

The Family Man

ALTHOUGH HE MOVED about constantly, Maharajji was still a family man on many levels, though preeminently it was God's family with which he identified.

ALL WOMEN ARE MOTHERS AND SISTERS, AND ALL MEN FATHERS AND BROTHERS IN GOD'S FAMILY.

*THE WHOLE UNIVERSE IS YOUR HOME.
ALL ARE YOUR FAMILY.*

The way in which Maharajji said such things often conveyed the impression that he, who intimately understood reincarnation, was sharing with us a literal truth about our relationships with one another across births.

On the more mundane level, Maharajji was very much like a grandfather, especially to the Indian devotees. And as such he frequently gave counsel about family matters. The gist of this counseling was clearly to keep the family unit strong by properly honoring the roles involved.

A WIFE MUST SERVE GOD BY SERVING HER HUSBAND.

Maharajji most often instructed women to be loyal and patient, that this is what kept the marriages together, no matter whether a man was bad or good. For example, a wealthy family came with a modern daughter dressed in a pants suit (unusual in India), who had left her husband. Maharajji said in front of everyone, "Yes, he was wrong, but you shouldn't have been so impatient and gotten so angry." Maharajji was very hard on the young woman. He felt that if cultural changes occurred such that women no longer held the family together, all would be lost. He said, "This is why we don't have divorces."

WOMEN ARE HIGHER THAN YOGIS IF THEY ARE LOYAL TO THEIR HUSBANDS.

"You don't even care about your old father," Maharajji said to a devotee. "Every day you should take sweets to your father. If a man has a father and mother, he needs no God. It is easy to pray to a murti but hard when the murti speaks back." Then he made the man hold his ears (an Indian form of promising, similar to "cross your heart") and promise that every day he would attend to his father and bring him sweets. The next evening the father came to Maharajji. "What is this?" Maharajji said, "Your son loves and serves you and you do nothing for him. You should make your son a new suit. He is your devotee."

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Maharajji said that mothers were next to God, and he made them in this form in order to share himself, because only God and mother can forgive all faults.

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(The mother of one of the Western devotees visited India and was asked what she experienced with Maharajji.)

I felt that I had a certain "status." The word status is such a negative word in my life that I hate to use it, but I guess perhaps it applies. There was some kind of respect because I was a mother, which I felt was accorded to me by Maharajji. I had never gotten this from anyone else, certainly not in America. It was very nice.

I know that Maharajji also gave such respect to Krishna Das's mother. The sanctity of motherhood was emphasized. All women are mothers. Intellectually I have felt that there are good mothers and bad mothers and the fact that you've given birth to someone doesn't really say much. Yet, with him, the feeling was right.

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If my mother did not have her cloth over her head, Maharajji would say, "No, Ma. That is not the way," and he'd fix her cloth.

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Often I would see old women feeding Maharajji directly. He said, "I can feed men, but women must feed me because all women are the Mother."

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"You are angry with your wife. You do not treat your wife well. She is Lakshmi! You should not treat her so badly," said Maharajji to a devotee.

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M's son-in-law went to Kainchi to have darshan, but Maharajji wouldn't talk to him. Finally he asked, "Where is my daughter? You've come alone to enjoy the hills. Go back and bring my daughter!" The son-in-law left and returned later with his wife.

WITH INDIAN YOUNG people his relationship seemed to be more that of a grandfather, guiding in worldly matters yet still touching with the spirit.

Maharajji would come and sit in my room, and I'd never go there because I was afraid he'd tell everything and I didn't want my parents to know.

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K played like a child when she was with Maharajji. Though she had loving devotion to him, Maharajji chastised her, saying, "You don't read the books, and then you get angry with me for your bad marks in school."

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Maharajji told a student to worship his mother every day if he expected to pass exams. He didn't do so; nor did he pass the exams.

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The son of one of the Ma's said that Maharajji always gave him worldly rather than spiritual guidance when he was young. He said that he had not been interested in spiritual things then, but that now he has some spiritual feelings and remembers Maharajji often.

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Some students came and looked at Maharajji with cold expressions and started to go away. Maharajji called to them and said, "You are enjoying in your way, and I in mine." Though they wanted to leave the temple, they were reluctant to go. They wandered around confused. After some time, they came back for another darshan. Now their faces were softer and more animated. His work with the heart was so subtle.

YOUNG MEN ARE LIKE LIONS.

Maharajji spent some time at our house in Haldwani when I was nine or ten. Whenever I would come in, he'd say, "My daughter has come, my daughter has come." The day he left I was very sad; he wouldn't even look at me. That night I was so upset that I couldn't eat supper. At 4:00 A.M. there was a knock at the door. Mother saw that it was Maharajji and let him in. He told my mother, "I came back just for my daughter. You have four chapattis and some vegetables that she didn't eat. Bring them and we shall eat together."

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An old man was brought to Maharajji for the first time, but he hadn't wanted to come. As he came in Maharajji said, "Stop beating your son so much. It is not going to make him any better." The man had in fact been beating his son a great deal. Only his wife had known, and after he left Maharajji he chided his wife for telling. But she hadn't. When he then went to

slap his son, he would hit him once and then find himself slapping his own face. This continued until his own face was black and blue. After that he stopped beating his son.

TO THE ELDERS who were living with their children, Maharajji often repeated: "Maun! Naun! Kaun!" which translates as "silence" (i.e., don't grumble or complain); "Salt" (i.e., don't point out faults or make judgments, such as, "there is not enough salt in the food"); and "corner" (don't interfere in family life. Stay out of the world and in the corner).

Maharajji often played the role of arranger of marriages. Of the few who already seemed married to God, he was protective, helping them escape the parental pressures to marry. But for most, he encouraged and even bulldozed them into the marital state.

Rabu said that he wouldn't marry, but when Maharajji told him he had been saving this girl for him for five years, Rabu married her.

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One of the Ma's sons was adamant about not getting married, and the Ma came to Maharajji for help. Maharajji met the son on a bridge and put a blanket over his head, then said, "He'll get married. He's now prepared." And he did marry.

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Maharajji once told a devotee to call his neighbor over. She was a doctor, a Christian woman whose husband had died, leaving her with three young daughters. As soon as she came into the room, Maharajji said, "Your daughter hasn't been married yet? You met an eligible young man in Kerala? His family wants twenty thousand rupees? You can't give twenty thousand." She replied that this was so. The next day Maharajji again called her. "Now you should go. Approach the boy's family again. They won't ask for money. Give them whatever you can. They'll accept." She went to Kerala. The boy's father explained that money wasn't important, that what they wanted was a good wife for their son, and the wedding was arranged at minimum cost to the woman.

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A traditional Indian woman and her daughter, both obviously disturbed, were waiting for a moment alone with Maharajji. But just as they arrived, Maharajji said in front of everyone, "Look, she should marry the dark one because she isn't very pretty. Your daughter isn't pretty and if one who isn't pretty marries a handsome man, he'll always have eyes for others. Let her marry the dark one." MS, another devotee there, was so embarrassed for the women that she said in her mind, "Oh, Maharajji."

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My aunt had pock marks and wasn't very pretty. She was sad because she had not married. Maharajji said to her, "You are mine," embracing her. Filled with bliss, she no longer desired to marry. Then a month later she became engaged to a very nice man.

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In my youth I had taken a vow not to get married, from the day my aunt, who had raised me, died. My family tried to get me married, but I was adamant. When I was between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, Maharajji would tell me not to get married and told people that I was tubercular or had cancer, and that I was dying. In my thirtieth year, Maharajji asked me, "Do you want to get married?"

"No," I answered. Maharajji then admired my shirt and asked to have it. He asked what sort of shirts I had before I started college, and I replied that I had only one old, torn shirt, but it served the purpose. Maharajji then asked how many I had now, and I said twelve. When asked why I had so many, I replied that as a teacher in public school, I had to maintain a certain code of dress or I'd be fired. Maharajji said, "No, no it is not this. Now you want to get married. You could have done with one shirt. If I ask you to marry, what will you do?" I told him, in that case I'd have to marry, but the responsibility would be Maharajji's. For eight days Maharajji continued to press for my marriage.

On the eighth morning, Maharajji set off to catch the train. On the way to the station, he turned off the road to a young woman's house and beckoned me to go in with him. There was kirtan going on and Maharajji was sitting in the puja room. I was called in and so was the young woman. Maharajji asked if I'd marry this girl, but I refused. Maharajji said, "If I ask you to?" I replied that the responsibility would be Maharajji's. First Maharajji said, "I'll not do

it." Then he said, "All right, all right. I'll solemnize the marriage!" He put tilaks on our foreheads and said, "There, I've got you married! Do you accept it?"

"Yes."

Later Maharajji said, "Don't think that I or you have done this. God plays the lila in his own way. No role of mine, none of yours. It was to happen!" My wife and I have been very happy, for over twenty-five years.

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Siddhi Ma one day described the marriage lila of one of Maharajji's long-time devotees. On the very day of this man's marriage (which Maharajji had arranged and insisted upon, to the man's objection), the man sat before Maharajji and would not leave him. But Maharajji insisted so forcibly that at last the man was taken and dressed in groom's garb and seated on a horse for the ride to the bride's home. As he was riding through the jungle he spied Maharajji wandering there, and he leaped off his horse and ran to him. Again Maharajji forced him to return and continue with the marriage. (The man, whose children are now being married, reports that this marriage was a spiritual boon and freed him from many misconceptions. Only after marriage, he reports, did his sadhana truly begin.)

On hearing this story, another devotee told of a man whose marriage was all arranged, and on the wedding day the groom's procession passed by Kainchi. The groom saw that Maharajji was there and so stopped off, with the intention of obtaining his blessings before continuing on. To his surprise, Maharajji instead detained him, refusing to let him continue to the bride's home. And the man never married.

ALTHOUGH MAHARAJJI was formal and traditional in his reactions to Indian marriages, he obviously recognized vast cultural differences in the marriage mores of his Western devotees. Some he pressed continually to marry, asking them again and again and offering to them as a partner, one choice after another. In a few instances he took two relative strangers and announced that they were now married or should marry.

Sometimes Maharajji talked about a certain union so much with two potential partners that they psychologically accepted the match as a fait accompli. Then Maharajji would never mention the matter again and the marriage would not happen. Sometimes, when such an arranged marriage didn't seem to "take," he dissolved it with alacrity.

Three times, Maharajji asked me if I wanted to get married. The first time was with Ian. Every evening after darshan we'd walk the two miles up that beautiful Kainchi Valley to our houses in Ninglat. Ian was such an astral being that when I was with him everything was magic—roses and winged fairies. One night when Ian came over to my house there was just a lot of sexual energy in the air. I turned it away since it really wasn't the time or the place. But after he left my whole body was alive with desire. I just lay there with it and tried to think of Maharajji. The next morning the minute I entered the temple for darshan, Maharajji called me right into the room, where he was sitting with Dada. Maharajji asked me, "Do you want to get married?"

I said, "No."

He said, "Do you want to marry Ian?"

"No, no." I wasn't horrified; there was simply no question in my mind. I hadn't even made a connection between this darshan and the night before. Maybe there wasn't one. But as Maharajji was asking me he looked deeply at me, as if to study my whole being, and then he turned around to Dada and said, "She's very good." And then he hit me on the head and said, "You're very good. Don't get married. Jao." I started to get up and then he said, "Sit down." He hit me on the head again and said again, "You're very good. Don't get married. Jao," and again another time before I left.

The second time he asked me whether I wanted to get married was after I had hitchhiked from Vrindaban to Kainchi with Carlos Vishwanath. It was an overnight trip and we had slept on the platform of some train station. When we arrived in Kainchi, Maharajji pulled me into his room right away and asked, "Do you want to marry Vishwanath?" Again, there was no question in my mind. So Maharajji said, "Accha, good. Don't get married. Jao."

The third time occurred when another devotee playfully said to Maharajji, "Saraswati isn't married yet. You haven't married her off yet. You should marry her to Ravi Das [Michael]."

Maharajji said "Accha? That's very good. Bring her here." When I appeared he asked me, "Do you want to marry Ravi Das?" The devotee started laughing.

I said, "But Maharajji, he's like my father." So Maharajji said, "Accha, very good. Don't get married," and he sent me out again. Then he called in Ravi Das and asked him the same question about me. Ravi Das's reply was, "Maharajji, I only want to marry you."

Maharajji kept asking me if I wanted to marry. I kept answering that I only wanted to marry him. Then he'd say, "But how can you fulfill your desires if you marry me?"

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We had a saying in those days: "Don't bring your date to see Maharajji, because he might marry you off."

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During my first darshan with Maharajji, I walked in with an old friend of mine I'd known in America. Just as we neared the gate, the friend grew frightened and said, "I can't go in there with you. We have to go in alone. He might marry us."

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When Maharajji arranged the marriage of J and K, he told them that marriage was nothing to celebrate. Marriage, he said, meant that you were fettered by the feet to the world.

MAHARAJJI WAS A family man at yet another level, although most of his devotees never heard about it during his lifetime and did not believe it when they did hear. Apparently he was betrothed at the age of eight, before running away from home to become a sadhu. Although he never returned home, the woman to whom he was betrothed as a child performed much tapasya and prayed that he would return so that her life as a woman could be fulfilled. He did return temporarily and fathered two children with her, although he never remained with the family as a householder. Yet the family, which now includes several grandchildren, reports that Maharajji always watched out for their material comfort and always arrived to fulfill the ritualistic functions demanded by his role as father and head of the household. They all consider him primarily as their guru.