and laughter all around. This was enough to keep the mothers engaged for the whole day so he could be free from their gaze. Such episodes and events became a regular affair as he started spending more time inside his rooms.

In the morning before Babaji came out, the mothers would assemble to perform their arti and prayers, their most enjoyable experience of the day. Seeing them getting busy with their arti, I stood aside watching. All the rituals were gone through, and Babaji was on his cot receiving the arti and giving the impression of being a sitting idol, lost in meditation, when he was actually a very active and playful one. Sometimes he would snatch the incense burner from someone's hand and wave the incense before them all. These practices had gone on for a long time, and were enjoyed by the mothers as a rare privilege. Babaji would not

permit any others such a display of arti and puja with him in the center as the deity for worship. But this was a concession to the mothers in response to their deep love.

While staying at Allahabad in winter months, he would sit on the verandah for a long time after finishing his toilet, allowing the mothers to perform whatever pujas or rituals their religion stipulated for them. Ma and Maushi Ma and other ladies who were staying in the house would gather around. His behavior with them was unique. He readily yielded to all their demands in performing their pujas and sat patiently without resisting any of them. His behavior reminded the mothers of the docile child permitting its mother to do all her washing and anointing of her child. They would begin by making him sit on a small bench and helping him clean his teeth. He would use a small neem twig for the toothbrush. Maushi Ma would place a towel around his chest and stand behind him, holding it with her hands. Seeing his interest in the brush and cleaning his teeth, Maushi Ma said one day, "You do not have any teeth, but you go on cleaning so vigorously." Everyone started laughing.

"No, no, Maushi Ma I have my teeth." And then he opened his mouth for her to see. While she was looking into his mouth he inquired of her, "Are they there or not? How many are there? Was I wrong when I said I had my teeth. Now you have seen for yourself."

While he was showing his teeth to Maushi Ma for her to count them, many others scrambled round to help. Maushi

Ma said there were three teeth, and he accepted this as a validation of his statement. There was so much joy for everyone that the mothers forgot what they had to do next. The reminder came from him. “Maushi Ma, please apply the sandal paste. Ma, where are your *tulsi* leaves? If I don’t let you do it now, you will accuse me later. Now finish it quick.”

When they got busy with their work of anointing his forehead with sandal paste and fixing the tulsi leaves on his toes, he got busy in looking toward the gate and inquiring if the *jaleebi* treats had been brought or not. Hearing that they had not come, he started his work by shouting at me, “All your work is done like this. Nothing is done in its proper time. When you know what work is to be done and when it is to be done, why do you not do it in advance? The work that you have to do tomorrow, do it today, and the work that is to be done today, do it now. I always follow this rule and I never face any difficulty with my work. But who will teach you all this? I cannot teach you.” After all the sobriety and solemnity of pujas, a new round of entertainment was needed, and I was very handy for that.

The man finally came with the jaleebis, and Babaji’s attention was immediately shifted toward that. “Take them from him and bring them to me. People are waiting for them. They have their work to do and cannot waste their time waiting for your jaleebis. Do it quick. I will distribute them.”

The jaleebis were brought in a bucket. I stood before him with the bucket in one hand and, in the other, a pan of

warm water to rinse his hand from the sticky juice. It was a thrill to see him distributing prasad by his own hand and putting some in the mouth of one person standing nearby. Prasada is to be given in handfuls, not by counting the pieces. This goes on and everybody got his or her share.

He looked around to see if anyone had missed his share, and his eyes fell on a small boy in tatters standing at the corner of the courtyard staring at him. He beckoned him to come, but the boy was too timid to move. The boy was brought and placed before him. Then Babaji took up a whole bunch of jaleebis from his bucket, and holding them on one hand, with the other he put them in the boy's mouth, one by one. All eyes were focused on the boy's mouth, eating slowly, and the outstretched hand that was putting the food in his mouth. Gone was the thrill and excitement. Everything ceased to move. This went on for some time. When the boy was fully satisfied and could not eat anymore, Babaji's hand was withdrawn from his mouth.

Among the silent spectators was the mother of the boy, standing apart. She was not only surprised but had actually become dumb and lifeless, and could not spread her hands to accept her share of the prasada from Babaji's hand.

When the spell was broken and people began moving around and getting busy, the story of the boy came out: he was six or seven, the son of the maid servant working in the house. The boy was not normal in his behavior and was below normal in his common sense, so he could not be of any use to his parents in the household work. Poor as they

were, they could spend little on his food and clothes, and being busy themselves, they had little time to spare for the care and comfort of the little one. He would accompany his mother when she came to do her daily work. Uncared for and unwanted by anyone, the boy had learned to stand aloof and not expect anything from anyone. But however much others might neglect and push him away, there was one to honor him and draw him near.

This was Babaji's way with everyone, but only those who come to him with an open mind and keep their eyes open can see it. There were those who thought that he should be only for them alone and should not look at others. Failing to get that, they often raised the slogan that he was partial to the rich and important. Babaji used to enjoy this reprimand and sometimes sitting with devotees of all kinds, rich and poor, big and small, he would speak out, "I am a baba of the rich people. I do not care about the poor." He cared for all, whoever came to him or remembered him.

At the end of July 1973, changes were taking place so rapidly regarding Babaji's program and activities that his usual routine of getting up from the bed, finishing toilets, sipping his cup of milk tea, and coming out to sit with people, had ceased to exist. It was taking all our efforts to get him to do the little that he was doing. While inside the room, everyone would be kept busy by massaging his body with oil while narrating some old events and anecdotes, one after another. Before they could finish their narration, he

would enthuse them with his queries and comments, displaying his deep interest in their stories.

It was on one of those days that I entered his room in the morning for my daily attendance. The mothers were already there. Their number was greater than it had been, as their entry and movements before him were not restricted as before. Babaji had become more considerate and pliable to their requests. The arti was given more time than usual and the talks were going on. Everyone was in a jovial mood. Babaji was encouraging them in every way to draw as much as they could out of this pool.

While this was going on someone mentioned something about how Draupadi spent money on prasad. Babaji joined them and began talking of how she had given money for Hanumanji's temple and how she would cry when he refused to take her money. Then he talked about her proposal of chartering a plane to take Babaji to America. He said that however much he might decline to go, there were many others who praised her and pressed her not to give up her plan. He added that many of them who would like to accompany him in his plane journey gave their names to her, and would you believe that even the mothers were eager to join the trip? I contradicted him, saying that this could not be true, and that his statements were based on some hearsay as jokes made at their cost. How could he talk like that about them?

Hearing me talk like that he actually sprang up on his bed, sitting erect, and began making gestures with his

hands. "You do not know anything about it, therefore you are talking like this. You, the ignorant one. But I know all about it and the preparations they have already done for their journey. You are challenging me? I know of the beautiful long frocks they have made for themselves." Then he indicated by the movements of his hands that these frocks were long enough to cover their whole body from the shoulder to the feet.

The description and demonstration was over for him, but it was impossible for many of the mothers to stand while laughing so loudly. Even breathing became difficult for some, and they could not speak out. The mothers, who were both thick and slim, started looking at each other. Some could not look at him anymore and came out of the room. Babaji was sitting silently, not looking at anything or anyone, so I also left the room. Seeing me, one of the mothers began pleading about how fantastic were his charges against them. She could not imagine how these things came to his mind. But she could not finish, as she was caught in her laughter while trying to visualize how she would have looked with her frock on. "How astounding, how absurd," was all that she could mutter.

There is one more story with Kishan that happened at Kainchi in 1973, almost at the very end of our stay. It was the month of June, about ten in the morning. Babaji was being persuaded to follow the daily routine he had observed during the last several years at Kainchi, when he would come out exactly at eight in the morning to give darshan.

He was expected to stay outside giving darshan until eleven, and then he would retire for his bath, food, and rest. These days he was late coming out in the morning and was returning inside much before eleven.

On this day his whole time schedule was set aside. Only after much persuasion could he be made to come out much after eight, and it was much before ten when he returned to his room. He was busy inside, not resting, but entertaining the devotees close to him and driving their inquisitive minds away from concentrating on him. As this was going on, Kishan came rushing out, shouting, "Dada, Babaji is sitting inside the room talking with us. His talk is about the persons who have been attending to him. Deriding and abusing you all the time, he took your name as one of them, and was talking about your way of working. How very foolish you are, he said, without any brains. It is very difficult to tolerate such persons. And then Babaji came out with the exclamation, 'Had I been Didi, I would have turned him out of the house. How she tolerates him, I cannot understand.' Everyone enjoyed this, including myself."

As Kishan reported this to the audience outside, it was like rainfall coming to the stream. Through the dry or the barren lands, and more so in the dry month, these streams shrink and become very feeble, to the distress of those who come to benefit from them. The streams get renewed vigor and energy with the onset of the rains. The purposes of everyone coming to the stream are not the same, but all who come are served. Every religious and spiritual

institution, big or small, has its own stream to cater to the needs of its visitors or members.

People talk of Kainchi or Vrindavan and other places as Baba's institutions, but it would be more appropriate to say that Babaji himself is the institution, the stream. The ashrams are the channels flowing out of it. They do not exist by themselves, but only by drawing from the source. These ashrams and temples with all their activities — pujas and prayers, bhajan and kirtan, feeding and serving people, assisting the helpless and curing the sick — were the visible streams flowing to all who desired to derive their benefits by visiting them.

But there were other, hidden streams which could be used and enjoyed only by those who were not in a hurry to fill their pitchers and buckets and run away. You could see how the life of the stream glides on, beyond all the bustle and commotion of the unending community of people who rush to draw from it, as if lost in its own musing, unmindful of everything else. This stream caters to the needs of the select ones who reside nearby and sit by the stream, just to be with it. Kishan sat by one of these slowly moving streams on its journey. The wind started blowing, raising waves and ripples and disturbing the smooth journey. The joy Kishan was having in the room with Babaji was not generally available for others any more. He came out with his full bucket to give a taste to those who could not reach the stream.

Kishan came to us in the early days of Babaji's visits, and that is why we include him among the old devotees. Moreover, the way he enjoyed Babaji's grace, his closeness to him, and his popularity with the devotees from the hills drew us close to him, but our meeting each other more or less ceased after Babaji took his samadhi. Kishan's visits to the ashrams were never frequent, but now he came even more rarely. Moreover, I myself would not be present when he did visit the ashram.

When I was in Kainchi in early 1976 for the meeting of the Trust, Kishan came one day to see me. I was sitting together with Inder and Siddhi when Kishan arrived. Remembering Babaji's love for him, I asked him to take an interest in Baba's ashram and to be active with it. He should visit and spend some time in serving Babaji. Little did I know that there was a veil of suspicion around him, making it difficult for him to accede to my request. He apologized to me for not being able to obey me and blurted out that he was accused of leaving Babaji and visiting other babas. He felt that since he was so much of a suspect he would not venture to have anything to do with the ashram work. I had to stop after that.

Kishan's experiences helped me to unlock many teachings and experiences that had not come easily before. They linked up many stray events and incidents, making them easier to understand. His role for me was something like the fuse wire: the fuse wire gives no light of its own but brings light by connecting together the elements that can

give it. That is how Kishan helped me see several things clearly which were otherwise dim or invisible. I remember with joy what I have gotten from Kishan, given out of his love for me and devotion to Baba. I treasure it as Babaji's gift to me, with Kishan as his medium for that.

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