



## The Great Escape

WHAT WAS TO be Maharajji's final day at Kainchi was spent in darshan, kirtan, and prayers. Both Indian and Western devotees were gathered. Maharajji was asking after everyone at the temple and elsewhere. Twice he put one of his Indian devotees into samadhi and brought him out of it by throwing his blanket over the man's head. At one point he said to those gathered, "He is your guru. He is young and I am old. He will live and I will die!" Everyone laughed. He then had the Westerners sing to Hanuman. There were tears in his eyes. The Indian women did arti before him, and one and all received a tilak upon the forehead.



Then he went to bathe and eat and hinted that he was leaving for four or five days. When he came out of his room he went to the temple and paused before the murti of Hanuman, holding his hands together in pranam silently for two or three minutes. Again he stopped and honored each of the murtis at the temple in turn. While crossing the bridge out of the temple compound he met an old devotee who was a photographer. Maharajji gave him an old photo and told him to copy it and distribute it freely. He instructed that the daily feeding be stopped and the Mothers taken to Nainital. Then he said softly, "Today, I am released from Cen-

tral Jail forever." As he approached the car that was to take him to the station, the blanket slipped from his shoulders to the ground. A devotee tried to put it back on, but Maharajji said, "Leave it. One should be attached to nothing." Others folded it and placed it in the car.

Just at the moment when he sat in the car, an old woman arrived from the nearby village of Bhowali. Maharajji said, "Ma, I've been waiting for you." He touched her on the head and said, "I'm going." He was gay and full of humor.

The driver of the car was another old and trusted devotee. He reports that during the ride to the railway station, he became aware that Maharajji's feet had become extremely big. "I was afraid," he said.

Maharajji kept saying to him, "What is destiny? What is going to happen? Tomorrow we don't even know." They got to the station early for the train, so they sat in the car for two hours. Maharajji pointed out a beautiful rainbow and said, "Look at that natural beauty. How beautiful is God's creation, man can never make anything so beautiful."

Tickets had been purchased to Agra for him and for Ravi, a young devotee. On the train Maharajji did not close his eyes all night and kept waking the devotee and saying, "I'm not tired, talk with me." Ravi asked him to drink the milk which the Mothers had sent in a thermos, but the milk had turned bad. "Throw it out," Maharajji said, "Throw the thermos out, too." Ravi didn't want to, but Maharajji did so himself, saying, "Throw it out, I will not need it anymore." He spoke of many things and many people through the night. He said, "I've come on earth only for the spreading of dharma."

When they reached Agra, Maharajji jumped from the train while Ravi trailed behind with the baggage. Instead of following the platform, Maharajji jumped from it easily, crossing six sets of tracks and jumping up on the main platform. Ravi caught up with him at the ticket-taker who had stopped Maharajji for his ticket. Then Maharajji bargained with various rickshaw drivers: one wanted three rupees (about thirty cents), which Maharajji argued was too much. Finally a price was fixed and they set out, only Maharajji knowing the way. En route, Maharajji pointed out a house and said, "Their son has gone to America and the family feels very sad. Sons don't serve their fathers anymore." When they arrived at the house, he told Ravi to give to the rickshaw driver the milk bucket filled with Ganga water that Maharajji always carried with him. Again he said, "Have no attachment for anything."

Except for one hour when Maharajji went to see a heart specialist (he had complained of pains in his chest), he remained at S's house from 6:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. that evening. The specialist said that Maharajji's heart

was fine and that he just needed rest. At 9:00 P.M. he left for the station to meet the train that would take him back up to the foot of the mountains at Kathgodam. He was accompanied by young Ravi and another devotee, D. After some time he told Ravi to go and sit in the next compartment. Ravi went there but was thought to be a thief by the occupants, who yanked the chain and had the train stopped. Ravi was taken up and placed in the police van that was a part of the train. Ravi persuaded the police to ask Maharajji at the next station if Ravi was with him. Maharajji was very loving to Ravi and said, "We'll get off at Mathura and I'll make a call to the DIG [Deputy Inspector General] and set things straight." At Mathura, not far from Agra, they got off the train. Some people bowed to him. He then sat down on the steps of the station after leaning against the outdoor latrine. D went to get a taxi, while R waited with Maharajji.

Maharajji then lay on the steps and began convulsing. His eyes were closed and his body was cold and sweating. D fed him some pills and Maharajji said, "Turn off the lights." He asked for water and to be taken to nearby Vrindaban. He was carried by stretcher to the taxi and laid across the back seat. During the ride to Vrindaban, Maharajji seemed unconscious for most of the way, though now and then he mumbled things they could not understand. They took him to the emergency room at the hospital. In the hospital the doctor gave him injections and placed an oxygen mask over his face. The hospital staff said that he was in a diabetic coma but that his pulse was fine. Maharajji roused and pulled the oxygen mask off his face and the blood pressure measuring band from his arm, saying, "Bekar [useless]." Maharajji asked for Ganga water. As there was none, they brought him regular water. He then repeated several times, "Jaya Jagadish Hare" [Hail to the Lord of the Universe], each time in a lower pitch. His face became very peaceful, all signs of pain disappeared. He was dead. No one at the hospital had recognized him. The hospital staff left the room. Ravi and D carried Maharajji out and placed the body in a taxi and took it to the Hanuman temple. (It was about 1:15 on the morning of September 11.)

*HC said that in September 1973, shortly before Maharajji's mahasamadhi, he felt such a longing, such a craving to go see Maharajji. He and his wife went to Kainchi just two days before Maharajji left. "It was no strange thing—not a miracle," he said of this coincidence. But he said that when he got there, it made him think very deeply. The experience was "exceptionally something else."*

*During this visit, Maharajji foreshadowed his leaving by saying to him,*

*“Ask whatever you want—then I am going to go.” HC said that all that was in his mind evaporated. He asked nothing, nor did he catch the hint.*

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*Oh, Maharajji told us all that he was going to leave this world. One time he said to us that when he leaves, he will leave us all laughing! Then he said that when he leaves Siddhi Ma, he will leave her weeping. As he said this, Siddhi Ma began weeping so much. But Maharajji said she shouldn't worry—he wouldn't let anyone harm her, that she would become radiant with his love.*

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*A friend of HC's said that Maharajji also clearly hinted to him of the coming mahasamadhi. Maharajji said to the man, “What can I do if God calls me back?”*

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*It is D's feeling that for the past two years Maharajji had been almost constantly in deep samadhi and completely forgetful of the world. The functions of talking and behaving with people were going on automatically while Maharajji wasn't in this world. He was forgetful even of the body's necessity to urinate and would pass all day without doing it. Then he would finally be reminded and would run, sometimes urinating as he ran. His dhoti and blanket weren't tied properly. Formerly, they were so neat and tight.*

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*On the Saturday before he left, he told me, “This is the ghost plane. Everyone has to die. People weep for their selfishness. Even the dying person weeps for his family. These are nothing, this is foolishness.”*

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Mrs. S was very worried about Maharajji's heart condition, so B got Maharajji alone to ask about it by flooding the car's carburetor when just the two of them were in it. He said, "Maharajji, the car is flooded and it will take one of your miracles—or I'll ask you a question and if you answer it directly, maybe the car will start. Are you really sick?"

"No, I'm not."

B then said, "Do me one favor. If you are, will you tell me?" Maharajji put his hand on B's head.

Exactly one month before Maharajji left his body, he said to a group, "My heart stopped last night." He said this twice, but someone giggled, which made B angry so he didn't pursue the matter. Then Maharajji said it a third time, but there was so much activity going on around Maharajji that B could not discuss it. Then B had to go to Europe. He returned a few days before Maharajji left his body. He planned to go for darshan when he remembered that he had promised to do something for another man, and he thought to himself that if Maharajji could do service for thousands, then he could serve this one other person. He went and served the other man instead of going for darshan, and so he didn't see Maharajji before the mahasamadhi.

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That last day, Maharajji allowed everybody to wash his feet and drink as much as they liked of the remaining water. He was very pleased. Then he said, "I'm not going today." But after a half hour's rest, he said, "No, I am going. Get the car." Then T said he had to check Maharajji's pulse, and Maharajji said, "Are you becoming a doctor, too?" T checked it and found no pulse.

He said to Maharajji, "Maharajji, if you keep playing tricks . . ."

Maharajji replied, "All right, fifteen seconds and no more." This time the pulse was perfectly normal. That last day, he was very happy and joyful, quite contrary to other times, when he would leave a place without appearing to know anyone.

T and D were talking to each other, saying, "He's too happy. This is contrary."

Maharajji said, "When you go to your house, you are happy."

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One day in 1971 or 1972, Maharajji was presented with a diary. From that day on, he would fill two pages with handwritten "Ram" each day. "॥ॐ ॥ॐ ॥ॐ ॥ॐ . . ." He asked that the diary be kept in his room. From then on he was left alone for an hour each morning while he wrote in his diary. When he traveled the diary went with him. By September 9, his last day in Kainchi, he completed the entry, then proceeded to date the next page September 10 and wrote "Ram" on it. Finally he wrote September 11 on a clean page and did not write any "Ram" there. He then gave the book to SM and said to her, "Now this is your book. You write in it."

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B had made a tape of Maharajji chanting, but Maharajji said, "You aren't to let anyone hear it for two years." That was exactly two years before he died.

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A few days before Maharajji left Kainchi he said to SM, "The temple must be inside the ashram."

She said, "You don't need another temple. You have five temples here already." He just laughed. Now the Samadhi temple fills the courtyard where the Westerners used to sing kirtan to Maharajji.

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On the morning of September 8, Maharajji called for me and we talked privately for three-quarters of an hour on various subjects. After that I saw him again at four o'clock in his room with two or three others. He was saying to us, "All those who come into this world must go. Nobody will stay here. They must go. Knowing this, why do people at the time of death go "Whooooo, whooooo" (he feigned great weeping)? Why do they cry? They should go gladly. They should go laughing. They shouldn't cry." After some general talk he said, "Now I shall go. I won't stay and I won't give darshan anymore to anyone."

One devotee asked, "Maharajji, where will you go that we people will not be able to get your darshan?"

"Oh, too far! Too far!" Maharajji replied.

"Where?" the devotee asked again.

"Oh, there . . . near the Narmada River," Maharajji said. (The Narmada River starts in Amarkantak, traditionally from the throat of Shiva.) The bus driver came shortly after that to take away all those people who lived elsewhere. Some man had just arrived and asked for a private darshan, but Maharajji said, "Baba Neem Karoli is dead! Who will you talk to now?"

The man laughed and said, "All right, if you order me to go then I will, but I'll return at eight in the morning and talk with you then!"

Maharajji said, "All right. You come. If I'm alive, I'll talk to you."

Outside in the courtyard the Westerners were singing and had begun to shout in unison the traditional salutation, "Sri Sri Sri One Thousand Eight Neem Karoli Baba Santa Maharaj ki jai!" Inside, Maharajji commented, "Baba Neem Karoli is dead! Now their voices will have to reach there," he said, pointing heavenward.

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Maharajji said to me, "Dada, I shall run away. What is attachment, to a saint?"

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Just a few nights before he left his body, there was a lot of activity in the ashram. He was jao'ing everyone. I was over at Hanuman, just singing for a while. When I looked around, everyone else had left the temple. Maybe they'd all been jao'ed, or had gone to the back of the ashram, but the temple was empty. I looked and saw Maharajji sitting there; nobody else was around. I went up to him and pranammed, and of course he jao'ed me. But I have never gotten such a sweet jao. It was the sweetest jao in the world. He called me "my daughter"—"hamari beti." And his look was just like pools overflowing with love.

"My daughter . . ." I could barely get up to my feet. It took a few minutes to get up. He didn't say jao again, just gave me that through-and-through look of total compassion. I felt that during those last few days he was taking on a great deal of karma. You could see so much anguish in his face.

It was strange those last few days. An Indian man used to come and do pujas, and he'd pass out while singing Ram. Maharajji was in the man's room



one afternoon. There was such a crowd that I couldn't really see what was going on, but I could hear the man screaming in anguish: "Nath! Nath [Lord! Lord!]" I didn't know what it was. Perhaps he had some inkling of what was shortly going to happen. Maharajji was just sitting there while the man was screaming. You knew something was happening but of course you would never admit the possibility of what it really might be.

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Dwarka Sah asked me if I had been in Kainchi for the last darshan, and as I hadn't, he told me some of his personal experience that day. After Maharajji had gone into the "office" for rest, Dwarka, feeling very heavy with sleep, had fallen asleep outside the door. He was suddenly awakened by Maharajji bursting out the door. Maharajji called to him, "Dwarka! Stand up!" Maharajji took his hand, and another devotee, R, took Maharajji's other hand. Together the three of them walked to Hanumanji's temple, where Maharajji stood in silence, hands folded in pranam, for a full two minutes. During this time his blanket fell off, and Dwarka picked it up and rewrapped it around Maharajji. Maharajji then went before Lakshmi-Narayan, and then before Shiva, standing again in silence for a long time before each temple. Then he began walking swiftly out of the temple grounds, and as he was crossing the bridge his blanket again fell off. This time he would not allow it to be put around him. He got into a waiting car and took Ravi with him, leaving Dwarka behind.

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When we parted, Maharajji said to me, "If I don't meet you in this form, I'll meet you in another form."

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In the summer an ayurvedic doctor from Delhi had come to visit Maharajji and to spend two weeks at Kainchi. Even before he was fully unpacked, Maharajji sent him home with no explanation. Maharajji had five boxes of apples put in the man's car and said, "Go immediately." The man was confused and angry. Maharajji also said, "This is the last time I'll see you."

Back at home the doctor received an unexpected opportunity to earn seven thousand rupees during the week when he would have been away. But he was afraid he was going to die, since Maharajji had said that he would not see him again, so he wrote his will and arranged all his affairs. Then in September, when he heard that Maharajji had died, he said, "Good." Later, when he went to the Delhi temple, he fainted, because he saw Maharajji in place of the Hanuman murti. This happened to him twice.

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At the last group darshan he was sitting up on the tucket, rocking back and forth as if to get up, and we'd all think, "Oh, no, don't get up"; then he'd sit back down and we'd all think, "Oh, good." When he'd start to leave again, we'd think, "Oh, no! Don't go!" When he'd sit back down, you could just feel it in the air—"Oh, good, he's going to stay a while!" It was a long darshan. When he finally left there was something very reluctant about the way he walked. And I remember that we were just exhausted after that darshan.

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After that darshan the focus of Draupadi's movie camera swooped up to the sky, to the top of the temples, which expresses the imagery we were left with then. You wanted to throw your hands up. It was intensely joyful, yet totally exhausting. After that it was very, very quiet. I rarely slept in the afternoon, but this time we all slept. We awakened to find that Maharajji had left. I think Janaki said she saw him pranam to the murtis before he left.

AFTER HIS DEATH in Vrindaban, Maharajji's body was placed on a large block of ice on a verandah of the ashram. In the evening it was paraded through the streets in a litter atop a car. Thousands watched the procession, which was complete with brass band and processional lights. At about 9:00 P.M., in the courtyard of the temple, Maharajji's body was placed on the funeral pyre.

Translation from Vrindiban newspaper, September 12, 1973: *The cremation ceremony of the earthly body of the famous and "wonder-working" saint, Baba of Neem Karoli, was performed with all the necessary religious ceremonies at his dwelling place, the ground opposite to the Sri Hanuman temple.*

While he was going from Agra to Nainital he suddenly became unwell, and after that he died of heart failure.

Before the cremation, the dead body of the baba was carried in a procession in a decorated carriage in the city. The question of the place where the last rites should be performed was solved by the Pagal Baba (Sri Lila Nand Thakur), who said that Vrindaban is the king of holy places. He further said that there cannot be any better place than this. The old Mother who came from Kainchi ashram insisted that the cremation take place either at Kainchi or at Haridwar. The pyre remained burning up until three o'clock in the morning. By then a good number of devotees had reached there to pay their last homage. There was deep sorrow in the ashram and the devotees kept coming.

The president of the All India Congress Committee, Dr. S. D. Sharma, reached Vrindaban at 6:00 A.M. and remained sitting near the cremation place for quite some time. He has been a devotee of the baba since 1957. He has advised the ashram people to collect the literature regarding the baba's life and activities. A committee has also been formed. September 22 has been fixed as the date of the community feeding. The ashes have not been put into the Yamuna. They will be buried in his Samadhis. Some of his ashes have been preserved for immersion at several places of pilgrimage.

There is a controversy about the age of the baba. People say that his age may be between 250 and 300 years.

The inhabitants of Vrindaban were always against him. They always addressed him by the name of "Chamatkari Baba [miracle man]."

As soon as his American devotees heard the news of his death, there were a number of telephone calls from that country.

Big officials of India are coming to Vrindaban to pay homage.

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He numbed us in a certain way. We got to Vrindaban about 8:00 P.M. and they were just coming back from the parikrama (circumambulation of Vrindaban). That was when I saw his body on top of the car. And they brought it down for everyone to take a last look before putting him on the pyre. We all went to touch his feet. Something about it seemed really removed. It didn't feel like anything had changed—whatever had happened with his body seemed unreal.

I think it was just that sort of numbness that he put on us. You'd feel terribly sad and you'd cry, but there was some part of you that couldn't really believe it. But after time passed, you'd start to realize that though Maharajji is

still with us, his body was gone. At that time, though, even the idea that his body was gone wasn't real.

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For the procession through the streets, Maharajji's body, covered with flowers, had been placed on the luggage rack on top of a 1955 Plymouth. As the car passed through the narrow streets, people threw coins from the windows of the houses along the way. Children ran after the car, catching the coins or retrieving them from the roadway. There was a loud band playing. We felt numb in the midst of the confusion. But just as the car went by us, we spied in the rear right-hand-corner window, three decals: one of Mickey Mouse, one of Donald Duck, and one of Goofy. Seeing them changed the entire meaning of the occasion. We recalled how our friend Wavy Gravy had always said that death was Donald Duck. It felt as if this was Maharajji's secret message to us.

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One old devotee spent the night sitting beside the fire in which Maharajji's body was burning, singing "Shri Ram, Jai Ram" at the top of his lungs. He said he saw Maharajji sitting above the fire and on each side of him were Ram and Shiva. They were pouring ghee on his head so that he would burn better, while overhead were all the devas (gods) throwing down flowers. Everyone was so happy!

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A Ma saw Maharajji sit up in the fire and look at her, pointing while leaning on his elbow in his characteristic way.

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I've experienced the deaths of people close to me before, but this was really different. Maharajji's presence was just so much stronger. We did the parikrama around Vrindaban that evening and the next night, too, but we were suspended in some way. I couldn't eat or sleep. It was the strangest thing.

*I was hanging there, waiting for him to come back, waiting to see him walk down the street or sit on his tucket.*

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*S said it was Maharajji's lila that nobody around him at the time he died could realize that if they had spoken with true heartfelt devotion to him, "Get up, Maharajji, you are not dead," he would have done so.*

THE NEWS OF Maharajji's death came with extraordinary swiftness to those of us who had left India, and the reactions were as varied as to any other part of his lila.

*During the summer of 1973 I was staying at my father's farm in New Hampshire, and was there in September when the telegram arrived. My father and my stepmother, looking rather concerned, met me when I returned from shopping in the village. Dad said, "This telegram just came from India. I don't understand it, but I copied it down word for word as the operator gave it to me."*

*"At 1:15, September 11, Babaji left his bojhay [sic] in Vrindaban. . . ." The telegram went on with further details. My father asked, "What does it mean?"*

*"It means," I said, "that Maharajji died."*

*They immediately tried to console or at least commiserate with me, but their words seemed strangely irrelevant, for I felt absolutely nothing—neither sad nor happy. There was no sense of loss. Perhaps I was just numb. A couple with marital difficulties were waiting for me, so I went and sat with them and helped them unwind the tangled thread of their loves and hatreds. Every now and then in the midst of the discussion, my mind would wander and I'd think, "Maharajji isn't in his body. Isn't that strange," or "I wonder what will happen now?" But I pushed such thoughts aside and forced my consciousness back to the task at hand, for, whatever was to come, there was no sense in stopping service to others.*

*Throughout that day and many times thereafter I remembered the words of the great Ramana Maharshi. He was dying of cancer and in the past had shown power to heal others, and his devotees were now begging him to heal himself. He kept refusing, and they cried, "Don't leave us, don't leave us," to which he replied, "Don't be silly. Where could I go?"*

*After all, where could Maharajji go? I had him in my heart. I had been*

living with him moment by moment and yet not with his physical presence—so did it really make any difference? I wasn't sure.

When the couple left I started calling other devotees in the United States and Canada and asked them to call others. It was agreed that those within a radius of three or four hundred miles would join me in New Hampshire. By the next noon some twenty of us were gathered. It was a peculiar meeting. We were all somewhat dumbfounded by the news and many were crying, but at the same time we were happy to be together and felt Maharajji's presence very strongly with us. We cooked a big meal, which we ate around the fire. But before the food we went up to my room to sit before the puja table and meditate and do arti.

While all of us sang the ancient Sanskrit prayer, we took turns offering the light (in the form of a candle flame) by waving it before Maharajji's picture. After my turn I went to the back of the group and watched. In the reflection of the candlelight I looked at the faces of my guru brothers and sisters and saw their expressions of love and the purity of their hearts. And finally I was able to cry—not out of sadness at the loss, but rather because of the presence of that pure and perfect love that is Maharajji and which I felt in this gathering of hearts. (R.D.)

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I rapidly went through many reactions when I got the news. One of them, strangely enough, was, "Oh, poor Maharajji." My very first reaction was grief, which was cut immediately with the realization that nothing had changed. ("Grief for what?") Then I went through all the rest of the reactions, like, "What's it all about? If he's not in a body then why am I? Why am I still playing this game, which is all centered around him. If he's gone, I don't want to play anymore."

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When he left his body I was way off on Mount Shasta, somewhere alone in the woods. There was another person there whom I had met at darshan. When Maharajji left his body, the word spread fast, so that we all knew about it. The man had gone into town to make a phone call and had found out and come to tell me, even though I was way in the woods. And I've talked to a lot of

other people who were in America at the time, and they had similar experiences; wherever they were, they found out almost immediately.

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That summer I spent traveling around, still reorienting myself to being back in America. The first of September I came down to San Francisco from British Columbia to visit my Sufi family of previous years in California. Within a day or two I started to feel vaguely ill and wondered if I was having some sort of recurrence of the hepatitis that had sent me home from India. But there was no fever, no trace of jaundice, in fact, nothing—I just felt terrible. Since this was the home of Saul, who was a hakim (healer), I received every loving attention and was put to bed. Then after about a week, my “illness” disappeared as mysteriously as it had come. Two days later, a close Gurubahin (Guru-sister) phoned. “I’m sorry to be the one to tell you,” she said. “Maharajji has left his body.”

At that moment I felt only chagrin and amusement—he’s run away again! “That fucker!” was all I could say.

As I hung up the phone, Saul came in the front door. “Maharajji has left his body,” I told him.

“Praise God!” he cried and gave me a great hug.

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It’s hard to explain how the news affected me. It was similar to the way you feel when you get ripped off in India: Instead of feeling perturbed, angry, or sad, you feel relief, because it allows you to accept something that’s happened. Later there were other feelings.

Before he left his body, I had a really strong sensation, which came one time in Vrindaban when Maharajji was sending everyone away. Just before he “jao’ed” everyone, he explained that we were all just worshipping a clay pot. “What will happen when the clay pot breaks?” he asked. He was sending everyone to different places, people were crying, and I felt that Maharajji wanted just to split, that he was finished with the body. I felt like it was going to happen that day, so when it did, it didn’t come as a surprise to me. It was too strong a thing to have an outward reaction to.

THE BURNING OF Maharajji’s body happened so quickly after his passing that few devotees had been able to get there in time, so many of them

planned to attend the funeral bhandara to be held in eleven days in Vrindaban. About thirty Westerners decided to fly to India for this ceremony and for a later one, to place some of the ashes at the Kainchi ashram.

*In Vrindaban hundreds had already gathered by the time we arrived from America. The immensity of the love and openness of all the devotees was awesome. All the petty differences between the devotees from the hills and those from the plains were forgotten, as were differences between East and West. All the jealousies and judgments that we had had toward one another, which Maharajji created and exacerbated at every turn, showing us again and again our petty reflections in his big mirror, were gone for the moment. We shared a common loss, and, more important, we realized that we had all been privileged to have had the recognizable darshan of God on earth. (R.D.)*

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*One of the amazing things that happened was at the funeral bhandara, the final Vedic ceremony, about eleven days after death, in which traditionally the soul has passed through all the bardos (planes of existence) and is free.*

*They had covered over the entire courtyard with tents and at one end had built a small platform on which they were going to light the sacred fire. Just as they were lighting the fire, out of the clear blue sky, from the east, came this big black cloud. And it came fast. As it was approaching, the wind was getting more intense and the canvas roofs began flapping. I remember thinking at that time, "Maharajji, if this is a sign from you, it just isn't enough," thinking that if he were going to come in some other form, I still wanted total immersion, total darshan.*

*The cloud kept approaching and the wind got stronger and stronger, and suddenly we were in the midst of a violent windstorm! The canvas was ripping in shreds, the supporting poles were snapping in two, the sacred fire was leaping high into the air. It was so exciting, so ecstatic, that people were leaping up and down, hugging each other and crying. It was recognized very quickly as Maharajji's blessing. Then, after the storm passed by and things were going to go on, I was so filled with excitement that I went rushing into one of the rooms in the back. I don't know why I went there, but as I rushed in I awakened Molly Scott. She'd just arrived, never having seen Maharajji alive. I burst in, filled with the excitement of this storm, waking her up. She told me later that she woke up at that moment with an entire song, melody and lyrics, in her mind. "There is no death. I feel you all about me. In every breath, I'll never be without thee. In my heart, in my mind, in the flower, in*



*the child, in the rain, in the wind [etc.—each verse is different], you are born anew. You are born anew.” This is the song that came from that storm.*

MAHARAJJI HAD SO often spoken to us about death that we had his own words to work with.

AS LONG AS THE TIME DOES NOT  
ARRIVE, ONE CANNOT DIE.

THE BODY PASSES AWAY.  
EVERYTHING IS IMPERMANENT  
EXCEPT THE LOVE OF GOD.

*Maharajji used to say that bodies should be cremated because it minimizes the craving of the soul to get back into the body. The last possession has been given away.*

॥॥

*Maharajji once asked a devotee, “What is this body? What is it made of? What happens when you die?” Then he answered his own questions: “The body is made of five elements. The body dies but not the soul. Atman, the real man, does not die.”*

WHY ARE YOU WITH SUCH EGO?  
ONE OF THESE DAYS YOU WILL  
HAVE TO LEAVE THIS WORLD AND  
BECOME ONE WITH THE EARTH.

—MAHARAJJI QUOTING KABIR

*Maharajji would say, “When the time will come,” in reference to his death. But at other times he would say, “Am I going to die? Never! I don’t die.”*

THERE WERE ALSO many stories about the way in which Maharajji had foretold or reacted to the death of his devotees in the past.

*Maharajji said a woman in Almora would die, but her doctor, also a devotee, insisted she was in good health. Maharajji and the doctor went to*

dinner at her home. She went into the kitchen during the meal, choked, and died. Maharajji cried and cried.

॥१॥

Once Maharajji and Mr. Tewari were talking on the parapet at Hanuman Garh. Maharajji looked up above him and closed his eyes for a moment and told Tewari that a certain old woman devotee from down in the plains had just died. Then he giggled and laughed and laughed. Tewari, who had known Maharajji for many years, was taken aback and said, "You butcher! How can you laugh at the death of a human being?" Maharajji looked at him in surprise and said, "Would you rather have me pretend I'm one of the puppets?"

॥१॥

Once Maharajji said that we are on a long journey, birth to birth to birth. The people we meet in each birth, we are predestined to meet.

It is also predestined how long you will be with a person, so you shouldn't get attached to trying to keep together or feel sad at loss. Realize that you will one day be separated, and then you will avoid that feeling of pain.

॥१॥

Maharajji was sitting with some devotees when he suddenly asked, "Who has come?"

"Nobody, Maharajji."

"Yes, someone has come."

A moment later, the servant of one of his devotees arrived. Before the man could say anything, Maharajji said, "I know he's sick but I won't come." The servant was astonished because the man had taken sick just a few minutes before and had sent the servant to get Maharajji. Everyone encouraged Maharajji to go, but he adamantly refused. Finally he said, "Here, take him this banana. He'll be all right." The servant rushed home with the banana, for all knew the power that Maharajji often invested in a piece of fruit. The banana was mashed up and fed to the man. Just as he finished the last bit, he died.

॥५

A lady took Maharajji to her unconscious husband and asked him to place his hands on her husband's head. Maharajji hesitated and asked what she wanted.

"Your blessing!" she replied.

"You want me to give a blessing?" He repeated this question three times, stalling for time. "Mother wants me to give a blessing. What should I do?" he questioned a nearby devotee. The devotee encouraged him to give the blessing. "All right, I'll give blessing." Maharajji got up from his chair. At that moment, the lights went out and the whole house became dark. The lady rushed away to fetch a lantern. Maharajji turned to the devotee and said, "When God has given darkness to this house, how can I give light?" Then he ran from the house. The lady caught him. He said, "I'll come again. I'll come again." And he left. The man died that same night. Never before had Maharajji taken so long making arrangements to give a blessing. The man was meant to die and his wife was trying to force Maharajji to give a blessing that he might live.

॥५

One old forestry man came sobbing to Maharajji and said, "My son has died and what did you do?" Maharajji said the son had cancer and it was God's will. "But you could have saved him," the man said.

"What God wills must happen," said Maharajji. The man left and Maharajji said, "When somebody has done wrong, the karma must come back—maybe the father or his children, but someone must pay."

**M**AHARAJJI'S REFUSAL to interfere with the karma of death was apparently not without exception.

I was sitting with Maharajji late at night by the side of the road near the Bhumiadhar temple, not far from Nainital, when up the road came a very strange-looking man covered in rags and ashes. He started to shout abuses at Maharajji, so I thought he must be drunk. He kept accusing Maharajji of giving too much protection to his devotees. "This time," he shouted, "you have gone too far! In six days, I will have him." Maharajji seemed very excited and told me to go to the temple and fetch food for the stranger. I ran to

*get it and as I was coming back, the man walked across the road and seemed to rise up into the air and disappear. Maharajji was shouting, "See where he has gone, see where he has gone!" But I couldn't see him anywhere. Maharajji then told me that the stranger was Death. Six days later one of Maharajji's closest devotees died.*

**AND YET HE** himself had chosen to die, as he had lived, in a form which reiterated again—nothing special.

*He did everything according to nature. A child stays, a young man moves about, an old man stays. He did, according to the laws of nature. If he wanted to, he could do, but I don't think he changed nature for himself. When he was sick he asked about medicines; when he was tired he used to rest. When he got old he died.*