

Embodied Spirit

PERHAPS NOTHING concerning Maharajji is more mind-stretching than the manner in which he related to the physical universe, especially to his own body. Although at first glance he seemed like an ordinary human body—and he seemed to go out of his way to prove that it was—there was ample evidence not only that it was not ordinary but, indeed, extraordinary beyond comprehension.

Perhaps most subtle was the attractiveness of his body. Although a passerby might have described him as a short, rotund, elderly gentleman, another look and such a description would have become irrelevant. There was a quality to Maharajji's body that made it compellingly attractive to us devotees. Most of us could be fulfilled hour after hour just by gazing at this form.

When I think of him now I remember his hands—not just holding his hands but watching the way they moved. His fingers were very flexible yet full of strength. When he was not using his hands they were completely relaxed and open, completely flat. The tips of his fingers had an unusual shape. More than his face, I remember his hands.

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He was spontaneity itself. He would assume amazing postures. He flowed like the Akash. He seemed totally fluid. His flesh had an amazing quality to it; it had a glow and a softness that was unusual, like a baby's skin.

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Sometimes the beauty of his body was so startlingly radiant it took your breath away. In the July heat of Vrindaban before Guru Purnima Day, he came out wearing only a white dhoti, and all I could think of was the description of Hanuman in the Ramayana: "A body shining as a mountain of gold . . ."

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I always expected to see him wrapped in his blanket. One day I came around the corner into the room and there he was, with only a sheet around his waist and legs. It was one of the most shocking things I had seen in my life, though it wasn't frightening. I don't know why. I'd seen photographs, but I wasn't prepared for seeing the vastness of who he was.

Another time I saw him sitting outside on the tucket with just a sheet around his waist. This time he seemed to me to be like an infant. Here was this massive being who looked like a delightful little baby, wrapped in his diapers and playing.

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My mother and aunt snuck into Maharajji's room when he was out taking a bath. They caressed his blanket and put it to their faces. Afterward they could only talk about how it smelled like a baby's blanket.

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At times he seemed fat and at other times thin; sometimes tall and sometimes small; now heavy and then again light. And his joints didn't function like ordinary joints.

Not only did he outrageously manipulate his own body, the one with which we were familiar, but he apparently took on other bodies at will.

Once I was alone in the night with Maharajji. We were in Vrindaban. He said to me, "Okay, you take me for a walk."

Maharajji has such a massive body, and I said, "Maharajji, how can I take you for a walk?"

But he insisted. I put out my hand, palm-up, and he put his force full-weight on my palm. I said, "Maharajji, you are too heavy."

He said, "Is it so? Then you put me somewhere."

So I found him a place to sit for a while. Then he said, "Now, you take me again." And this time, I found he was very light. Much lighter than a baby.

From that day onward, the feeling that he is walking beside me is still there.

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When he would appear in a village in his earlier years, he would often just play with the children, showing them incredible feats with his body. Every joint seemed as if it were not interconnected. I would never have believed it. Twenty of us were present when, to entertain the children, he brought his arms over his head from back to front without unclasping his hands.

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Once a famous orthopedist was visiting Maharajji. Maharajji showed him the way the right joint of his right arm could move in a very unusual way. The doctor examined it carefully, for he had never seen such a thing. Then he said, "Well, as a child you must have broken the joint and it never healed."

"Oh," said Maharajji, as if impressed. "Well, what about this one?" And then he did the same thing with the other arm.

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When they wanted to make the murti of Maharajji after he left his body, they came to me asking for some photo of him—the best one for a murti. I told them that I had known Babaji for so many years and had many hundreds of photos, no two alike. And Babaji himself—sometimes he was short, sometimes

very fat, sometimes quite slim. I have never been able to know which was the real Baba. You could give him any form you liked, but he could not be captured. He was like the air.

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The teenage daughter of a devotee sometimes stayed at the temple overnight. She watched Maharajji frequently and finally said to him, "Maharajji, during the day when all the people are around you seem so helpless and old. But at night, once the gates are closed, you are running about. How come?" Maharajji laughed.

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Mrs. Soni once visited Maharajji and he was not looking well. "Maharajji, you are not looking well at all," she said.

"Aren't I, Ma?" And then he did something with his body and he suddenly looked radiant. "How do I look now, Ma?"

"You look much better, Maharajji."

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A family was at the temple with their old grandfather. When they came before Maharajji he pointed at the grandfather and said, "We've met before." But the grandfather said he didn't think so. He was quite sure they had never met, but Maharajji was insistent. Finally Maharajji closed his eyes for a moment and then said, "Don't you remember? You carried my sleeping roll at the railway station."

At first the grandfather just thought Maharajji had mistaken him for someone else. But then he remembered that when he was eleven or twelve he had been on a bicycle trip with some schoolmates. His bicycle had broken down and his companions had gone on without him. He needed a few rupees to get the bicycle repaired but had none, so he went to the railway station, thinking that perhaps he could make believe he was a porter and carry someone's bag.

The problem was that he was very small, so the bag would have to be very light. He stood near the first-class carriages. Suddenly a man got off the train. He was wearing a suit and shiny shoes and a derby hat. He had a blanket roll, which he entrusted the boy to carry to a home at the edge of town. The roll was very light, but when they arrived the man gave the boy five rupees (much

more than the job was worth) and told him that he could come back and visit the next day if he liked. But the boy took the money, got his bicycle repaired, and went on his way. He never went back.

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Once a beggar boy came to our hotel. We gave him some food but the boy wouldn't leave. Finally he asked for a toy and we turned him out. Later, Maharajji said, "I came to your hotel but you turned me out."

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There were two sisters who revered Maharajji very highly. One of them went into the toilet and came out in an ecstatic state, saying, "I just had darshan of Maharajji in the bathroom!" This was at a home far from where Maharajji was at the time. The other sister rushed into the bathroom and what she found there was a huge cobra.

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Once when CS was washing Maharajji, he was thinking about Gorakhnath, who had no real body but would manifest different bodies. CS, meanwhile, was soaping and washing Maharajji and kidding with him, but this was in his mind as he was doing so. As he went to tie the dhoti on Maharajji, he experienced that there was nothing within it. And at the moment he had this thought, Maharajji turned and yelled at him, "Get out, get out, I'll tie my own dhoti."

THE EXTRAORDINARY postures into which Maharajji placed his body were no more random than anything else he did. Some of his older devotees got quite proficient in reading Maharajji's body language, for many of the positions were actual *mudras* (statements in form) that gave blessings, activated certain powers, or brought about certain changes in the environment.

Siddhi Ma was holding a picture of Maharajji in which he is lying on his side, a classic pretzel, with one hand on top of his head. She said that this *mudra* of hand on top of head means: "Don't worry about anything. I've got everything under control."

SOMETIMES HIS devotees apparently pulled upon him from two places that were quite distant from one another. At such times, rather than disappoint anyone Maharajji would demonstrate one of his neatest talents—that of appearing in two places at once.

Once Maharajji went to a barber to have his beard shaved. As the barber was working, he told Maharajji that his son had run away some time ago and that he did not know where he was. He was missing him terribly and worried about him. Maharajji's face was only half shaved, the other half still lathered up, but Maharajji insisted that he must go out just then and urinate. He returned shortly, the shave was finished, and Maharajji left. The next day, the barber's son returned to his father with a strange story. He had been living in a town over one hundred miles away, and the day before, this fat man, whose beard was only half shaved, had come running up to him in the hotel in which he worked. He had given him money and insisted that he return at once to his father, by train that same night.

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While staying at a devotee's house Maharajji asked to be locked in the room. The windows were barred and the door locked from outside. (Rooms in Indian homes often have heavy bars on the windows to keep the wild monkeys from coming in. They also have independent slide bolts on both the inside and outside of the door. Thus, if they are locked from the outside, they cannot be opened from within.) A short while later a devotee arrived, asking where Maharajji was going. The host said, "What? He's locked in the room."

"That's impossible. I just saw him on a rickshaw going toward another area."

My sister, at that time, received Maharajji at her door. "I want khichri. I'm not feeling good so I'll only eat khichri," he said.

Meanwhile, at the host's house, they opened the door and found the room empty, but none of the bars had been tampered with, so they locked the room again. After about an hour, they heard some sounds from inside the room. They opened the door and this time found Maharajji inside.

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Maharajji appeared at 3:00 A.M. in the room of an old woman in her locked house and said, "Why are you bothering me, Ma?" She had been praying to him at that time.

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Devotees had just completed the building of a new Hanuman temple for Maharajji in Panki, near Kanpur, and the time for the official opening ceremony was near. Maharajji was staying in Allahabad and had told everybody that he wouldn't personally attend the function. On the morning of the opening of the temple, Maharajji went into his room in Allahabad and asked to be left alone for a few hours. He was locked in from the outside. The next day some devotees arrived in Allahabad to give out some of the prasada from the puja in Panki. They gave some to Maharajji's host and they described the colorful puja and bhandara. They said that everything had gone off perfectly; Maharajji even came, despite his having told everyone in advance that he wouldn't.

"That's impossible!" said the host. "Maharajji was here in Allahabad the whole time."

"Well, he was also in Panki. He was at the temple from eleven to twelve o'clock," they replied.

IF YOUR KUNDALINI [SPINAL ENERGY] AWAKENS,
YOU CAN GO TO AMERICA
WITHOUT A PLANE

While visiting in Kanpur, a Nainital devotee had Maharajji's darshan. As he was leaving, Maharajji gave him a message to deliver to the temple upon his return to Nainital. The message was that they should expect Maharajji within a fortnight. When he got to Nainital the next day, the devotee went straight to the temple before going to his home. He wondered why so many people had come to the temple when Maharajji was away. He overheard them say that Maharajji was inside one of the rooms.

"I can't believe it," he said. "I just saw him yesterday in Kanpur. It's impossible."

"No, Baba has been here for fifteen days," they told him.

"But I've brought a message from him in Kanpur. He says that he won't be here for two weeks." The devotee approached Maharajji's room. "Babaji, what is this?" he asked.

"Hap! Get out! Go away! Don't tell anyone anything. You're telling lies!" Maharajji shouted at him.

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A devotee of Maharajji lived in Agra and hadn't had Maharajji's darshan for a few years. Upon hearing that Maharajji had come to New Delhi, the man talked with Maharajji over the phone.

"Why haven't you come to Agra? You haven't given me your darshan in so long. May I come to Delhi?"

Maharajji replied, "No. Don't come here. I'll come to Agra."

"When?"

"Soon."

The man couldn't accept Maharajji's word so he begged for permission to go to Delhi, but Maharajji insisted that he would visit the man in Agra. The devotee then hung up the phone, and as he turned toward the door he saw Maharajji standing there. The devotee fell at Maharajji's feet. Maharajji talked with him for three or four minutes then left to return to Delhi. The man again phoned the hosts in Delhi and they said that Maharajji had just gone to the bathroom a few minutes before. Then immediately afterward they said, "Oh, here he is now."

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Once at Neeb Karori a man wanted to travel with Maharajji to Vrindaban, and Maharajji didn't want to go. Maharajji said, "Lock me in this room. I have work to do." When the man returned from Vrindaban, he reported that he and Maharajji had had a wonderful time together. But when the room was opened, Maharajji was still within.

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A devotee who was attending Maharajji was once thinking of how Maharajji could be in more than one place at a time. Three times Maharajji said to him, "You go out and see what's going on in the other rooms." Finally the devotee went out into the hall. There were six rooms in the house and he saw Maharajji coming out of every one of them.

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A devotee had to leave the Hanuman temple at Nainital, where Maharajji was staying, to go to the plains on business. As he left he was sad, thinking that Maharajji might not be at the temple when he returned and that it would

be a long time before he'd be with him again. He was on a train that had stopped to take on water at a small station. Someone came to him and said, "Look over there. There's Neem Karoli Baba." The devotee thought, "This is strange. I left him in Nainital." He went to the other end of the platform and found Maharajji sitting there surrounded by devotees, behaving as usual. The men talked with Maharajji and also with the other devotees, and after a while Maharajji said, "Go back to your train. Otherwise you'll be left behind. It's about to start."

After finishing his business, the devotee returned to Nainital and found Maharajji still there. Maharajji hadn't left the temple the entire time.

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My mother once saw Maharajji in two places at once. She was in Bhumiadhar walking toward him when suddenly she saw another Maharajji, the same as the first. One was sitting on the roadside, the other in the forest. A few moments later, one form disappeared, and she spoke to the "remaining" form of Maharajji.

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On January 14, 1965, in the clothes closet of the darshan room in Dada and Didi's home, some footprints appeared on the wall, which they interpret to be Maharajji's and celebrate yearly with a bhandara. When they confronted Maharajji about the footprints, he said, "I came, but Didi caught sight of me."

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Once Maharajji was resting, and the Ma's sitting in the room had the sensation that Maharajji was not there. When they felt his energy return, they asked him where he had gone. He laughed, and when they said he could go to America without a plane, he upbraided them and laughed again.

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Once I was having lunch in America with a Nobel Prize winning physicist. He asked me about Maharajji and I proceeded to share a number of stories with

him. He found it all fascinating and could allow for the truth of all of it, until I got to the stories of how Maharajji could appear in two places simultaneously. To this the physicist replied, "That's impossible. The basis of physics is that something cannot be in two places at once."

"But you see," I said, "Maharajji did it anyway." (R.D.)

THERE HAVE BEEN NO explanations from Maharajji himself about the play of his body. However, this story suggests another reality in which, at least to Maharajji, it made perfect sense.

Once when we were in the mountains during a very cold spell, Maharajji put on nine sweaters. Later, at bedtime, he said, "You people think I do this for worldly reasons. Don't be silly," and he took off all the sweaters and the blanket and slept all night with nothing on.

ONCE YOU CAN allow for these phenomena that Maharajji manifested with his body, it is difficult to return to your concept of him as an ordinary mortal. But he put up a good fight to convince us of just that. He demonstrated some vanity, illness, aging (though the stories below suggest some confusion on that), and, ultimately, death. But for the devotees, all of this was just more of his play.

When Maharajji visited us on one occasion, he noticed a picture of himself in which he is laughing and in which his beard is quite long. He began abusing me, asking me why I hadn't told him his beard had grown so much. Why hadn't I had him cut it? "Now," he said, "it has ruined the whole picture!"

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During an evening darshan in Kainchi Maharajji had been in the back with the Ma's, who had just finished doing puja to him. He came out and sat on the tucket. He looked perfect: the most handsome, regal being. He had just been shaved and had a perfectly centered, round yellow tilak (marking of religious significance) on his forehead. He sat down like a king and we sat before him in silence for a long time. He seemed to be saying, "I'm so good-looking!"

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In an elevator in Bombay Maharajji looked at himself in a mirror and smoothed his moustache.

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About two weeks after we got to Kainchi Maharajji said, "Doctor, I have a headache," so I ran to the back rooms where I had my medical supplies and pulled out aspirin with codeine. I was thinking, "Now, really, do I want to give this man codeine?" He was, after all, an old man, and I didn't know what his response would be. As I was fumbling with my vials, Maharajji sent me a message that he didn't want a pill; he wanted an ointment. At the time I really wasn't very big on ointments, and all I had was pills, so I had to tell him that I didn't have any ointments.

Chaitanya came to the rescue, though, with some Essential Balm, a Chinese ointment that comes in a small, tightly sealed red container. Being very happy that a Western doctor had managed to get some balm for this poor old man who had a headache, I raced back to Maharajji, tripping over the devotees sitting in front of him, lunged over to him, and handed him the little container. And he said, "Oh, doctor! Your medicine is so good! This is wonderful! This is exactly the medicine I wanted!" He looked at it and tried unsuccessfully to open it. (He didn't have that much patience with these kinds of things.)

Then, putting the closed container on top of his head, he said, "Doctor! This medicine is so good. It's wonderful. It's taken away my headache completely. Oh, doctor, you're such a wonderful doctor! You're so good. Your medicine is wonderful. Everything is perfect. My headache is completely gone."

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One day Maharajji complained that he had a cold and needed socks and medicine. KK laughed and said, "Oh, Maharajji, there is nothing wrong with you. Why do you try to fool simple people like us?" Like a child, Maharajji laughed as if he had been caught at a trick, and soon he was better.

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In Vrindaban Maharajji was really sick. He'd been taking heart medicine for two years, because he'd had several heart attacks. Sometimes when he was sick he would call for me, and one such day we entered to find him sitting on his tucket. In front of him on the tucket was the largest handkerchief I've ever

seen, with which he kept blowing his nose. He was a very funny caricature of a man with a bad cold.

He said, "Oh, doctor. I'm terribly sick. Won't you give me some medicine?" I said, "Yes, Maharajji," and I asked him about his symptoms. I decided he had a cold, so I ran out to the bazaar and brought back, in three separate packages, homeopathic medicine, ayurvedic medicine, and Western medicine. I pointed out each one to Maharajji: "Here's the homeopathic medicine. Here's the ayurvedic medicine. And here's the Western medicine." (The latter was Vitamin C, aspirin, and Dristan.)

He threw aside the homeopathic and ayurvedic medicines and said, "This is the medicine I want." And he gobbled up the Vitamin C, the aspirin, and the Dristan.

Very often he'd say to me, "You know, Western medicine is very good." And he'd call me Doctor America.

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A doctor who had met Maharajji at least twenty-five years earlier came to visit the baba. After fifteen minutes, Maharajji said, "I have a pain, doctor. Will you massage my leg?" The doctor began massaging, using oil, and then said, "I've seen many old people and they stiffen, but there is no change in your nerves. In fact, your body seems younger than when I knew you in 1942."

Maharajji said, "Go! These doctors are fools. After all, one is born, he has to die. A saint told him about nerves. What does he know about nerves?" And Maharajji sent the doctor away.

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A woman once told Maharajji, "My relative's wedding is approaching. Maharajji, you'll have to attend."

Maharajji said, "I'll go to it," and he did—but not in his usual shape. He told her at the wedding that he was very hungry, and when she asked what he'd like to eat he replied, "Khir, khir, nothing else. Bring khir." She brought khir and when she went to bring some more, he disappeared. Sometime afterward, when she again met Maharajji, she rebuked him for not attending the wedding.

He shouted, "No, no! You fed me khir yourself. But you didn't bring me khir a second time, so I ran away. I had you there!"

THE GREAT SADHUS DON'T HAVE A HUMAN BODY. THEY ARE OMNIPRESENT. IF A SAINT CHANGES FORM, HE DOESN'T NECESSARILY HAVE TO TAKE ON A HUMAN BODY. THE SOUL IS THE SMALL FORM AND THE HUMAN BODY IS THE HUGE FORM.

At Neeb Karori, a Ma came to clean out the underground cave in which Maharajji spent much time in seclusion in those days. As she entered, Maharajji was sitting there with snakes wrapped around him. She told him she would not come in if the snakes were there, and she ran out of the cave. He called out to her not to worry, and as he stood up the snakes disappeared into his body.

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Once when we were in the forest in the dead of night, I said to him, "Show me God."

He said, "Just rub my belly." I got tired because it kept growing bigger and bigger, until it seemed like a mountain. He was snoring and the snore sounded like a tiger. It was just play, but if you were testing him he wouldn't show you anything.

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Sometimes when Maharajji lay on the tucket it was too small; at other times he was like a shadow, or a very small child under the blanket.

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When you walked with him he was sometimes huge and sometimes little.

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Before there were buildings at Bhumiadhar, there was just a little outhouse. Maharajji once needed to go to the bathroom, so Siddhi Ma obtained water in a

lota from a nearby house and waited outside. When Maharajji came out she saw his huge form and felt literally the size of a fly in relation to him.

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A devotee once told me that Maharajji always became very small whenever he stood before the Hanuman murti in Vrindaban. Of course, I then desired to see this phenomenon but said nothing of it to anyone. One day, just after lunch, when Maharajji usually rested in his room, I was standing alone before the murti. To my great delight, Maharajji arrived at the temple to take Hanuman's darshan. We were both leaning against the rail and he caught my attention with an intense stare, and as I looked at him he became smaller and smaller—each form fading out as a smaller form appeared. It looked very ethereal.

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Maharajji once said, "I am coming to America."

The Westerners asked, "In our hearts?"

"Nay," he replied, "In a body. Will you take me to America? Where will I stay?"

Once as Maharajji was leaving my house I was afraid he'd fall (he was an old man), so I caught his arm. He took my hand and pressed with such force (yet without showing any sign of exertion) that I was about to fall down. Then I realized he was not an "old man."

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In 1962 an old woman came for darshan of Maharajji. When she saw him she exclaimed, "How can Neem Karoli Baba be alive? He must have died a long time ago! My father was a devotee of Neem Karoli Baba, and my father said he knew Baba for forty years before that. I am seventy-three now; I last saw Baba when I was seven and he didn't look any different from the way he looks now." Maharajji upbraided her and wouldn't let others speak with her after that.

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Maharajji once said, "I used to come here to see that fakir who rides on a horse, that Gorashin Baba." (Gorashin Baba lived some three hundred years ago.)

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Once in Lucknow an eighty-year-old Moslem arrived, who said he had known Maharajji as an adult since he himself was ten or fifteen years of age. Maharajji said, "Don't believe him!" Another man of over eighty years said he knew Maharajji almost seventy years before, when the man was twenty years old, and that Maharajji had given him his blessing to take his first job.

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Several people were once discussing a saint who had lived some five hundred years earlier. Maharajji said, "Oh, I knew him."

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In 1961 Maharajji made a pilgrimage to Chitrakut with several devotees. While there, he stood on the banks of a river and kept shouting across it for a certain Gopal, a shepherd. Over and over he would call for him. No one knew of such a man, but Maharajji said that Gopal was a friend of his who would bring him many things. After much inquiry, it was discovered that four generations back there had been such a person who was devoted to such a guru. Gopal's grandson was eventually found, and he was a very old man.

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To one old woman who was confused by seeing Maharajji unchanged after so many years, he said, "Ma, I was dead. I have been reborn in the hills."