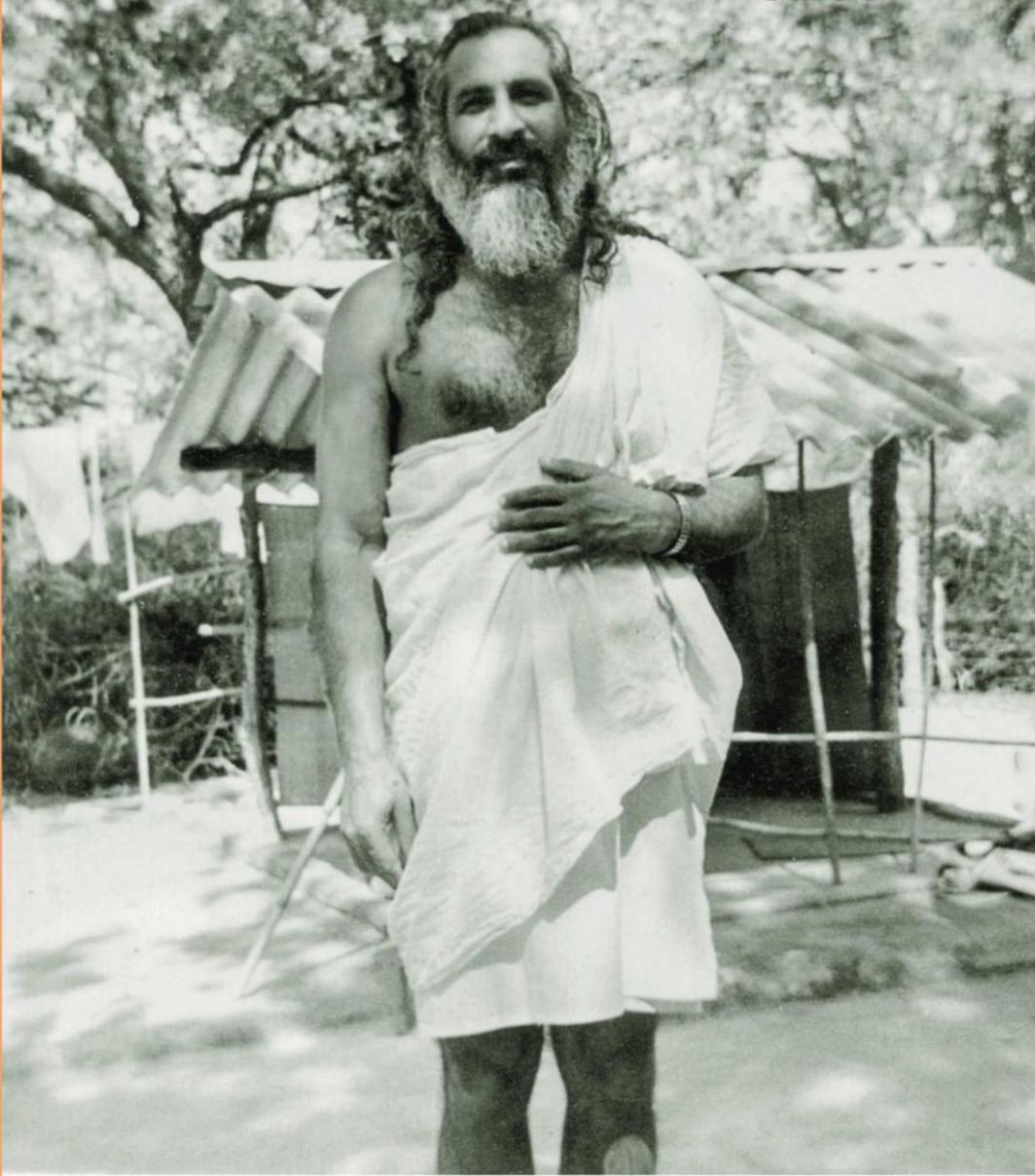


Chandra Swami Udasin

Footprints to Eternity

Part I



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Part I

Swami Prem Vivekanand

Seekers Trust
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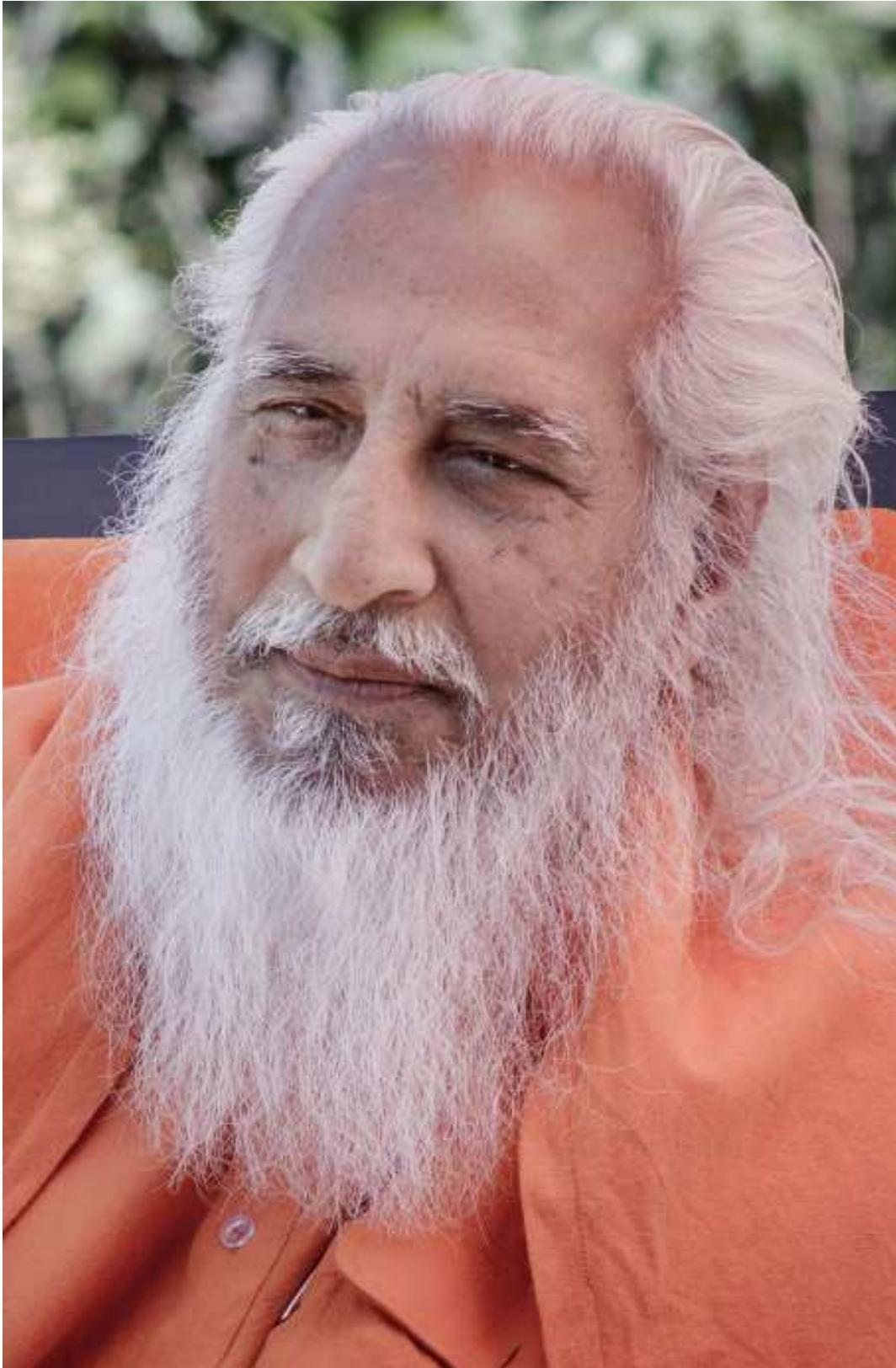
“What am I seeking? This is the most fundamental question which everyone should ask himself or herself. It is God and God alone, the Absolute Bliss/Consciousness, which is truly attainable and which once realised, is never lost. All else is like a mirage, which can never quench the thirst of any soul.”

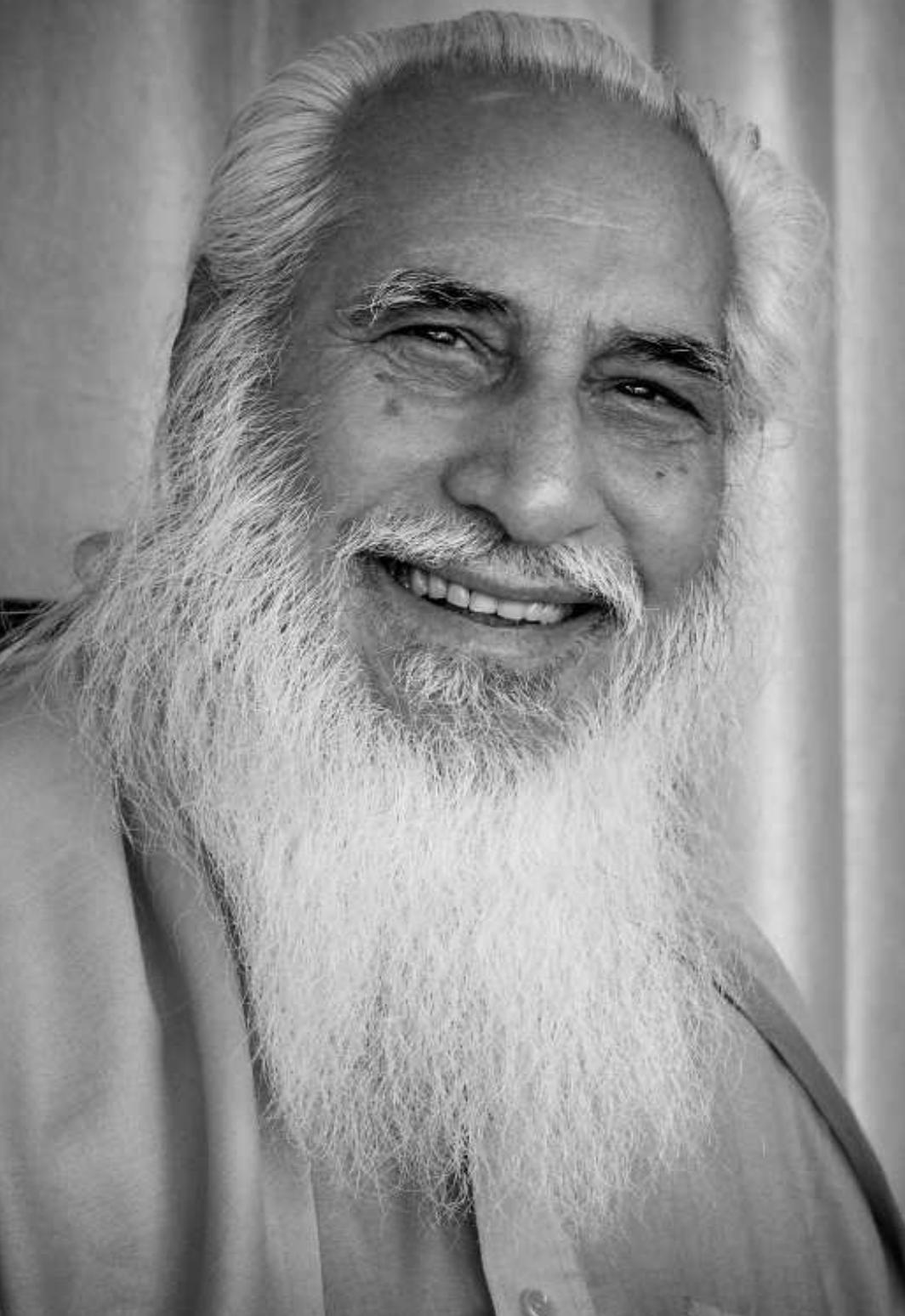
- Chandra Swami Udasin

Dedication

**To the lotus feet of our beloved Gurudeva,
Shri Chandra Swamiji, an ocean of compassion —**

Who is fully established in God,
The absolute Truth, Consciousness and Bliss;
Who is the eternal child of his Gurudeva,
Baba Bhuman Shahji, the life of his life,
The personification of divinity and the consummation
Of intense divine love (*mahābhāva*).
Whose soft and soothing presence is like an eternal celebration;
Though himself beyond the realms of do's and don'ts,
Who has effortlessly embraced strict self-discipline
And pure, righteous conduct,
For the sake of his devotees and mortals like us;
Whose full moon-like radiant face, satiated with the bliss of the *Ātmā*,
Is ever so peaceful, soothing and cheerful;
Gleaming with divine splendour, from whose graceful person,
Virtues of divine love, knowledge, joy, peace, humility, simplicity,
Equanimity, detachment, immovability to pairs of opposites,
And freedom flow forth ceaselessly;
On whose lips ever dances a gentle and guileless smile;
Totally divinised, whose body, senses, mind and *prāṇa*,
Radiate the sweet bliss of the *Ātmā*;
Whose eyes are ever filled with grace and compassion;
Who tenderly converses with his devotees and seekers
Through his sweet silence;
Whose divine life is the holy ground
For the revelation of God's glory and splendour,
As well as a beautiful commentary on the sublime worldly values;
Who, of his spontaneous compassion,
Is ever engrossed in the well-being of his beloved devotees and seekers;
A feast to the eyes, whose holy *darshan* evokes the Divine —
Is this ballad of his divine play (*līlā*) dedicated with loving reverence.





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Preface

More than fifty years ago, I waded across the clear cool waters of the sacred river Ganges in Sapta Sarovar, Haridwar, together with my parents and three siblings, and entered the remote forested island called *jhāḍī*. Just the day before, my father, who was a lover of saints and had been desperately searching for his *Sadguru* for a long time, was led by divine providence to meet revered Chandra Swamiji in his forest abode and was now taking the whole family for his holy *darshan*. After making our way through the jungle for about half an hour and crossing yet another stream of the Ganges, we finally reached a thatched hut on the bank of the river where Swamiji lived. We sat down in the shade of the hut and gazed out at the charming sight of the rushing river flanked by trees on all sides. Not a soul was to be seen for miles. Being only a child, I don't remember the details of that eventful day, but what is deeply imprinted in my heart forever is the divine splendour of the Master standing outside his thatched hut amidst the tall trees with a loose orange cloth draped over his shoulder. Little could I imagine then that this charming *yogi* would become the focal point and guiding light of my life.

From that first day in 1964 onward, I have had the rare privilege of observing this God-man from very close — first from the eyes of an innocent child, then from the view of a rebellious youth and finally from the perspective of a devout disciple. I confess that in my youth I tried and tested him

unabashedly, but the more I did so, the more brilliantly his spotless character shone forth, like purified gold.

Now, after having spent the last twenty-eight years living continuously in his holy presence, it is a great honour and joy to present the first comprehensive biography of Swamiji in English. I was first inspired to write Swamiji's biography in Hindi in the late 1990's, published under the name *Chandra Prabhas*. By then I had been living with him for more than a decade and believed that many seekers of Truth would benefit from reading about the amazing divine life of a God-Realized sage like Shri Chandra Swamiji, the very icon of integral divine life. There was another motivation as well — to personally bathe and swim in the river of his divine *līlā*, like the Ganges, so purifying and inspiring.

Swamiji has always avoided talking about himself, his difficult *sādhanā*, his realizations, etc. and it was only with great persistence that I finally obtained his permission to write about his life. All along I was keenly aware of the impossibility of the task at hand, for to capture the essence of a great one like Swamiji in words is like trying to capture a ray of sunlight in one's hand. It took several years to write *Chandra Prabhas*, as I was also preoccupied with the construction of Sadhana Kendra Ashram and other responsibilities. To whatever extent *Chandra Prabhas* was able to reflect Swamiji's divine personality, even in the smallest measure, is due entirely to his grace. Utterly unqualified as I am, should there be any flaws or shortcomings within the text, these are entirely mine.

In 2006 the ashram started publishing a bimonthly spiritual magazine by the name of *Bhuvan Shah Sandesh*

and I decided to translate *Chandra Prabhas* in installments for Swamiji's English speaking devotees. That is how the bulk of this book came into being over the years. However, in the long translation process, there have been many changes and additions, especially with regard to the all-important topic of Swamiji's spiritual practices and realizations. At my earnest request, Swamiji graciously granted me several private meetings during which he patiently, if not reluctantly, answered many queries about his early *sāadhanā* and spiritual experiences. Many questions and answers from such meetings have been incorporated into the text, along with some of Swamiji's spontaneous reminiscences which he wrote during the daily *satsaṅgs* or at other times. Other new additions include several revealing letters that Swamiji wrote to close devotees during his early *sāadhanā* days, as well as a number of brief memoirs written by Swamiji's oldest living disciples. These letters and first-hand accounts give us an authentic and precious glimpse into Swamiji's divine personality during those days. Like *Chandra Prabhas*, this book is also a pictorial biography, but contains many additional photos from Swamiji's early life not previously published. These too have been graciously provided to us by Swamiji's old devotees.

For the sake of expediency, we have decided to divide Swamiji's biography into two parts. This first volume covers the early part of Swamiji's life, from childhood to sainthood. It follows Swamiji's footsteps through his early years, his renunciation of the world, and his eighteen years of intensive spiritual *sāadhanā* during which he lived in an isolated cave in Jammu, on a remote mountaintop in Srinagar, and on a jungle island near Haridwar. We will also explore, to the

best of our knowledge and ability, the different spiritual experiences and realizations which he had along the way, culminating at last in the highest integral realization of the Divine.

The second volume will cover Swamiji's move from the forested island to his first *āshram*, Sevak Niwas, located in Sapta Sarovar, Haridwar, where he lived for twenty long years, as well as his subsequent move to Sadhana Kendra Ashram, Domet, where he lives to this day, guiding and inspiring, by personal example, the spiritual seekers who come to seek his blessings.

Some of the details about Swamiji's childhood and early *sādhanā* have been taken from the writings of the late revered Anandji (Yvan Amar), Swamiji's beloved French disciple who spent intimate time with him, beginning in the late 1960's. We also gathered information from many other devotees and disciples to whom we are ever grateful. Many of the small anecdotes were provided by Swamiji himself; over the years, whenever he spontaneously recounted an incident, we kept the small slips of paper on which he wrote and later incorporated them into the text. Since Swamiji rarely speaks about his pre-monastic life and mystical experiences, the reader may sometimes notice a lack of flow or some gaps in the book.

This work has been possible because of the untiring devotional *seva* of *sadhvi* Muskanji, who has been serving the Master personally for over twelve years. She has done all the typing, editing and layout of the book with care and dedication. All the photo work has been done by revered Swami Brahmanandaji who has been serving Gurudeva personally for more than sixteen years. He spent countless

hours scanning, repairing and retouching more than ninety vintage photos of Swamiji's early life, many of which were badly damaged. Many other devotees have also contributed to this book in various ways.

The truth is that this life story contains but a few of the gross incidents of his life, perceptible from outside. But like a floating iceberg, the greater part of his real story is still hidden under the surface. Truly, the life of a saint is as mysterious and incomprehensible as the Divine Himself.

Now O divine Master! Pray, be gracious and kindly accept this humble offering at your lotus feet and grant us the great boon of a pure heart, steady intellect and devotion unto your holy feet.

Date: 05.03.2016

Forever his Servant,
Swami Prem Vivekanand

Introduction

Man, the most evolved of all known species, remains an unsolved riddle. Though he has realized amazing possibilities in the inner and outer realms, he still has his eyes set on the innumerable mysteries of the limitless universe, with a constant zeal to unravel them. His destination, though unknown and unseen, seems mysteriously familiar at the same time. Whatsoever be the object of seeking, whosoever be the seeker, whatever be the means or the place of seeking, ultimately the yearning to discover infinite Bliss, complete Freedom, absolute Truth and enduring Reality is always the motivating force behind this grand journey.

We observe that only those great heroes of mankind who realized the Divine as supreme Bliss and absolute Freedom could solve the complex riddle of life in its entirety and forever; their holy lives spontaneously became the highest ideal of humanity. These beings did not take any physical, mental, ethical or worldly attainment as the ultimate aim of their lives. They saw only the attainment of the Divine as standing the test of Eternity, Infinity, absolute Bliss and absolute Freedom. Thus we find that the greatest heroes of mankind in all ages and in all countries have always been from amongst the spiritual giants.

The presence of these holy souls in our world seems in perfect accord with the intent of the Divine for the general evolution of mankind. Their lives remind us that this mundane world is nothing but an interplay of ego, moving towards death. All relationships prove unreal in the end. Like a mirage, life slips out of our hands. Despite all the means of comfort and security, man is so miserable, burning in the fire of his own ignorance, endless craving and selfishness. He finds no abiding rest until he walks towards his true Home of supreme Bliss and perfect Freedom, and reclaims his essential, primordial dignity.

It is in this context that the holy lives of saints, sages and incarnations acquire relevance. Ever full of divine love and joy, their lives are an eternal spring from which flow ceaselessly and spontaneously the virtues of contentment, simplicity, modesty and humility. Their very presence is a balm to parched hearts. They are mirrors of the highest ideals of humanity. Their tender compassion and grace is the succour and support of souls on their journey to their real Home. Their own noble lives, full of renunciation, austerity, intense *sāadhanā* and equanimous love for all, lay forth before us the practical ideals to be followed. Truly, real saints are the most precious gift from God to humankind. The great poet-saint Paltuji says:

For the good of others
Do the saints take human birth.
They show the right path,
Preach devotion and knowledge,
Sing the glories of the divine name.
Themselves lying low, they
Foster love and amiability amongst all.

To the harshest conduct they reciprocate
With nectar-like sweet words.
They are ever desireless and yet
Undergo sufferings untold
Of their own sweet will.
They move about in the distant lands
For the sake of souls burdened
With darkness and ignorance.
The humble servant 'Paltu' exclaims
I have become Free and Fearless
By the grace of my Gurudeva.

Our beloved Gurudeva, Shri Chandra Swamiji, too belongs to this class of rare sages. He indeed is a vivid illustration of true sainthood.

Over the last fifty years numerous spiritual seekers have found solace under his loving care. His irresistible holy charm arises from the depths of the Spirit and thus he appeals to all alike, whether they are from the East or the West, educated or uneducated, children or adults, devotees or strangers, believers or sceptics. The impact of his Being is contagious. He is, at the same time, majestic like a benevolent king and unassuming like a shy child. His every movement exudes tenderness, purity and divinity. Though now in his mid-eighties, his tall, graceful body is still strong and upright. His lovely meditative eyes are alight with deep compassion and divine love. His long, white hair and beard add to his grandeur, with a bewitching smile often dancing on his lips. The devotees who have but once tasted his charm never tire of gazing at his beauty.

Being always centred in the Divine, Swamiji is never seen excited or depressed, and all his life's activities are done with precision and grace. His gentle, serene, unflinching equanimity and his balanced way of dealing with people even in the most unexpected situations bear the stamp of a man of God.

To his disciples and devotees, he is a father, a most beloved friend, the ultimate guide and support of their lives, while he himself is the disinterested lover of all. He mingles with all and takes his meals together with all the *āshram* residents and visitors. With a marvellous sense of humour which keeps the atmosphere around him light and informal. He loves to play jokes; often they bear a hidden spiritual teaching. Cheerfulness is the way of his life. Non-stop long sessions of laughter in the dining hall and even during the morning walks with him, are not an uncommon sight. And through humour and jokes he always gives some spiritual hint, a message, a touch of inspiration.

Being the Master of thousands of devotees, Swamiji is approached incessantly by people with their worries and excitements. With his infinite listening power, he digests everything like Lord Shiva. The devotees come to him on every occasion—death, marriage, birth, loss, profit etc. He receives all calmly and patiently and gives the most loving and pragmatic guidance to his devotees. Sometimes a devotee comes with the exciting news of the marriage of his only son; soon after another devotee visits with the heart rending news of the death of his only child. Swamiji shares the joys and agonies of both, all the while remaining 'Himself', with his characteristic holy indifference. Though himself remaining an ever uninvolved witness, centred in

his true Being, whenever some tragedy befalls his devotees, he does not brush it away as an unreal passing incident. Like a mother, he shares their grief and sorrow. But at the same time he gives inner strength to the person to bear the tragedy in the name of God. More often than not, he utilises such occasions to disturb the slumber of his devotees and awaken them to follow the path that leads to immortal life and everlasting joy.

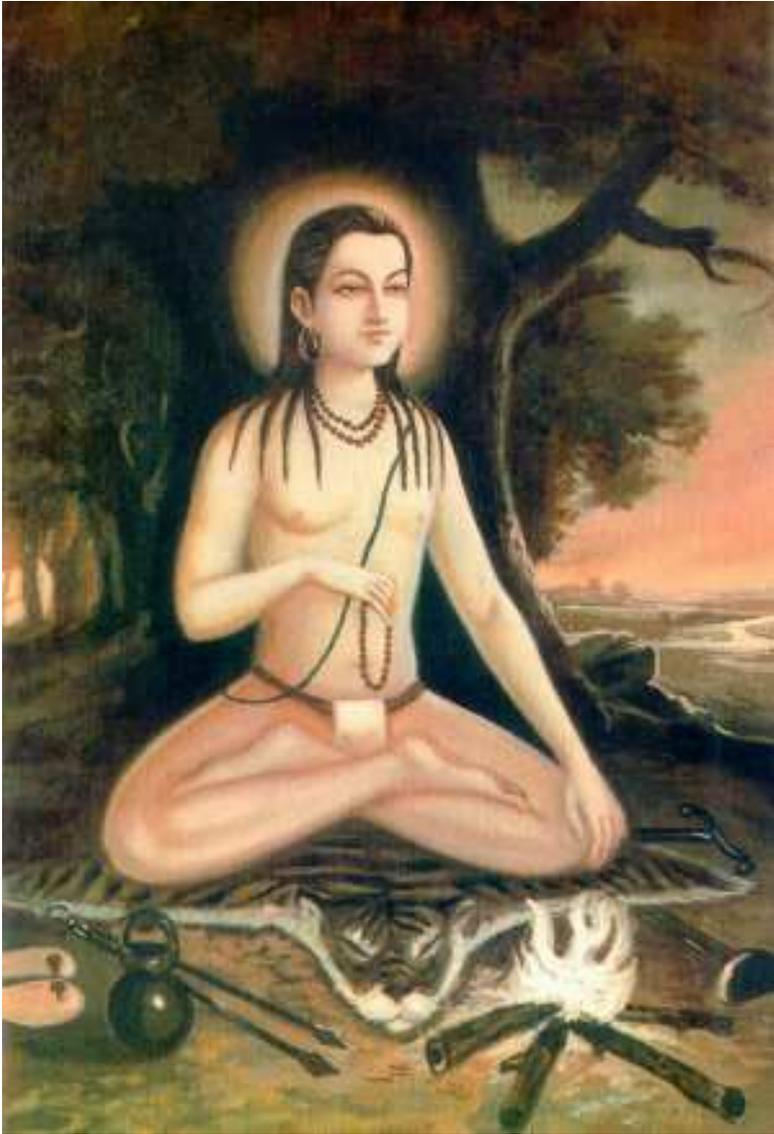
Swamiji's teachings are pure and simple, devoid of any mystification. He tells us that the true aim and purpose of human life is to realize the Divine, who is Absolute Life, Absolute Consciousness and Absolute Bliss. For this he recommends an integral *sāadhanā*, comprising firm faith and trust in God, sincere aspiration to realize God, discrimination, dispassion, prayer, purity of character, constant remembrance of any aspect of the Divine, meditation, *japa*, *prāṇāyāma* and/or breathing exercises, reading sacred scriptures, and association with inspired saints and sages. Along with these spiritual practices, he stresses living a simple, modest and balanced life and serving the poor and needy in the name of God. Thus his integral teachings involve the refinement and sublimation of all the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of the *sādhaka*.

Before we delve into Swamiji's divine *līlā*, it would be pertinent to say a few words about Achārya Shrichandraji and Swamiji's Guru, Baba Bhuman Shahji, the sages with whom he has had close spiritual connection throughout his *sāadhanā*, as well as the Udasin lineage to which Swamiji belongs.

Swami Prem Vivekanand

Udasin Tradition

The Udasin lineage is one of the most ancient monastic denominations of Hinduism. From generation to generation there have been many great saints, mystics and scholars in this tradition, the most renowned in recent history being Bhagavan Shrichandraji. Shrichandraji is considered to be the 165th Udasin Master, though due to his fame as a great *yogī* and his role in spreading the Udasin teachings far and wide, he is often mistakenly taken to be its founder. In fact, the Udasin lineage can be traced all the way back to the time of creation itself. In the holy *Vedas* there is a reference to the four psychogenic offspring of *Brahmā*, the creator of this universe: Sanak, Sanandan, Sanatan and Sanat Kumar. These sages are believed to belong to the period prior even to the seven celestial sages (referred to in the *Vedas* and other scriptures) and the great Naradaji. About these four *ṛiṣhis* (seers), it is believed that, ever remaining in the form of children, they are constantly engrossed in the ecstasy of divine remembrance. Their countenance is exquisitely beautiful and gentle. Dressed in a loin cloth, they move about freely in the whole universe while incessantly chanting the great *mantra* ‘*Hari Sharaṇam*’ (meaning, I take refuge in God). These child-seers have been here since the beginning of creation and continue to be present until the dissolution of the universe, called *pralaya*. Of them, the sage Sanat



Bhagavan Shrichandraji (1494 - 1643)
165th Achārya of the Udasin Lineage

Kumar is the foremost and is believed to be the initiator and the first Master of the Udasin tradition of Hinduism. As we shall see later, these child-seers were especially gracious to the hero of this book, our Gurudeva, and blessed him with their *darshan*, guidance and protection.

Philosophically, Udasins follow the *Vedic* tradition and believe in *Brahman* as the non-dual Supreme Divine Reality. They believe in the final authority of the *Vedas*, but also believe in the *Puranas*. Achārya Shrichandraji preached the practice of both *jnana* and *bhakti* (knowledge and devotion) as the means for the realization of *Brahman*.

Today there are thousands of Udasin *āshrams* and hundreds of thousands of Udasin monks throughout India. Udasin monks are commonly associated with asceticism and are known to be quite liberal. They may wear clothes of orange, black or white, while some wear only a loin cloth and smear their bodies with sacred ash. Some shave their heads completely, others wear their hair in long dreadlocks wrapped around their heads, and some look like common Hindu monks. They are often involved in rendering selfless service to society. Within the Udasin tradition itself there are many branches and sub-denominations. The two main central organizations, to which many Udasin *āshrams* are affiliated, are *Shri Panchāyati Udasin Bada Akhara* and *Shri Panchāyati Naya Udasin Akhara*. These two *akharas*¹ are among the thirteen main *akharas* that represent the diverse monastic traditions of Hinduism and are run by monks with the aim of spreading moral, cultural and spiritual values in society.

¹ *Akhara* is a place where monks live, provided with boarding and lodging, in order to pursue their spiritual sadhana. Different monastic traditions have their own *akharas*.

Baba Bhuman Shahji

Baba Bhuman Shahji, a great mystic and enlightened sage, is the beloved *Sadguru* of our Swamiji. Although Babaji² lived hundreds of years ago, Swamiji has had an intimate relationship with him that defies the confines of time and space. Swamiji himself writes:

“As for me, I have had such a deep and mystical relationship with Babaji that whatever I have known or realized is all due to the total and unreserved protection, guidance and grace of Babaji. He is the being of my being and life of my life; without him I do not have any independent existence at all. And such feeling never ever leaves me, even for a moment, by his sweet grace.”

Babaji was one of the many great realized sages of the aforesaid Udasin tradition. A perfect *yogī* by birth, he is regarded by many to have been an incarnation of Achārya Shrichandraji. Babaji lived in Montgomery district in East Punjab (now in Pakistan) and to this day there is still a village in his name, ‘Bhuman Shah Village.’ His whole life was dedicated to the unbroken remembrance of the Divine, selfless service to the poor and needy, and to awakening people from the hypnotic slumber of attachment to worldly and temporal pursuits. Swamiji has written a small booklet,

² The epithet ‘Babaji’ is used for saints in the Punjab region of India.



Baba Bhuman Shahji Udasin (1687 – 1747)
Swamiji's Guru

Mirror of Bliss, detailing a brief account of Babaji's divine life and teachings.

To this day, Babaji has thousands of followers around the world, especially in the north Indian states of Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan, where many of his devotees fled at the time of partition and constructed temples and shrines in Babaji's name.

The following words about Baba Bhuman Shahji, written by Swamiji on different occasions, give us a glimpse of their divine bond:

“Since his childhood, Babaji was blessed with the state of *mahābhāva*, a rare and very high spiritual state in which the devotee remains completely engrossed in supreme divine love and bliss, with his body and senses divinized as well. Remaining perfectly celibate since childhood, Babaji spent his whole life in unbroken divine remembrance, inspiring the populace to observe the virtues of purity within and without, nonviolence, honesty, justice, compassion, friendliness and so on. Reflection on the vain and trivial nature of this phenomenal world, and contemplation on the eternal, supreme and charming nature of the Lord, remained the focal point of his life throughout. Babaji was spirituality incarnate in its perfection. He was fully capable of awakening any worthy seeker by his mere will.”

“I am the creation of Babaji; I became what he made me. During the course of my *sādhana*, I did whatever he bade me to do. My love for God and intense dispassion was actually born of my love for Babaji. When I was young, I used to weep in his love. I have always had an awareness of his presence, but I used to have his actual *darshan* (vision) frequently as well.”

“In what words can I express the glory and greatness of Babaji? He is my all in all. The riches, status and power of the whole world are nothing in comparison to what he has given to me. That which I have received and which is beyond the realm of description, is due entirely to Babaji. And that which I did not receive was not my lot. It was in my interest not to get it. I feel the limitless grace of Babaji in that too. Should I be reborn, I cannot repay my debt to him in thousands of lives. Should I write about the miracles that happened in my life through Babaji, it would make a book of one thousand pages and no one would believe those extraordinary happenings.”

“Everything can be realized with the grace of Babaji. Whatever one asks, one receives. If one does not ask anything from him, then he gives himself to his devotee. There is no limit to his compassion, his knowledge and his divinity.”

“Should he wish, Babaji can make a king of a beggar and vice versa. All the impurities of the soul are cleansed and life becomes radiant with divine Love and Knowledge through a mere compassionate glance from him. All glory be to Babaji again and again.”

Though we are not aware of the intimate details, the essence of the sweet and divine connection between Swamiji and Babaji, which has endured for lives after lives, is hinted at in the above words. The very remembrance of their divine bond purges the seeker of impurity, prompts and prepares him for self-surrender unto the Lord, and enlightens within him the quintessence of the true relationship between Master and disciple.



A 2012 photo of Babaji's *samādhi* shrine (tomb) in Bhuman Shah Village, now in Pakistan. Since the partition of India in 1947, the shrine has remained largely abandoned. In 2008 the Pakistani government renovated and declared the shrine a heritage site, inviting Shri Chandra Swamiji to inaugurate it, which he did, accompanied by around forty devotees from India and abroad.

Chapter One

Early Years

Childhood & Family Background

On the 5th of March, 1930, a divine child was born to a respected and devout family in Bhuman Shah Village, now in Pakistan. The name of the newborn was Suraj Prakash, later to become Shri Chandra Swamiji Udasin. The mother of this great soul was Mata Vasudeviji and the father was Lala Roopchandji. The baby was very beautiful and charming. Suraj Prakash had two brothers and one sister — all elder to him. His mother was the only daughter of a renowned householder saint of that area, Baba Gulab Dassji. To this day there is a village in his name in Pakistan, Chak Gulab Dass. Mataji had seven brothers. She was a very kind, simple, amiable and devout lady. She was very sociable too. Though herself from a fairly affluent family, she had great concern and compassion for the poor people of the village and freely interacted with them. Some Muslims and people from the potter community lived near her home. They were very poor. But Suraj Prakash was allowed to play freely with the children of their families. He would go to their homes and would eat whatever they offered him, regardless

of religious or caste restrictions. The other children also used to come to his home and do the same.

Since Mata Vasudevi was the daughter of a saint, she had an innate interest in religion and spirituality. She had deep, unflinching faith in Baba Bhuman Shahji, Guru Nanak Devji and Lord Krishna. She was very respectful towards *brāhmīns* and would often serve them. There was a poor *brāhmīn* in the village whom she used to feed devotedly at least twice a month. She would regularly and faithfully observe the fasts of *Ekadashi*, *Amavasya*¹ and other holy days. Observing his saintly mother foregoing food on such days, the young Suraj Prakash would also fast sometimes. As he once wrote, many years later, “I don’t fast now. But as a child I sometimes used to fast, imitating the mother of this body.”

If any saint or monk visited the village or the *derā*,² Mataji would respectfully invite him to her home, feed him and give *dakshina* (money offering). Although in those days most of the village women were illiterate, she could read Gurumukhi³ and used to recite Shri Guru Granth Sahib and the Gītā in Punjabi daily. Swamiji has told us that he could read Gurumukhi even when he was only six or seven years old. In those days his mother would ask him to recite verses

¹ *Ekadashi* is the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight and *Amavasya* is the no-moon day of lunar fortnight, both considered to be auspicious days in Hinduism.

² *Derā* signifies a religious/spiritual place which is usually centred around some sort of temple, shrine or living saint and is inhabited by devotees/seekers.

³ Gurumukhi is the traditional script of the Punjabi language. Shri Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, also revered by Hindus, is written in Gurumukhi.

from the Gītā and Shri Guru Granth Sahib out loud while sitting in the family shrine room. She would listen carefully and correct his pronunciation when necessary.

Mata Vasudevi taught Gurumukhi to many illiterate women, who later built *Gurudwārās* (temples in which the Shri Guru Granth Sahib is ceremoniously installed). She had provided for such a temple in one of the rooms of her own home, in which twenty-five to thirty people could sit. On one side of the temple there was a large wooden dias on which Shri Guru Granth Sahib and Gītājī were placed reverentially. The centre space was adorned with the photos of Baba Bhuman Shahji, baby Krishna and Guru Nanak Devji. The walls of the temple were tastefully covered with beautiful decorative cloths. She used to do her regular daily worship, *japa*, etc, in this home temple. Young Swamiji and the other family members also used to participate in the daily *ārati* in this temple and would sing devotional songs, during which Suraj Prakash would play the drum. Swamiji informs us that his mother had particularly deep faith in *japa* and used to do a lot of *japa* with a *mālā* (rosary). She always kept a *mālā* near her pillow on her bed, a practice which Swamiji also adopted and continues to this very day. Many times Suraj Prakash noticed his mother sitting on her bed late at night telling the beads of her *mālā*. Once he observed, “Now, on the basis of my experience, I can say that she was a very advanced *sādhaka*. At that time I did not recognize her.”

Mata Vasudevi left her body in 1948 after a brief illness. Swamiji told us that thereafter he saw his mother many times in dreams and a few times in meditation as well. Indeed the life of Mata Vasudevi is a typical example of an



Swamiji's father, Shri Lala Roopchand

ideal Indian housewife, demonstrating how a woman, while attending to all the daily chores of life, can grow in spirituality merely on the strength of simplicity, purity of heart and devotion to God.

Now a few words about Swamiji's father, revered Lala Roopchand. He was tall, handsome, well-built and had a charming personality. It is said that in his youth he was exceptionally strong and was highly respected by the Muslim wrestlers of the area. He was also very liberal and modest by nature. In those days the people of that area were not very well educated. But he was a matriculate⁴ from DAV school, Lahore. After passing his matriculation, he had the tempting offer of a direct appointment as Superintendent of Police – a post of pelf and power, but the then head of Bhuman Shah Dera, Mahant Harbhajan Dassji, did not let him go. On his part, Lalaji too preferred to serve the *derā* rather than taking up a job as a police officer which promised only money, respect and high social status. In Swamiji's words:

“In fact, father had completely dedicated his whole life to the *derā*. He had the general power of attorney and was the general manager of the *derā*, which he served with exemplary devotion, grit and integrity. He looked after all the affairs of the *derā*. He was a towering personality of the whole area. Even the Superintendent of Police would not dare arrest anyone from that area without first consulting him. He kept on serving the *derā* till his last with an unparalleled commitment and devotion.”

⁴ Matriculate refers to one who has passed tenth class, a very high standing for villagers of those days.

Swamiji told us that after the age of sixty, his father's state of mind changed completely and his devotion to God became deep and intense. He was very much devoted to Guru Nanak Devji and would visit the *Gurudwārā* daily. He was soft and generous of heart and often gave in charity even beyond his means. Though he did not do much *sāadhanā* in exclusive sittings, like his wife, Vasudevijī, his devotion was very deep, often unmanifest. He had to encounter many tough situations in his life, but he faced them manfully and valiantly, and continued serving the shrine of Babaji with the same zeal and dedication. After the partition of the country he too came over to India along with many others and continued to serve the *derā*. He breathed his last in 1981.

The holy lives of these pious and devout parents left an indelible impression on the mind of the child Suraj Prakash. Certainly it was due to the familial environment of piety and righteousness that the Divine Power sent this highly evolved soul to this noble couple.

The whole village of Bhuman Shah belonged to the *derā* of Babaji, and the family of Lala Roopchand also lived within the village. Their house was quite spacious and big. It had two floors. There were five or six rooms and a kitchen on the ground floor. A hand pump was sunk in the courtyard of the house. Swamiji recalls:

“In the whole village there were only two hand pumps. One was in our house and the other was in my maternal uncle's house. My father had also installed one hand pump outside the village where people could take water.”

The upper storey of the house had two rooms. Though the house was made of mud bricks, all the flooring was solid. Every alternate year a protective coating of mud and cow-

ding used to be applied to the outside of the house while the inside was whitewashed. All the rooms were full of different kinds of articles and goods. Just in front of their home there was another building with five or six rooms. It was used as a storehouse for wheat, cotton, etc.

Mata Vasudevi's father, Baba Gulab Dassji, had also kept apart a plot of land for his daughter in his village, several kilometres away from Bhuman Shah Village, from where a lot of grain used to come to the family. Also, Lalaji used to lease some of his plots of land in the neighbouring villages on a contract basis for farming purposes, and that also yielded some income. Swamiji remembers even now that twelve litres of milk used to come to them daily from the *derā* in the morning and another twelve litres in the evening. The family also had its own buffaloes and cows, which were looked after by servants. At the time of partition, when they were forced to flee from their village, there were some 120 quintals of wheat and other articles lying in their storehouse. The family was fairly prosperous and highly respected in the society.

In those days the population of Bhuman Shah Village was around 5000. Though the *derā* served the populace in many ways, in general the people were poor. Around 70% of the villagers were Hindus and 30% Muslims. People lived together in harmony and amity. Looking back on that period Swamiji often recalls, "In those days Hindus and Muslims lived together as brothers. As a child, many of my friends were Muslim."

One such childhood friend of Swamiji was the late Mehdi Hasan, who later became a world famous *gazzal* singer. Swamiji recalls:

“There was also a great classical singer named Mohammed Ali. He was the uncle of Mehdi Hasan. He lived in Bhuman Shah Village. He used to sing on All India Radio. I was very small then. He loved me as his son. Many times I went to his home. His grandson was my friend; we studied together in Bhuman Shah School up to fourth class. Often when I would go with my friend to his home they would give me food.”

Following are a few more of Swamiji’s early memories, written by his own hand, which give us a glimpse into the village life of his childhood:

“When I was small there were no transistor radios. In the whole Bhuman Shah Village there was only one radio, which belonged to Mahantji.⁵ In our house we had a gramophone record player. All the people from the neighbourhood used to come to our house at night to listen to music on the gramophone record player. Mostly we had the records of *bhajans*, devotional/religious songs. One of the singers was K.L. Saigal. The record player was run by turning the handle.”

“Once when I was a child I went to see a film in a nearby town. The actors would not speak at all. In those days they would act only by signs and expressions. My elder brother took me to see that film. It was in 1939.”

“There was a big pond in Bhuman Shah Village. There were stairs on all sides of the pond, as you see in Shri Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar. It was very big and deep, but

⁵ Mahant is the spiritual/religious title given to the head of an *ashram* or *derā* in some denominations of Hinduism. In this case Swamiji is referring to Mahant Girdhari Dassji, the 10th successor in the line of Baba Bhuman Shahji.



The main gate of Babaji's dera in Bhuman Shah Village (1982)



The pond in Bhuman Shah Village where Suraj Prakash used to swim and go boating with his friends (1982).

there was no temple nearby. There were many peepal trees surrounding the pond and five or six rooms were built next to it. There was also a well and a hand pump nearby. During the summer it was not so hot at that place. The pond used to be filled with the water from the irrigation canal. It was a beautiful pond. There was a small boat belonging to the *derā* in that pond. I used to swim in that pond with my friends; we also used to go boating there. The pond had some huge fish in it. In childhood, because of the influence of the culture of that area, I used to eat meat. Once I caught a large fish from that pond, but when I saw it writhing in pain and tossing about in agony, my heart was filled with compassion and I put it back into the pond. From that day I gave up eating meat. I must have been around thirteen or fourteen years old at that time. My mother never ate meat. Father used to eat meat, but later he also gave it up.

“Many times mother arranged for the recital of Shṛīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa⁶ for seven days at that pond. Many Hindu families of the village would participate in that function.”

“I was told that sometimes the father and mother of this body used to go to Haridwar on a pilgrimage and used to stay at Narayan Niwas in Kankhal (Haridwar). Once my mother is said to have come to Haridwar during the Kumbha Melā. I was then a very small child. I got lost in the crowd and was found only in the evening.”

After enjoying a few of Swamiji’s childhood reminiscences, we now return to his devout family. Devotion towards

⁶ Shṛīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa is one of the foremost ancient scriptures of Hinduism. It preaches spirituality through inspiring stories, including the divine *līlas* of Lord Krishna. It is also a historical text alluding to the old Hindu socio-religious systems.

saints was a hallowed tradition in the family. It was Lala Lakshman Dassji, the paternal grandfather of Suraj Prakash, who first came to settle in the village of Bhuman Shah. He had previously lived in the Muzzafarpur district of Multan (West Punjab) dealing in the wholesale business of dates. Once he was travelling from Multan to Lahore in connection with his business. During the train journey he heard about the holiness and glory of the shrine of Baba Bhuman Shahji and of Mahant Baba Harbhajan Dassji, the ninth Master in the line of Baba Bhuman Shahji. Lala Lakshman Dassji was a lover of saints. He got down at the railway station near Haveli Lakkha and walked to Bhuman Shah Village to have the *darshan* of Mahantji. He was greatly impressed with his divinity and decided to stay there with him for some days. There he virtually fell in love with Mahantji, took him as his spiritual Master and resolved to come and settle in Bhuman Shah so that he could be in the proximity of and serve his beloved Master. He went back to Muzzafarpur, closed his shop and wound up his business, reckoning that he had earned enough to support his family, and came to settle permanently in Bhuman Shah Village with his whole family.

From the above we can infer why Swamiji chose this family for the final leg of his great spiritual journey. Thus, from the gross point of view, it was Lala Lakshman Dassji who first sowed the seeds of devotion to Baba Bhuman Shahji in this family. And now, through our Swamiji, these seeds have grown into a big banyan tree, which, in its full verdure, is ever branching and spreading across the world. Today there are thousands of devotees of Swamiji worldwide who have received the gift of devotion to Baba Bhuman Shahji through Swamiji. Whosoever, from India or abroad,

comes in contact with Swamiji, naturally develops faith in Babaji as well.

Childhood Visions and Spiritual Experiences

Right from childhood, Suraj Prakash felt a spontaneous, deep and unearthly attraction not only towards Babaji, but also towards his *samādhi* (tomb). The child loved to spend hours and hours at the *samādhi*, just as a lover runs towards its beloved at the slightest pretext. For him the *samādhi* was the gross form of Babaji, and he clearly felt the presence of Babaji there. The innocent village boy used to feel that the centre of his own being was not in him, but in the *samādhi*. And this irresistible attraction was so natural and spontaneous, as if it were a love affair of many, many lives. In fact, it was his deep love for Babaji that later manifested into the highest state of spirituality. Swamiji has said himself, “In childhood I had no particular interest in God as such. Of course, there was a pious and religious atmosphere at home; the company of saints was also frequently available. But my deep dispassion and love for God that was to manifest later, in fact was based on my love for Babaji. Whatever has happened in this life, has happened because of his love alone.”

On the basis of the incidents following hereafter, we can easily infer that this child was born with an unusually high spiritual background. Such extraordinary spiritual experiences were happening to the child effortlessly, as are rare even for advanced *sādhakas*.

We have a rare piece of dialogue on this topic between Swamiji and this author which reveals a number of very

important facts. Of course, as usual, the questions were asked verbally and the Master wrote his replies.

Swami Prem Vivekanand (SPV): Please tell us something about the spiritual experiences you had as a child.

Swamiji: In childhood, one of my frequent experiences was the feeling of flying high in the sky, as if I was going up and up. I enjoyed this experience, but sometimes it felt as if I was coming down. Then I had to make great effort to continue to fly. In childhood it used to happen quite frequently. At that time I never wondered why it happened so. The feeling of flying in the sky happens when the *prāṇa* (vital force) rises swiftly to the higher centres. This feeling is a common experience for many *sādhakas*. Or, sometimes because of the rising of *prāṇa*, the *sādhaka* feels as if his/her body has risen from his/her *āsana* (seat) during meditation. Besides this, there used to be the experience of trembling in the body because of *sāttvic* emotions like love, compassion, etc. It happens either because of the activation of *prāṇa* or an overflow of an emotion in the body. For example, exceeding love causes horripilation, and an excess of anger causes shaking in the body.

SPV: It is said that in childhood you often had visions of enlightened saints, especially Babaji.

Swamiji: Yes, but in childhood, except for Baba Bhuman Shahji, I never had visions of the saints of present acquaintances. Sometimes visions of child Krishna used to occur. But now I have only a faint memory of that. Such visions can occur not only in meditation, but also in the waking state.

SPV: What is the impact of such visions?

Swamiji: One feels joy. The very sight of a saint has a purifying effect on the mind and one comes into contact with their subtle holy vibrations. Its impact on the subconscious mind is even deeper. It is like when you drink milk; you don't know the details of how it acts on your body, but you feel a strength and nourishment from it.

Once this author sought clarification from Swamiji about an apparent gap in Swamiji's *sāadhanā*. From observing Swamiji's life, it appears that he consciously started his *sāadhanā* only at the age of seventeen after becoming initiated into the *mantra*. Thus, there appears to be a big gap between the *sāadhanā* of his previous life and the present life. To this, Swamiji gave a beautiful explanation:

“The *sanskāras* (impressions in seed form) can manifest at any time. Until the age of fifteen, not a single thought about spirituality crossed the mind of Ramana Maharshi. But at fifteen, while reading about Arunachala mountain in the *Shiva-Purana*, the past *sanskāras* became active and came to the surface. If no sign of outer growth is observed, would you call it a ‘gap’? Evolution takes place both at the conscious level as well as at the subconscious level. When at the conscious level, outer signs become visible. When the seed grows under the earth, it is not visible. It becomes visible only when it comes out from the earth. Shall we say it did not grow while it was underground?

“If someone has visions of saints or other spiritual experiences without any effort on his part, it only proves the presence of past *sanskāras*, even if one is unable to understand or interpret these visions. Realization of God does not spontaneously become the only goal of life for everyone. And if it so happens for someone, then it has to be admitted

that his background was different than that of others. As many features and characteristics of the body become manifest only after reaching a certain age, like puberty, so also past *sanskāras* of the soul become active and manifest only after the body-mind matures up to a certain minimum limit. Then, apart from *sanskāras* of previous lives, the present environment and the personalities of the mother and father also influence the development of the body-mind of the soul.”

Thus we find that these high spiritual experiences were very natural to child Suraj Prakash. Though he could not interpret them intellectually, deep within he did feel and enjoy the blissful and wholesome impact of these experiences. In this context Swamiji wrote elsewhere:

“It is not necessary that your gross mind should be aware of such impacts. The gross mind seldom becomes aware of spiritual growth. You will understand it only when your mind makes an analysis of the changes the impact has brought about, and then tries to interpret them. A small child cannot make such evaluations.”

On being asked if he had other experiences, Swamiji wrote: “In childhood I used to have foreknowledge of future events. I remember an incident. Perhaps I was a student of eighth class then. Father had gone to Lahore. There he purchased a bicycle and sent it home by train. He had never talked about it with any of us before. I received the receipt from the railway station at 11 a.m. and got the delivery of the bicycle. The very same day at four in morning I had witnessed the whole sequence of events relating to that bicycle and it being brought from the railway station. I was very surprised as to why and how it happened! Many times I knew beforehand the persons who were going to visit our

home and sometimes I would even tell this to my parents before they arrived.”

The child Suraj Prakash was shy and naughty by nature, but also deeply spiritual. Swamiji himself wrote, “I was not interested in studies. I was interested either in playing, or in religious activities because of the influence of my mother. I used to go to the *samādhi*, where *ārati* used to be held, daily in the morning and evening. There, hidden from the eyes of people, in the privacy of a corner, I longed to meditate. Many times, getting up early in the morning, I used to sit for meditation in the *samādhi* of Baba Darshan Dassji, the fifth Mahant in the line of Babaji, because many devotees were coming to the *samādhi* of Baba Bhuman Shahji to do obeisance. Many times I felt scared because of the darkness in the *samādhi*. Sometimes I felt a mysterious presence there, as if someone was touching me. In the beginning I felt afraid because it used to be completely dark and nothing was visible. It also felt as if someone was walking there and the sound of footsteps was also heard. But gradually, as I grew, the fear disappeared. Sometimes I would lose consciousness in meditation and experience great bliss. I would regain consciousness only when the priest came in the morning and opened the doors to do *pūja-ārati*. In those days, I was studying in fourth or fifth class, perhaps.”

Besides the above, Suraj Prakash used to have visions of Baba Shri Chandraji and Baba Bhuman Shahji frequently in his childhood. In his words:

“I always had an unbroken awareness of my intimate closeness with Baba Bhuman Shahji, but sometimes I also used to see him directly with my own eyes. However, I never meditated on him deliberately. When one is aware of the



The inner sanctum sanctorum of Babaji's shrine (1982) where Suraj Prakash used to attend *ārati* early in the morning.



Samādhi shrine of Baba Bhuman Shahji (1982).



Samādhi shrines of other *mahants* (masters) in the lineage of Babaji. Suraj Prakash used to meditate in the early mornings in the *samādhi* of the fifth mahant, Baba Darshan Dassji, shown on the far left (1982).



Columns of the *samādhi* shrine and the nearby Darbar Hall with their intricate carvings and paintings still partially intact (1982).

presence of somebody, there is no need to practice meditating on him. What is the meaning of meditation? Awareness.”

Now we wish to relate another revealing incident from Swamiji’s life, which we learnt through his own writings. In Bhuman Shah Village there lived an old widow lady from the Kamboj community, Mata Jyoti. She had learnt the Gurumukhi language from Mata Vasudeviji, the mother of Suraj Prakash, and she herself taught Gurumukhi to numerous children, mainly from the Kamboj community. She had the Shri Guru Granth Sahib ceremoniously installed in her house. Since Mata Jyoti was a frequent visitor to the home of Suraj Prakash, the latter was like a son to her and played on her lap. The old lady was very pure hearted and devout. She used to tell the child: “Look, when I put Babaji to sleep (meaning the holy scripture Shri Guru Granth Sahib, who is taken as a living Guru) by fanning, I never feel hot during the night.”

At the time of partition of the country, when she had to flee Pakistan, she left everything behind in her home, but brought the Guru Granth Sahib, carrying it on her head. Such was her faith and reverence for the holy scripture. After coming to divided India, she constructed a *Gurudwārā* made of mud-bricks at a place five to six kilometres away from Sirsa in Haryana, where villagers used to perform *puja-ārati*.

Many years later, in 1951-52, filled with intense dispassion and abandoning his studies midway, Swamiji had returned from Dehra Dun to Mahant Girdhari Dassji in village Bahauddin. One day he accompanied the father of Mahantji to the aforesaid village where Mata Jyoti was living in her *Gurudwārā*. Now, further narrative from Swamiji’s own pen:

“She loved me very much and was very happy to meet me. She lovingly recounted to me many incidents of my childhood. One incident she told especially was that when I was born I did not open my eyes for one month. At the time she and my mother feared that perhaps I was born blind. So, my mother forbade Mata Jyoti from telling anyone, lest a rumour should spread that the child was blind by birth. My mother hoped I might open my eyes later on. Mata Jyoti informed me that I had opened my eyes one full month after my birth. She further remarked, with great assurance, ‘Now, seeing your strong dispassion and inclination towards God, I can say that for one full month after your birth, you were in a state of deep *samādhi!*’”

We are thrilled to ponder how deeply and firmly Swamiji must have been grounded in the Divine in his previous birth for his divine state to manifest itself so explicitly in his new birth. Perhaps to enable the mind-body of the newborn child to develop into a fit instrument to ascend the spiritual peak, the manifestation of his divine state gradually subsided outwardly.

Student Days

After passing the fourth class from the small school in Bhuman Shah Village, Suraj Prakash was sent for further studies to the village of Haveli Lakkha, which was about eight kilometres from his village, because it was the only school in the area in which English was taught. In Haveli Lakkha, Suraj Prakash lived in a hostel and would come home only on Sundays or during holidays.

In his school days, he was very fond of sports. Otherwise he was a shy, yet balanced boy. But he had one rather strange quality – unlike other boys of his age, he was not excessively attached to anyone or anything, not even to the members of his family, including his parents. Such was the sweet and mysterious grace of Babaji that after passing fourth class, Suraj Prakash never lived with his family for a long period. The Lord Himself was preparing the ground for the intense dispassion that was to manifest later in the life of His beloved child.

As Suraj Prakash grew older, he became especially fond of playing volleyball. He himself recounts how his love of sports sometimes got him into trouble:

“When I was thirteen and studied in eighth standard I lived in a hostel in Haveli Lakkha. I was very fond of sports. At that time I was interested in both football and volleyball. In the hostel the dinner was cooked rather early because there was no electricity. I used to go out to play sports and would come back late in the evening. The elder brother of this body was also living in that hostel. He was obliged to keep food for me because the football ground was quite far and I would return to the hostel late. One day he became very much annoyed and slapped me for coming late each day.”

Along with his sports activities Swamiji was also fond of playing the flute. When the students would practise their drill, someone would beat the drum and Suraj Prakash would play the flute. When asked if he used to sing as well, he shook his head with a smile, “I was of a very shy nature. But I did try to learn piano; I could play two film songs on the piano.”

Some time back we came into contact with Shri Jamna Dassji Goomer of Jalalabad, Punjab. He was a childhood friend of Swamiji and knew him since 1945, when they both studied in the government high school in Haveli Lakkha. They lived in the hostel together in the same room while studying in the tenth class. Therefore Jamna Dassji could observe Swamiji quite closely. He told us that he very much loved the handsome and innocent Suraj Prakash. In those days the hostel warden was Sardar Kesar Singhji. A man of philosophical disposition and purity, he also loved Suraj Prakash dearly. Perhaps he saw something special in the young boy.

Twice during summer vacation Suraj Prakash invited his friend Jamna Dassji to his village, Bhuman Shah, where they stayed in the *derā's* guesthouse called 'Burj'. There they received special treatment including special food. Suraj Prakash showed his friend the huge *derā* and also took him to all the neighbouring places. In those days the *derā* was so big that its stable had about a hundred horses. Suraj Prakash was an expert horseback rider and often travelled to and from Haveli Lakkha on horse.

Another remarkable characteristic of Suraj Prakash was his natural cheerfulness. He always looked happy. Lord Krishna tells us that 'inner cheerfulness' is an unmistakable sign of a *yogī*, which comes about only by the complete annihilation of attachment, greed, envy, ego, etc. That state was natural to Suraj Prakash. Also, he had no particular attachment to tasty foods. If he received any special dish from his home, he loved to share it with his friends.

The following quote gives us a glimpse into Swamiji's hostel life during that period. To this day Swamiji has a

small scar on the upper right side of his forehead. When asked when and how he got the scar he wrote:

“In those days I was studying in 10th class in a hostel in Haveli Lakkha. One day a severe rainstorm came when we were sleeping in the open outside the veranda of our hostel. So all the students took their beds and mattresses inside the covered veranda. When I was putting my mattress on my bed, one student kept his bed in standing position close to my bed. That bed fell on me and one of its legs hit me on the forehead. It started bleeding profusely and it wouldn't stop. So my friends applied mud on the wound and tied it with a cloth. In the morning I was taken to the hospital where proper dressing was done.”

In school, the teacher of Punjabi language, Gyani Dilip Singhji, especially loved this charming boy. In the tenth class, out of twenty-six students, only six were able to pass the exams, and these two friends were among them. Swamiji told us that Jamna Dassji was very studious. Jamna Dassji further told us that though Suraj Prakash was a naturally gifted and extraordinary sportsman, he was also very sharp and intelligent. He studied very little. Whatever he learned in the classroom was enough for him to pass the exams; he rarely studied after class time.

We were told that Suraj Prakash liked to watch movies. That was pretty common for boys of his age. But what was unusual was that whenever there was a love scene in the film, he would start weeping in the love of Babaji, right there in the cinema hall. The powerful web of worldly illusions and temptations in its myriad forms failed to trap the child of Baba Bhuman Shahji. With all its power, it could but evoke in him only dispassion and divine love.

Thus Suraj Prakash grew in the midst of high spiritual experiences of various orders, which were quietly transforming him from within, while outwardly he lead a fairly normal student life. As he grew, his craze for sports also increased, especially the game of volleyball. Thus, inwardly a strong undercurrent of spirituality and outwardly a strong inclination for games and sports existed together.

Often Swamiji draws a comparison between a *sādhaka* and a sportsman, giving specific examples of the relationship between a sporting event and some typical forms of *sādhanā*. We believe that through sports, our Swamiji had practiced many of the essential qualities of a true *sādhaka*. Long before meditating in caves and forests, he had already learned on the sports field the essentials of *sādhanā*, like one-pointed devotion towards the ideal, total commitment, perseverance, alertness, balance of mind, planning, selflessness, fearlessness, concentration, etc. It is natural then, that in his own typical way, Shri Chandra Swamiji defines spiritual *sādhanā* as a process of conscious and deliberate exercise by which one taps one's physical, mental and spiritual energies, and sublimates and uses them in order to realize one's divinity. The spiritual journey, he tells us, is also a long marathon race and, like a sport or game, it obliges you to strike your goal at any cost. The goal of young Suraj Prakash was God.

After passing the tenth class from Haveli Lakkha, Suraj Prakash was sent to Sanatan Dharam College in Lahore for further studies. His friend, Jamna Dassji was also admitted to this college.



Suraj Prakash, at the age of sixteen, when he was a student of eleventh class in Lahore.

The Divine Call

In 1947, when Suraj Prakash came home from Lahore to spend his summer vacation, a strange thing started happening to him. Baba Bhuman Shahji started coming to him regularly in his dreams. Standing before him and gazing straight into his eyes with deep love, he would evoke in the young boy memories of their intimate spiritual relationship of many past lives. Perhaps for Babaji, Suraj Prakash had now become mature enough to undertake his spiritual journey consciously and deliberately. Slowly the clouds of many previous lives started clearing up from his consciousness; countless sweet memories of his deep relationship with Babaji were rekindled. It dawned on Suraj Prakash as to who he was and what was the purpose of his life. He was completely overtaken by a deluge of dispassion and was carried away by the current of Babaji's love.

After several days of this occurring, another strange thing happened. One night Babaji appeared in his father's dream and said, "Suraj is my spiritual child. He must renounce his family ties and complete his spiritual *sādhana* in this very life. You should consecrate him to me. I will take care of him in every respect." During the dream, his father was so overwhelmed by the presence and authority of Babaji that he readily agreed to what Babaji demanded. But the next day he ignored the incident, interpreting it as merely a dream. He did not speak to anyone about it.

The following night, Babaji again appeared to him in his dream, but this time with a frightful warning. He said, "You have disobeyed me. How dare you ignore the whole matter as a mere dream and break your promise! Now look,

Suraj is dead.” And indeed Suraj Prakash, lying on his bed nearby, appeared lifeless to his father. Babaji continued, “Would you give this child to me alive or rather have him dead?” Hearing this, the father started crying bitterly. At this, Babaji consoled and assured him, saying, “You need not worry about your son, as he will always be under my direct and full protection.” Babaji then asked him to comply with two of his wishes: The first was that the father should immediately contact Mahant Girdhari Dassji, the tenth successor in the line of Babaji, and the second was that he must keep his word regarding the consecration of his son to him, and that whenever the boy wanted to renounce the world in search of the Divine, he should not restrain him from doing so. Babaji then disappeared.

The next morning the father told everything to his wife. Somewhat frightened and bewildered, they decided to go to Mahant Girdhari Dassji. They found, to their great surprise, that Mahantji was waiting for them. Before they uttered a single word, he told them that Babaji had also appeared to him in a dream and had instructed him to do certain things. He then explained everything to them.

Initiation into the Udasin Lineage

On the 15th of June, 1947, all the saints of the *derā* and many villagers assembled in the large Darbar Hall adjacent to Babaji’s *samādhi* shrine. Recitation of the holy Guru Granth Sahib was held especially for this sacred occasion. Suraj Prakash was made to sit on a special *āsana* and some of his hair was cut by Mahantji as part of the ceremony.

Mahant Girdhari Dassji selected a sentence from the Guru Granth Sahib at random and on the basis of the first syllable of that sentence, changed his name from Suraj Prakash to Chandra Prakash. He then whispered a *mantra* into the young boy's ear and gave him a *kopin* (loin cloth worn by monks) as well as a cap and *sehli* (a black holy thread) in accordance with the Udasin tradition. Later, after the function was over, his head was completely shaved and *prasād* was distributed. Thus Swamiji was initiated as a *brahmachāryi* of the Udasin order at the age of seventeen.

While changing his name from Suraj Prakash to Chandra Prakash, Mahantji remarked smilingly, “You were very hot like the sun (*suraj*),⁷ now you will be very cool like the moon (*chandra*).” Thus Babaji, in his infinite grace, initiated Swamiji into spiritual life through the medium of Mahant Girdhari Dassji. After receiving initiation, Swamiji lived in the *derā* for about a month and a half. Thereafter, in accordance with the monastic tradition, he never again lived at his parents' home, but stayed with Mahant Girdhari Dassji in the *derā*.

This initiation was not merely a change of name. It transformed his whole outlook and life interest. Chandra Prakash was submerged in a mighty current of dispassion and divine love. About his dispassion at that time, Swamiji once said, “Now I can say that my strong dispassion was based on my love for Babaji. It was because of his grace.” The young *yogī* came to know that he was a spiritual pilgrim of many past lives. The real aim of his life became radiant to him spontaneously and without any apparent cause. Therefore, at the age when most boys start becoming en-

⁷ Here Mahantji was referring to the young boy's craze for sports.



Mahant Girdhari Dassji, the tenth successor in the line of Babaji, who initiated Suraj Prakash into the Udasin lineage.



Views of the large Darbar Hall in which Suraj Prakash received initiation (photos 1982). Swamiji tells us that on the platform inside the hall a *murti* of Achārya Shrichandraji was installed under the dome in the centre, with a painting of Baba Bhuman Shahji on the right, and Shri Guru Granth Sahib on the left.

tangled in this illusory world of passion, name, fame, ego and worldly ambitions, this young boy made a Himalayan resolve within that the aim of his life was nothing short of an integral realization of the Divine.

After this incident, the undercurrent of strong dispassion and divine love in his heart never dried up. But people could not see his inner transformation from outside. Outwardly Chandra Prakash remained engaged with his second love — sports.

The way in which Chandra Prakash turned to God is an extraordinary example for humanity. He was an exceptionally handsome, well-built boy with a sharp intellect, who came from a respected and well-to-do family and before whom lay open the fullest opportunities to enjoy this tempting world. He did not turn to God because of any worldly failure, rejection, despair, want, or else due to suffering, fear, disease or old age. Chandra Prakash's dispassion towards the world and his love for God arose from the depths of his being; it was most natural, and without any external cause. In fact, it is the attraction towards the world that is unnatural and therefore invariably wanes and ends sooner or later, leaving behind a feeling of being cheated. Ultimately it is the divine Love/Light to which everyone must turn. For, what reason is needed to aspire to return to one's true Home? What counsel does one need to quench the thirst for absolute Knowledge, absolute Love, absolute Bliss and absolute Truth? May we also strive to realize Him for the love of Him alone with all our might and without any cause.

Only a month and a half after Chandra Prakash's initiation, India underwent the trauma of painful partition, which gave birth to Pakistan. Whereas India, true to her liberal

and spiritual values, once again became a secular country, Pakistan declared itself an Islamic state. In the process of partition, hundreds of thousands of people were killed. Hindus and Sikhs had to flee their hearths and homes from newly formed Pakistan to save their lives, leaving behind all their belongings, their temples, *Gurudwārās* and symbols of their culture. As fate would have it, the village of Bhuman Shah along with the huge *derā* and sacred shrine of Babaji, fell on the side of the border that became Pakistan.

In the midst of the massacre and bloodshed that was going on all around, Mahant Girdhari Dassji too decided to escape to India along with many of the other Hindus on that side of the border. By then, Babaji's *derā* had grown into a huge establishment with palatial buildings, halls, thousands of acres of land, magnificent shrines and the large Darbar Hall in which Chandra Prakash had received his initiation. All was left behind. At this time Chandra Prakash was already on the Indian side of the border in Mussorie, where he had gone to spend his summer vacation with several of his classmates. Mahantji sent Swamiji's father, Lala Roopchandji, to the Superintendent of Police of Ferozpur, a nearby town in India, to bring military forces for their safe passage. The Superintendent of Police of Ferozpur was a devotee of Mahantji. So, while Mahantji, some of his devotees, and Mata Vasudevi were waiting in Haveli Lakkha on their way to India, Lalaji arrived with Indian military men in two trucks. But unfortunately in the commotion, the old father of Mahantji and the sacred statue of Acharya Shrichandraji were left behind in the *derā*. So in one military truck Mahantji left for India along with his devotees and with the other military truck Lalaji went back to the

derā. When he reached the *derā*, rioters were busy looting the *derā*, especially the thousand-quintal stock of grain. There were big heaps of looted grain all around. In that situation the rioters and looters posed a clear threat to Lalaji's life. So the military men accompanying him fired shots into the air to scare them away. It worked. Without losing time, Lalaji searched for the old father of Mahantji and found him hiding in the house of an old Muslim friend. He took him from there and then went to the *derā* and retrieved the sacred statue of Achārya Shrichandraji. He then headed back to India. On the way back he again encountered rioters, who were destroying a bridge in order to prevent people from fleeing to India. Here also the military men had to fire shots to disperse the mob. Thus risking his life and exhibiting extraordinary courage, Lalaji rescued the father of Mahantji and the sacred statue of Achārya Shrichandraji and brought them safely back to India. That was the stuff Lalaji was made of.

Meanwhile, during this whole time, Chandra Prakash was safely in India, in Mussorie, unaware of the massive upheaval which was taking place in his family and the *derā*. Eventually Mahant Girdhari Dassji was able to convey a message to him and instructed him and his companions to remain in Mussorie until the situation stabilized. Thus, although they had originally planned to stay only a few weeks in Mussorie, they ended up staying several months. Finally Mahantji and the family of Chandra Prakash settled in the village of Bahauddin in district Sirsa, Haryana and Chandra Prakash went to join them, where he once again lived with Mahantji.



Chandra Prakash (left) together with his classmates in Mussorie in 1947.



Chandra Prakash (top left) enjoying his summer holidays with friends at Kempt Falls, Mussorie before the time of partition.

With the breaking of the country, the tender heart of Chandra Prakash also broke. The *samādhi* shrine of his beloved, the *derā*, the village – all had been snatched away from him. For him the separation from the *samādhi* was unbearable. In his own words, “After partition, I used to weep alone in hiding, in the memory of Babaji’s *samādhi*. For months together I was possessed by the idea of running away to the *derā* and continuing to live at the shrine of Babaji in Pakistan, in the garb of a *fakir* (Muslim Sufi ascetic).”

His state at that time was similar to the legendary lovers, Heer and Ranjha. For years Ranjha, disguised as a *sadhu*, had been grazing buffaloes in the village of his beloved Heer to be in her proximity. The following verse describes Chandra Prakash’s silent pangs:

“Far, far away in the heart of solitude, a flute keeps crying. O beloved! Look! How deeply the longing for thee has pierced my being.”

In those days he woke up in His remembrance; he slept in His remembrance; he smiled in His remembrance; he wept in His remembrance.

However, for young Chandra Prakash his beloved was not only limited to that *samādhi*, but was also present within as his own *Ātmā*, his true Self. The *samādhi* was just an outer symbol of that. And Chandra Prakash had direct awareness of it, with Babaji’s grace. Gradually, there was partial mitigation of his suffering caused by the separation from the *samādhi*.

After settling in Bahauddin Village, Mahant Girdhari Dassji established a temporary *derā* there and eventually built a new shrine of Babaji about four kilometres away from Bahauddin in the village of Sanghar. Here Lala

Roopchand continued to serve the *derā* and Mahantji as a loyal devotee. Gradually, Babaji's devotees made temples dedicated to Babaji at many places in north India, where to this day *pūja-ārati* is offered with love and faith.

It was during this early period in Bahauddin that Chandra Prakash suffered a second major loss — the loss of his beloved mother, Mata Vasudevi. Being uprooted from Babaji's *derā* had no doubt been a terrible shock for her as well, and in early 1948 she developed a high fever. After only a brief illness she passed away.

Though Chandra Prakash had lived apart from his family since a young age, he still had regular contact with them, and as he often reminds us to this day, the bond between a mother and child is the deepest and most selfless love amongst all worldly relationships. Swamiji has also said many a time that the mother is the first Guru of the child. We can easily gather from Swamiji's rare but revealing reminiscences about his childhood that this was no less true in his case. Swamiji himself has told us that when he learned of her death he wept in the arms of Mahantji.

Sportsmanship and Deepening Dispassion

Before partition of the country, Chandra Prakash was studying in Sanatan Dharam College in Lahore, from where he passed his eleventh class. After settling in Bahauddin, Mahantji sent him to complete the final year (twelfth standard) of his F.Sc. course from Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala in 1948, after which he was sent to Dehradun for further studies. He graduated with a Bachelor in Science in physics, chemistry and maths from DAV College, Dehradun (UP) in 1951.

Once, when recounting his college days, Swamiji told us an interesting incident which reveals that the date which devotees normally celebrate as Swamiji's birthday, the 5th of March, may in fact not be his actual date of birth. In his own words:

“I don't know the date of my birth. In 1948-49, when I took admission in a college in Dehradun, most of the refugees had no certificates to show which class they were in, because everything had been left behind in Pakistan. The principal of DAV College told me to bring my F.Sc. certificate, so I went to the head office of Punjab University in Solan. All their records had been left behind in Lahore, but seeing that I had passed my FSc from Ambala, they agreed to give me the certificate. The person in charge asked me my date of birth and I replied, “I do not know.” Then he asked me two or three questions and accordingly he wrote a date on that certificate. Since then, on all my records, my date of birth is recorded as the 5th of March.”

During his studies in Dehradun Swamiji displayed his excellence in sports and games in many events, including athletics, but his favourite sport always remained volleyball. He played for hours on end and was soon named captain of the DAV College volleyball team. He became quite adept at the art of smashing (spiking) and practised it for so many hours daily that his right arm became slightly longer than his left. To this day the right sleeve of his robe has to be specially stitched two inches longer than the left. His boyhood enthusiasm for the game of volleyball is especially apparent in the following letter written to a friend during his Dehradun college days. The letter was originally written in Urdu:

Dehradun
16.09.1951

Dear Brother Shri Rajkishan ji,
Namaste,

I received a letter from you long back and replied to the same within two or three days. After this I did not receive any reply, nor your programme of coming here. Any reason?

In Mussorie a festival is being arranged from the 18th of September to the 15th of October, in which a beauty competition, musical concerts and games will be organized. It is said that this is a unique festival in India. It also includes a volleyball tournament. If you could come here, then we could also enter as a private club. I will definitely go for sightseeing for a week; then why not participate in the tournament? There is no team there capable of defeating us. Hence, you must come, please. Dates have yet to be fixed, but you must reach here by the 24th of September because, in my view, the tournament will start on the 26th/27th. Our team has improved a lot by now. Mr. Sudarshan came here today and is OK. Respected Papaji is going to Sirsa on the 18th of September.

I am sure you will come and will inform me about your programme by return.

Yours,
Chandra

By now Chandra Prakash had grown into a tall, slim, strong and handsome youth. He had sharp features with a golden complexion and was very charming. Even though outwardly engaged in worldly activities, he always appeared



Chandra Prakash at the age of nineteen holding up his trophy for best sportsman at DAV College, Dehradun (1949-50) .

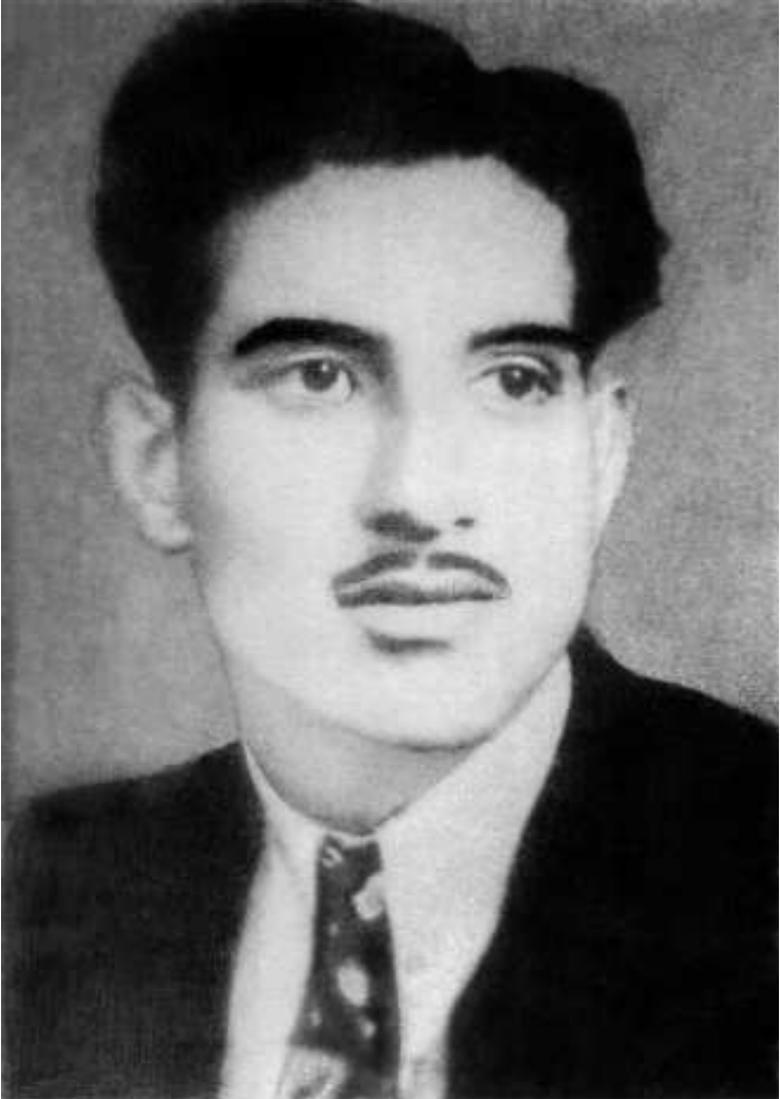


Photo of Chandra Prakash from the DAV College magazine (1950-51).

withdrawn and detached. Simplicity, humility, serenity and innocence were the hallmarks of his personality even then.

Both teachers and students alike were attracted to the young Chandra Prakash. The head of the Chemistry Department, Prof. L.N. Gupta, was especially fond of him and remained connected with him for his whole life. Years later Swamiji revealed the following remarkable information about him:

“Prof. L.N. Gupta was my teacher while I studied in DAV College. I had a great love and respect for him. I even longed to wash his feet. He also loved me very much. Though an Arya Samajist, he was a great devotee of Lord Ram. To me he always looked like a saint. His wife had died after only two years of their marriage and thereafter he did not remarry, but remained alone. Later, I had a vision that in one of my previous lives as a monk I had studied Sanskrit from him at an *āshram* in the Himalayas. Prof. Gupta had been a *paṇḍit* in that *āshram* and used to teach Sanskrit to monks. I never told him about this vision. Our contact continued even after I took *sannyās*. He wanted to make a will leaving all his property in my name, but I requested him not to. Later, he willed all his property to DAV College, Dehradun on my advice. He loved me so much that he wanted to have me besides him at the time of his death to help him. And so it happened.”⁸

Once, while having dinner in the dining hall of the ashram, Swamiji told us many things about his sports activities during his college days in Dehradun. He wrote:

⁸ Swamiji reached Professor Gupta only one hour before he breathed his last. At the last moment Swamiji put a little water charged with a sacred *mantra* in his mouth.

“The athletics team of DAV College was to be selected for the district level athletics meet. That day was a holiday in college. The DAV College had rented the athletics field of Saint Joseph’s Academy on Rajpur Road for one day. The athletics field had running tracks. The district level open sports meet also used to be held there. I was not aware that the college athletics team was to be selected on that day. I happened to pass by on a bicycle and saw two college students standing there. On enquiry they informed me that the college athletics team was to be selected for the district meet. So I also went in. The selection process had not yet started and the boys were practicing high jump at the high jump stand. I also tried, wearing my shoes and pants, and in my first attempt I jumped 5’6”. The highest record of our college for high jump was 5’8”. One of my friends encouraged me and said, “If you can cross 5’6” in shoes and pants without any practice, you must participate in the selection process.” So, for the first time, I participated in athletics. I stood first in high jump with 5’9”, second in 100 metres and 200 metres race and third in shot-put. After that I developed interest in athletics as well. Before that I only used to play volleyball daily. After a month with a little practice, I participated in the district athletics meet as a member of my college athletics team and secured positions in five events. I stood first in the group of under eighteen and third in the district open meet.

“The next year I stood first in the district open sports meet and afterwards I always stood first in such meets as long as I remained in Dehradun. One year I represented my district in three events in the U.P. state level tournament.

“In college I received colours for sports championships for three years, and that of district level for two years; I must have had at least twenty-five colours/certificates. Later, when I took *sannyās*, I gave the colours, which were put on a blazer, to a boy in Haridwar.”

Thus, when he took *sannyās*, his very promising career as a sportsman came to an abrupt end, but not before it gave birth to a heroic *sannyāsi* and a resolute pilgrim of Eternity. But we will explore that a little later on.

Now we go to Dehradun to see how Chandra Prakash spent his time there. Mahant Girdhari Dassji had bought a big bungalow in Dehradun. Chandra Prakash lived in a small room in this bungalow. Though Mahantji made all necessary arrangements, Chandra Prakash used to do his daily chores himself. He would clean his room daily and keep it well organized with everything in its proper place. He also used to sit in prayer and meditation daily and regularly.

Some years ago, in 1999, we had the good fortune to meet Shri Jagdish Marwah of Kolkatta, a close friend of Swamiji from his student days in Dehradun. Mr. Marwah owns a factory in Kolkatta. He told us that even as a student, Chandra Prakash was an embodiment of serenity and righteousness. He spoke little, but sweetly. And he was always cheerful. He lived in society rather as a stranger and did not have many special acquaintances. Jagdish Marwah’s mother loved Chandra Prakash very much and often invited him to her home and fed him lovingly.

Jagdish and Chandra Prakash played together on the college volleyball team and both were selected to play on the Indian team that was to go to Russia. However, in the



Chandra Prakash (front row, second from the right) and his close friend, Shri Jagdish Marwah (front row, second from the left) with their DAV College volleyball team (1951).

end both boys passed up the opportunity — Chandra Prakash because of his spiritual pursuits, and Jagdish because of his career. Many years later, when Mr. Marwah returned after studying in England, he and his wife came to see Swamiji, who by this time was doing *sāadhanā* on a jungle island outside of Haridwar. Impressed by the spiritual depth and magnetism of his old friend, Mr. Marwah and his wife requested Swamiji to give them *mantra* initiation, to which he obliged. Thus the relationship of friendship and fellow sportsmen took a twist and developed into that of Master and disciple, and continues as such to this day.

In the beginning of his student days in Dehradun, Chandra Prakash wore a western style shirt and pants, as was the fashion in those days. But later, perhaps as a reflection of his changing inner attitude towards worldly life, he started wearing *pajama* and *kurta* (loose traditional clothing). During a recent visit to the ashram Jagdishji recalled with a smile that one fine day Chandra Prakash had suddenly shown up for volleyball practice wearing the traditional *kurta* instead of his usual shirt. The next day he came wearing both *kurta* and *pajama*. In those days, the teammates often used to go out for a cold drink at a nearby sweet shop after practice. When Jagdish hesitantly enquired whether his friend intended to wear his rather unfashionable dress out to the sweetshop as well, the latter had solemnly nodded yes. From that day onward he mostly wore *kurta pajama*.

Jagdishji further informs us that in those days Chandra Prakash used to sometimes disappear and spend several days at an unknown place outside Dehradun. He didn't tell anyone where he was going. And whenever he returned from his unknown sojourn, he looked unmistakably calmer, more

humble and more profound. But the young Jagdish could never have imagined that his friend was a lone valiant pilgrim of the pathless path, treading fast towards his divine Beloved. Our Swamiji was so introverted, shy and modest that he did not talk about his inner spiritual life, his real life, even to his close friend.

On being asked about these mysterious absences, Swamiji revealed to us that during his student days in Dehradun he often used to go to Haridwar or Rishikesh. In Haridwar he used to stay at Narayan Niwas Ashram in Kankhal. At that time, in Rishikesh there were many huts belonging to Swarg Ashram that were situated across the Ganges on the road from Swarg Ashram to Lakshman Jhula. Many monks and recluses lived in those huts and did *sādhana* in solitude. There was a thick forest all around and the place was even visited by tigers and elephants sometimes. Chandra Prakash stayed there twice with a monk for four or five days. He stayed in the hut only during the night and would spend the whole day on the banks of the Ganges. During this period he used to study the holy scriptures and reflect deeply upon them as much as he could. Thus we find that along with his worldly academic education, he was calmly but firmly preparing himself to take the final plunge on his spiritual journey.

The following incident reveals the young Chandra Prakash's deep thirst for holy company, as well as his innocence during those days. Swamiji himself related this story many years later with much laughter and amusement:

“When I was a student, I heard someone say that there were many great saints living in Uttarkashi. I misunderstood, thinking that person was speaking of some place north

(*uttar*) of Kashi (Benaras), and so I went to Benaras. The train reached Benaras at about 3 a.m. The rikshaw driver took me to an inn very close to the railway station. They gave me an almirah to put my belongings in and a cot to sleep on the verandah — it was summer. Very early in the morning a priest came to me and asked me if I wanted to see the Vishwanath Temple. So, I went with him. He accompanied me and showed me many small temples within the Vishwanath temple and asked me to offer money in every temple. In nine or ten temples he made me offer money and then he took me to the main Vishwanath temple. There also I was asked to offer money. After coming out from the temple, I was quite tired and more than half the money was finished. Near the Vishwanath temple I stayed in a hotel and took rest. I asked the manager of that hotel where Uttarkashi was. He told me it was in the Himalayas. That very evening I came back to Dehradun by the night train.”

When we look back to those days, we observe that right from the beginning, like a flowing stream, Chandra Prakash kept moving towards his spiritual goal steadily and firmly, never becoming attached to the banks. Of course he shared his natural calm and poise with his fellow beings, whosoever happened to be with him, but moved on unattached without any clinging to anything or anyone.

Before we discuss Chandra Prakash’s renunciation of the world, we are including below some rare information about Swamiji — rare because Swamiji hardly ever talks about himself and his spiritual journey. Once this author, with his childlike stubbornness, elicited these facts from him:

SPV: Gurudevji, it seems that your spiritual voyage has come to an end in this life. Since when has this arduous and very difficult journey been undertaken by you consciously?

Swamiji: Since many lives.

SPV: How many?

Swamiji: I don't remember.

SPV: Have you ever been a householder or married in the course of your spiritual search? (By gesture Swamiji indicated that he had always been a monk.)

SPV: So like a professional seeker you always opted for a monk's life, which is supposed to have fewer obstacles and hindrances from the spiritual point of view?

Swamiji: Even a plant spreads its roots and branches, and an insect moves in the direction of least resistance. Only a foolish person invites unnecessary obstacles. However, a monastic life is not necessarily the path of lesser hindrances for every *sādhaka*.

SPV: Can it be that even after having the highest spiritual experience, one may have to take many births to become stabilized in the Realization?

Swamiji: Yes.

SPV: We have heard that you have had some relation with Lord Jesus.

Swamiji: I have had his *darshan*. But there can be a past relation also. I don't remember.

SPV: In your previous lives, were you a monk in Hindu religious orders or in other orders also?

Swamiji: In Hindu religious orders.

SPV: Why did you select this religion and environment again and again?

Swamiji: I did not select it. It is the Divine Power that makes the selection on the basis of one's *karmas* and *sanskāras* and sends one to a particular environment, family, religion, etc.

SPV: Excuse me for asking — many devotees believe that you were also present in the body at the time of Baba Bhuman Shahji. What was your relationship with him?

Swamiji: The relationship was that of a Master and a disciple.

SPV: Since childhood you had such a deep faith and love for Babaji, so surely you must have been Babaji's most favourite disciple.

Swamiji: He has thousands of dear devotees. But for me he is the dearest. I can say for myself that I love him the most, but how can I say that he also loves me the most? Having received his love was my privilege, but how can I say that I am his most beloved? Babaji's love is universal. I too received it. It was my good fortune. It was because of his sweet unreserved grace. All can share the divine love and still it remains infinite, inexhaustible.

(The insistent devotee still persisted in trying to learn more about Swamiji and Babaji's relationship. Again and again he implored Swamiji to write something.)

Swamiji (somewhat irritated, but smiling): What should I write? Is love something that is written or exhibited? Rather it is concealed.

SPV (humbly): You conceal many things from us without any reason.

Swamiji (laughing): As Babaji made me, so did I become. (Swamiji then laughingly wrote a couplet in Urdu):

*jinkā ishq sadak ho, vo kab faryād karte haiò
laboò pe, mohar e khamoshi, diloò mein yād karte haiò.*

“Those whose love is true never complain. With their lips sealed, they remember their beloved within.”

SPV: Please do tell something.

Swamiji: I want to tell, but cannot write. (Again Swamiji laughingly wrote an Urdu couplet):

*Ih paðanā ilm zarūr hoyā,
par dasanā nā manzūr hoyā,
jis dasayā oh mansoor hoyā.*

“I did learn the lessons in divine love, for sure, but I won’t reveal it. For those who revealed it had to pay for it with their lives, like Sufi Mansoor.”

Someone in France asked me a similar question about the relationship between Babaji and myself. I don’t remember what answer I had given then. When those questions and answers are received here, then it will be known what answer was elicited from me. Today you are asking very straight and blunt questions like an advocate. Not everything can be disclosed relating to spiritual life.

SPV: Ah, please tell something very little.

Swamiji: I will tell even without your asking when I have permission to do so.

SPV: When will you have permission?

Swamiji (laughing): This should be known to the one who gives the permission. How can I know it?

After tasting the sweetness of the relationship of our beloved *yogī* with his Master, we again return to that chapter in his life where, getting purified in the fire of *sannyās*, he was preparing to take the ochre clothes of a monk.



The sacred *thamb sahib*, a symbol of Babaji, in the inner sanctum sanctorum of his *samādhi* shrine in Bhuman Shah Village (2010). Before partition devotees used to circumambulate and tie colourful threads around it as a gesture of worship and devotion.

Chapter Two

The Spiritual Quest

Abandoning Studies

In 1951, Chandra Prakash was a student of M.Sc. Previous¹ at DAV College, Dehradun. Mathematics was his subject. The Falgu River (an underground river) of his dispassion had by now broken all barriers, burst up above ground and become visible to all. He lost all interest in worldly education, which promised but livelihood, name and fame. The awakened intuition of the pure-hearted, robust youth pierced through and perceived the real nature of worldly objects, situations and relationships, and became disillusioned with them. His consciousness began longing to have the integral realization of the Divine and to own that supreme Reality that quenches the soul's thirst forever. It was no longer possible for Chandra Prakash, the instrument of Babaji as he had become, to appear for the M.Sc. Previous exams. He abandoned his studies, sports and all other worldly activities, and went to Mahant Girdhari Dassji in Bahauddin, Haryana. That was in February of 1952.

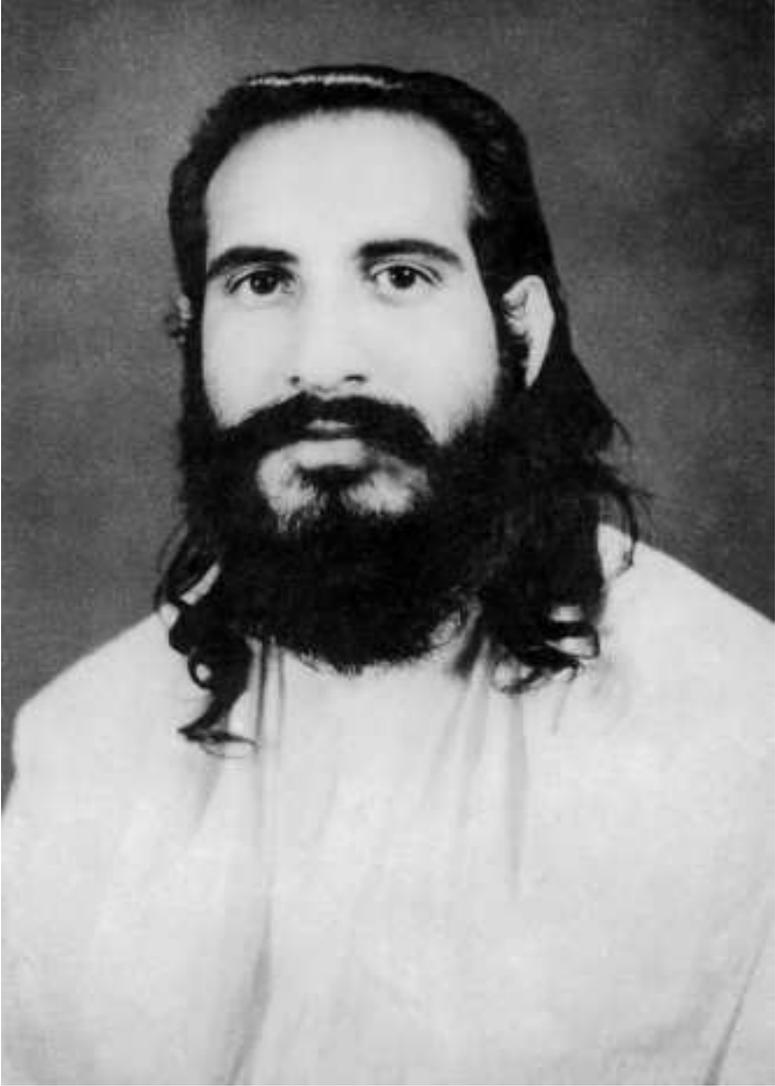
¹ First year of a Master's degree in science.

As previously mentioned, after the partition of India, a temporary *derā* of Babaji was established in the village of Bahauddin. After giving up his studies and leaving Dehradun, Chandra Prakash stayed in this *derā* for ten months. There he had a chance to meet his father, Lala Roopchand, daily, as the latter looked after all the affairs of the *derā*. But he never went back to the home of his father. Because of the *sanskāras* from previous lives, Chandra Prakash had deep conviction right from the beginning that a monk should never maintain a relationship with parents or relatives of the pre-monastic life. We have seen for ourselves that our Master has observed this ancient tradition throughout to its perfection. Except for some rare contextual reference to his parents, Swamiji never even mentions any of his previous relations.

Chandra Prakash now grew a beard and put on the traditional white clothes of a *brahmachārī*. By this time he had reached the age of twenty-two. We are fortunate to have several rare photos from this period through which we may behold his serene face exuding dispassion. During the ten months that he stayed with Mahant Girdhari Dassji, he used to get up very early and sit in meditation for two hours each morning and evening. His mind would become elevated and fixed on the Divine immediately and effortlessly. It was quite natural for him and he felt deep joy in it. During this period, he had the opportunity to do a lot of *svādhyāya* (reading and reflecting on holy scriptures and books). He read the Gītā, Vichar Sāgar (Vedantic scripture), books by Swami Ram Tirth and Swami Vivekananda, as well as Kalyan magazine, published by Gītā Press, Gorakhpur. Swamiji had never studied Hindi, but merely through *svādhyāya* he attained proficiency in it. Along with his scriptural studies, a silent



Chandra Prakash at the age of twenty-two as a *brahmachārī* in Bahauddin Village (1952).



In Bahauddin Village

but deep longing for the Beloved continued burning in his heart. Often he wept for God when alone. During this period, he served Mahant Girdhari Dassji in many ways. He wrote replies to the letters received by Mahantji as per his directions and did many other tasks as desired by him. Sometimes he delivered the message of Mahantji to other places. Before retiring to bed, he devotedly massaged Mahantji's feet. He also played games whenever he had the opportunity. During this period he also had the chance to meet Mata Jyoti, about whom we have already written, according to whom the child Suraj Prakash remained absorbed in deep *samādhi* for one month after his birth.

Thus the days flew by rather quickly; the hour of saying his final goodbye to the world had arrived. It became increasingly difficult for him to live without the Beloved. The deep dispassion and love for God from many past lives fructified and culminated into intense longing (*viraha*), which devours all the worldly desires and purges the lover of all impurities.

In his own words: "In those days I was totally possessed by dispassion, rather blind dispassion. It was not possible for me to stay there. Therefore, I told Mahant Girdhari Dassji that I wanted to learn Sanskrit. I did have a wish to study the scriptures first hand, but the real motive was to come away from that place."

Finally, in December of 1952, Mahantji gave him permission to go to Haridwar to study Sanskrit. At that time Chandra Prakash did not share his real aspiration with anyone, but as he left Bahauddin for the last time, he made a firm resolve that he would take the monastic vows of *sannyās*, and that from then onwards his only duty was to do *sādhana* and live for God-Realization. Though it was still several

months before he actually donned the ochre cloth of a *sannyāsī*, this was the defining moment when he set out on the last phase of his tough and unknown spiritual journey, abandoning all worldly ties forever. On this journey he had two precious assets — first was the sweet and constant protection and guidance of Baba Bhuman Shahji and the second was his own indomitable will, courage, sincerity and all-out self-effort to realize God.

***Sannyās*: Taking the Final Plunge**

Chandra Prakash stayed in Haridwar for four or five months and studied Sanskrit from a *paṇḍit* (priest) as arranged by Mahant Girdhari Dassji. There he lived in an Udasin ashram, Narayan Niwas, situated in Kankhal. This ashram was built before the partition of the country by the *derā* of the great saint Baba Pritam Dassji of Pak Pattan, now in Pakistan. Baba Pritam Dassji was the Guru of Baba Bhuman Shahji. Swamiji had already stayed there a number of times with Mahant Girdhari Dassji whenever they visited Haridwar.

It was at this ashram that Chandra Prakash met the great sage Swami Krishna Dassji Udasin for the first time. He was very impressed by the simplicity, purity and intense *sādhanā* of this great sage. At that time Swami Krishna Dassji was about fifty years old. There was a divine aura around his beautiful face. He was tall, lean, handsome, fair complexioned and had a very magnetic personality. Above all, he was very sweet, soft and divine.

Swami Krishna Dassji lived in Srinagar (Kashmir), but often visited Haridwar and Rishikesh. When there was un-



Swami Krishna Dassji Udasin



Rare photos of Swami Krishna Dassji.

rest in Kashmir in 1947, he had come to Haridwar and stayed in Narayan Niwas Ashram. After that he continued visiting regularly, and would also spend some time in Rishikesh, staying in the secluded huts constructed by Swarg Ashram for monks to pursue their spiritual *sādhanā*. In those days it was not so crowded in Rishikesh. The place was calm and conducive to God remembrance. After coming in contact with Maharajji², Chandra Prakash used to go to visit him in his hut in Rishikesh by walking some five to seven miles from Laxmanjhula (a bridge over the Ganges in Rishikesh) to have his *darshan*.

Swamiji told us that Maharaj Krishna Dassji had many *siddhis* (extraordinary powers) but he never displayed them to earn cheap publicity. Paṇḍit Nityanandji, the famous *tāntric* of Srinagar used to say that Swami Krishna Dassji had the power to travel with his astral body and could visit any place in the world at will within a few seconds. Reading the thoughts of others was another power he possessed, but used rarely. Even some rationalists and non-believers who came to him could feel his power and acknowledged it. Many highly educated young men were very impressed with him and entreated him to be their Guru, but throughout his life he never accepted anyone as his disciple.

During the time that Chandra Prakash stayed with Swami Krishna Dassji in Narayan Niwas Ashram, he found that he was not only endowed with supernatural powers, but also rich in rare divine love and wisdom.

² Maharajji literally means great king. According to the spiritual tradition in India, this epithet is often used to address saints and sages.

One day in early March 1953, Chandra Prakash, full of intense dispassion, implored Maharaj Krishna Dassji, “Kindly give me the robe of a monk. I have no interest in the world. I want to give myself exclusively to the quest for God-Realization.” Maharaj Krishna Dassji was very pleased to see the genuine dispassion in the young *brahmachārī*. He had already read the conscious and subconscious mind of Chandra Prakash through his penetrating intuitive power and knew his worthiness for the monastic life. He therefore accepted his request with great joy. Thus on an auspicious day and time and with the intonation of some holy *mantras*, he imparted the orange cloth of a monk to his dear Chandra Prakash. He also told him, “Look, I am not your Guru. I have simply done what your Guru should have done long ago.” He then lovingly addressed Chandra Prakash as Chandra Swami and exhorted him to strictly observe the rules of monastic life and follow the divine footprints of Baba Bhuman Shahji with unbroken zeal. He also told him, “Never feel any difference between Baba Shrichandraji and Baba Bhuman Shahji. They are one and the same divine soul incarnated in different bodies in different situations and at different times.”

Though Chandra Prakash was already a *sannyāsī* at heart, he now became a *sannyāsī* in the formal sense, and his name changed from Chandra Prakash to Chandra Swami. From here on developed a sweet and profound spiritual relationship between the two great sages which grew and grew with time.

Thus we observe how Baba Bhuman Shahji, the divine Master of our Swamiji, although not in the body, first had his spiritual child initiated with a *mantra* by Mahant Girdhari

Dassji and later had him receive the orange cloth of a monk from Swami Krishna Dassji.

After receiving *sannyās*, Swamiji tore up all his academic and sports certificates and threw them into the Ganges. He also distributed his clothes and trophies amongst his friends. Knowing his passionate love for sports, we can imagine the deep dispassion and love for God that was burning in his heart. Swamiji himself often laughingly declares that before taking *sannyās*, his greatest attachment was volleyball, as revealed in the following reminiscences:

“Once a devotee asked me what was the most difficult thing for me to renounce when I became a *sādhu*. I told him ‘Volleyball!’ Even now my right arm is longer than my left because of smashing the ball. A few days before I took *sannyās*, the names of two volleyball players from Dehradun were included in the Indian volleyball team going to Russia to participate in a volleyball tournament. My name was also on the list. But I did not go.

“Even after taking *sannyās* I once played in a volleyball tournament in Haridwar. I was still staying in Kankhal, Haridwar at that time. The Dehradun team had come to Haridwar to take part in a volleyball tournament. Two players of their team were my close friends. They knew where I was staying in Kankhal. They came to me and insisted that I participate in that tournament on their team. (Laughing) I played wearing saffron clothes. Our team made it to the final, but lost in the final to the Delhi team.”

After taking *sannyās* Swamiji remained in Haridwar for about a month. One day he very humbly expressed his wish to Maharaj Krishna Dassji and said, “Maharajji, I do

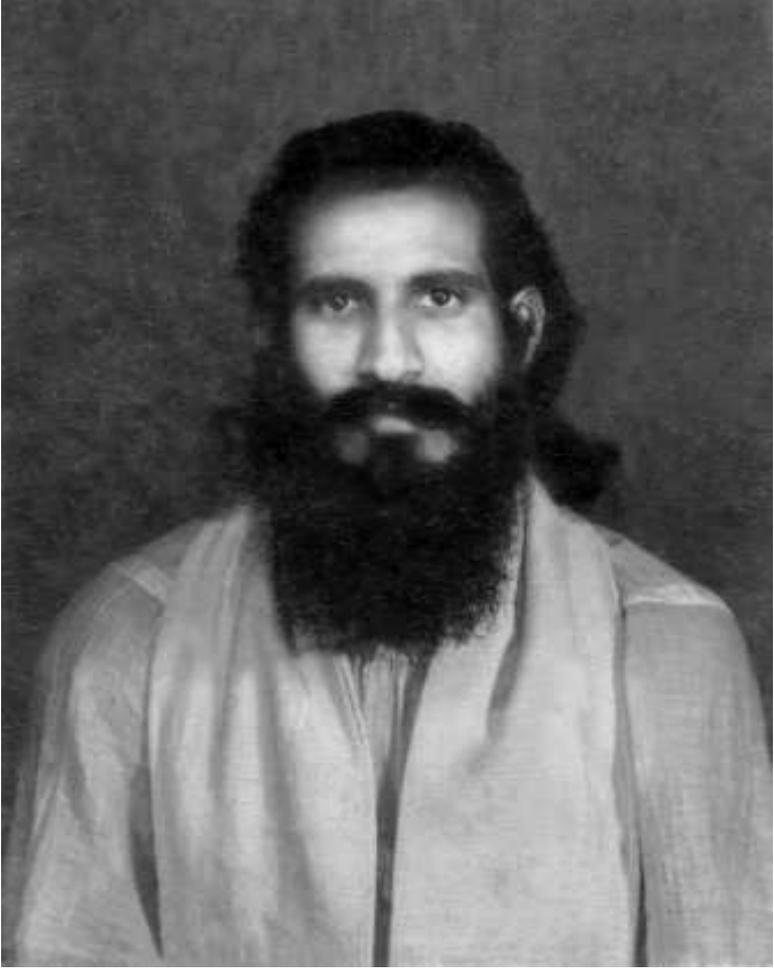
not want to touch money for the rest of my life. I wish to pass my whole life with total dependence on God alone.”

The mature Maharajji was well conversant with the psychology of the young monk and knew pretty well what was best for him. He retorted smilingly, “I very much appreciate your trust and faith in God, but do you know that money does not imply only currency notes? Money is simply a means in place of the barter system. In fact, money includes all material things. If you don’t want to touch money, you should also not ask for food or clothing or anything else from anyone. Well, you may observe this rule of not touching money at all for three years, which is enough for you to learn to live trusting in God alone. As a matter of fact, possession or non-possession of worldly things has little to do with trust in God. Even your physical body is a material possession which you must keep for doing *sādhanā*.” Swamiji humbly accepted Maharajji’s decree and strictly adhered to this difficult vow for three years.

After some days, Swamiji sought permission from Maharajji to travel in the Himalayas on foot and have the *darshan* of the holy saints and sages living there. Maharajji happily gave his consent. It was still March 1953.

Himalayan Pilgrimage

From Haridwar the young monk went to Rishikesh on foot and had the *darshan* of H.H. Swami Sivanandaji of the Divine Life Society. Swamiji had already had his *darshan* once during his student days in Dehradun, but at that time Sivananda Ashram had not yet been started. On his second visit, Sivananda Ashram was in its earlier days. The



Young Swamiji around the year 1953.

brahmachārīs and monks stayed in huts and an open tin shed served as a dining hall. Swamiji recalls:

“In those days Sivananda Ashram was still quite small. Swami Sivanandaji was not well and could not walk. He was bedridden for most of the day. In the late evenings after dinner, around twenty people staying in the ashram would come to his room and sit and chant *sankīrtan* for about forty minutes. At that time Swami Sivananda was staying in a small room on the bank of the Ganges in front of Sivananda Ashram. The first question he asked me when I touched his feet — he was on his bed at that time — was where I had come from and where I was staying. I told him I was staying in Haridwar in Kankhal. He also asked me my name and my qualification.”

From Sivananda Ashram Swamiji travelled a few kilometres to Neelkanth, the famous historic site related to Lord Shiva, where he stayed for two days. From there he went to have the *darshan* of the great enlightened sage Swami Purushottamanand, who was then living in Vashishta Gufa, a cave near Rishikesh. As per the information now written in front of the Vashishta Cave, Swami Purushottamanand was earlier associated with the Ramakrishna Mission and was doing a lot of social work (*seva*) in South India, but driven by dispassion, he left everything and went to Vashishta Cave to lead a life of total seclusion. Now a small ashram has come up near the cave and pilgrims visit that place throughout the year. Swamiji recounts his visit as follows:

“In 1953 I was going from Haridwar to Uttarkashi by foot. I stayed at Vashishta Gufa. Swami Ram Tirth had also stayed there about 100 years ago. I had read about Vashishta

Gufa in his biography. So I went to see it. I stayed there for a week. When I went, Swami Purushottamanandaji and two *brahmachārīs* were living there.”

From Vashishta Gufa, Swamiji returned to Rishikesh and started for Uttarkashi on foot via Tehri and Dharasu. Swamiji recalls: “As I had gone on foot, I stayed for one night in Tehri on the veranda of a *Gurudwārā*. The priest of that *Gurudwārā* kindly brought dinner for me from his home and he gave me two blankets to sleep in the night. At that time this body was twenty-three years old.”

By the time Swamiji reached Dharasu, his feet, unaccustomed to the harsh mountainous paths, became swollen and developed painful boils. He was therefore forced to stay there for three days until he became fit to move ahead. In the course of his onward journey, he spent one night in a cave which was full of wild insects and in the morning his body was again painfully swollen. Finally, with full faith in God and not caring for the hardships, he reached Uttarkashi. All throughout the journey he did not have to beg for food. The sweet Lord so arranged that he received food without asking. Reaching Uttarkashi, he stayed for two days in the famous Kailash Ashram. There he had the chance to have the *darshan* of the renowned, elderly scholar-saint Swami Tapovanji. Swami Tapovanji is the preceptor of the famous scholar-saint Swami Chinmayanandaji, the founder of Chinmaya Mission, which has many branches in India and abroad.

Now further details of Swamiji’s stay in Uttarkashi from his own pen:

“I used to go daily to the bank of the Ganges and there I found an empty cave. I came to know that the *sadhu* who

lived there had gone to the plains for the winter. There was nothing in that cave. So I went to live there. There was a spring of hot water near the Ganges, a short distance away. I stayed there for around three weeks. It was a very good place for *sādhanā* and only a solitude-loving monk could stay there. The vibrations of that place were also very strong and the mind became elevated effortlessly. I used to go and have food at the nearby Sadhu Bela Ashram once a day. At that time it was still quite cold and there were only two or three *sadhus* staying in the ashram. When the weather became a little warmer and the *sadhus* started coming to Uttarkashi from the plains, I thought that the monk who earlier lived in the cave would return and therefore I should vacate the cave.”

Thus he left Uttarkashi. He had heard a lot about Kashmir, ‘the paradise on earth,’ and Swami Krishna Dassji had also told him a lot about the natural beauty of Kashmir, its glorious landscapes and how it was a very conducive place for *sādhanā*. He was also aware that Swami Krishna Dassji, whom he loved deeply, would have by this time returned to Srinagar from Haridwar. Thus, guided by the Lord, the young monk left Uttarkashi for Haridwar, from where he planned to travel to Kashmir. It was then April, 1953.

***Darshan* of Saint Gurumukh Singhji**

While Swamiji was walking from Dharasu to Narendra Nagar, a truck driver who was devoted to saints stopped and with great respect invited him to travel in his truck. He took him to Narendra Nagar and in return asked only for blessings from the young monk. From there Swamiji resumed his journey on foot and by the time he reached Haridwar his

feet again became swollen with painful cracks and blisters. Therefore, he decided to halt in Haridwar for a few days before making his onward journey to Kashmir.

Swamiji had heard from another saint about the greatness of an aged and enlightened sage, Saint Gurumukh Singhji, who was living in utter seclusion in a thatched hut in Sapta Sarovar *jhāḍī*, a forested island amidst numerous streams of the Ganges. Swamiji felt prompted to seek the *darshan* of this holy sage, thinking that he would like to spend a few days with him, should he agree.

Thus he waded across the rushing waters of the Ganges and made his way through the jungle in search of the sage. When he reached the specific place on the island, Swamiji found the saint sitting on a bamboo chair outside his thatched hut on the bank of the Ganges with his eyes closed, absorbed in meditation. To quote Swamiji's own words:

“I humbly bowed my head before the sage and sat before him silently. Near him, I felt a very powerful divine presence, though I could not comprehend what it was.

“Saint Gurumukh Singhji was from the Nirmala denomination of saints, established by Guru Govind Singhji, the tenth Master of Sikhs. He was a very quiet and loving sage with his face radiating peace, purity and *tejas* (light). He was also a great scholar of Sanskrit.

“After over thirty minutes he slowly opened his eyes and seeing me, he asked me for an introduction and the purpose of my coming to him. After listening to me calmly and patiently for two or three minutes he said, ‘I have heard about the glories of Baba Bhuman Shahji from many people. He was a very great sage. But it is for the first time that I have met a monk from his tradition.’ He was very kind to

me and treated me as his child, and very graciously allowed me to stay in his hut.

“I recall an interesting incident that occurred on my very first night in his hut. At midnight, I felt something moving under the mat on which I was sleeping. It was making a hissing sound and I felt frightened. I opened my eyes and saw in the dim moonlight coming in the hut through a window that the sage was sitting crossed legged, deeply absorbed in meditation, about five feet away from me. I could not sleep the remaining four hours of the night because of fear, but the sage sat unmoved in the same posture in deep meditation. In the morning, after sunrise, I told the sage of my experience and fear during the night. The sage laughed and said, ‘There is a baby python that often comes into the hut and spends the night here. Many times I have caught him in a pot and left him about one kilometre away from the hut in the forest, but he persists in returning to the hut to spend his night here. So I have now stopped trying to drive him out. He is very loving and intelligent and will not bite you or do any harm to you, even if you inadvertently happen to put your foot on him.’ ”

Swamiji stayed with Sant Gurumukh Singhji on this forested island for about fifteen days. The sage used to take a heavy breakfast at 10 a.m., which was brought from Sapta Rishi Ashram by a devotee. He shared his breakfast with Swamiji, who would then go about one kilometre upstream on the bank of the Ganges and sit there till evening, devoting himself to prayer, *japa*, meditation and reading Swami Vivekananda. He would return to the hut after sunset.

This holy and historical place is called Sapta Sarovar in the name of the Sapta Rishis, the seven great seers who

had performed intense austerities in this forest in ancient times, as mentioned in the Hindu holy scriptures. Charged with spiritual vibrations and a calm, pure atmosphere, it was very conducive for spiritual practices in spite of being frequented in the night by elephants, tigers and other wild animals living across the Ganges in Kadli Van. Kadli Van is a dense jungle full of wild banana, bamboo and sal trees. It also finds mention in the ancient holy scripture Bhagwat Mahapurana. Swamiji had come to like this place very much for *sādhana*.

The sage Gurumukh Singhji was very kind and loving towards Swamiji and told him, “I am very impressed with your spiritual sincerity. You may stay here as long as you wish.” Swamiji humbly thanked him very much and told him that he had already made up his mind to go to Kashmir, but would surely come back to this place, if and when the Lord so willed. As the sage had come to know about the vow taken by the young swami not to touch money for three years, he asked one of his devotees to arrange for a railway ticket from Haridwar to Pathankot. The sage, who had showered motherly love upon Swamiji for fifteen days, blessed him and said, “I see a very bright spiritual future for you. And I somehow feel that you will come here again for taking the last plunge in the ocean of Supreme Divine Consciousness.” We will see later how these prophetic words proved to be one hundred percent true. Bowing down before the sage in loving gratitude, Swamiji touched his holy feet and departed.

After boarding the train at the Haridwar railway station, Swamiji reached Pathankot early in the morning the next day. In his childhood he had heard about a historical,

supernatural event connected with the life of Acharya Shrichandraji, who had stayed in Mamoon Village near Pathankot in the last leg of his spiritual mission. It is said that a dry, dead tree under which he sat in meditation had come back to life and turned into a blooming green tree. This incident happened about 450 years ago. Even today the Udasin monks visit Mamoon Village with great faith and devotion, considering it to be a pilgrimage place. Since his childhood Swamiji had deep devotion and reverence for Acharya Shrichandraji, so he also felt the urge to visit this holy place. At the railway station he enquired about the whereabouts of Mamoon Village from some local people and set out towards it on foot. It was only a few kilometres away from Pathankot.

When he reached the spot, he found that a monk was living there, but had gone out for some time. The place had two or three rooms and, of course, that sacred tree. While the monk was away, Swamiji meditated for two hours under the tree and was blessed with a vision of Acharya Shrichandraji. Though Swamiji has not shared with us the details of this vision, we understand that he received some specific instructions which were of great significance to his *sādhana*.

When the monk living at that place returned, he greeted Swamiji warmly. He prepared a simple meal and shared it with him. The monk also informed him that in order to visit Kashmir, all Indians required a permit, which could be obtained in Pathankot, from the office of the trade commissioner of Jammu & Kashmir state (J&K). Therefore, from Mamoon village Swamiji went straightaway to the office of the trade commissioner.

Divine Intervention: First Visit to Kashmir

Let us read from Swamiji's own pen about how he received an official permit to enter Kashmir:

"I had only one cloth shoulder bag, which contained a thin shawl, a loincloth, a water bowl and two books, one by Swami Ram Tirth and another by Swami Vivekananda. When I went to the office, the trade commissioner was not there. The clerk gave me a form to fill out and asked me to wait for the trade commissioner because it was he who signs the permit. Time passed and soon it was two o'clock in the afternoon. I kept waiting for another hour in his office, but still the trade commissioner did not come. His name was Mr. D.N. Jalali. When he finally came, he asked me, "Does anyone here know you?" I replied no. The identity of the applicant had to be attested by a gazetted officer. He asked me many questions. He was a devotee of Paramahansa Ramakrishna. After talking to me for some time, he said, "I do want to grant you the permit, but many spies go to Kashmir. Earlier I had granted permits to two saints out of devotion, but they turned out to be spies and were caught in Kashmir."

Thus, though the trade commissioner was very much impressed with Swamiji's divine personality, due to the unstable political situation at that time he refused to grant him the permit, albeit with a heavy heart.

Disappointed, Swamiji walked back and was wondering how to get to Kashmir. He had previously planned to make the arduous journey by foot. Now the thought crossed his mind that perhaps he should enter Kashmir from an unguarded spot on the boundary border. He was absorbed in

such thoughts when suddenly he felt the presence of his Beloved, Baba Bhuman Shahji near him. Almost simultaneously he heard a voice calling him from behind. He turned back and saw the peon of the trade commissioner running towards him. The peon told him, “The officer is calling you.”

Somewhat surprised, Swamiji walked back to the office. When he reached the office, the trade commissioner welcomed Swamiji with a smile and said, “I have reconsidered your case. We are granting you a permit.” Not only that, after the office closed, he respectfully took Swamiji to his home and invited his friends as well so as to introduce them to this young monk of unusual magnetism.

The next morning, without saying anything to anyone, the trade commissioner bought a bus ticket for Swamiji to Srinagar and saw him off personally at the bus stand. Before seeing him off, Mr. Jalali enquired from Swamiji about where he would stay in Kashmir and for how long. Swamiji told him that he would stay at Shri Chander Chinar Ashram on Residency Road and that he would go on the Amarnath pilgrimage. More than that he did not know himself. Later, in Srinagar, Mr. Jalali used to visit Swamiji whenever he had an opportunity, and would often take him to his bungalow in Rainawari for lunch or dinner. He also took Swamiji to meet a famous Kashmiri Shaivite saint, Swami Laxman Joo.

“*Yoga kshemam vahāmyaham,*” says Lord Krishna in the Gītā: “Providing for all their needs, I take full responsibility and total care of my devotees.”

The bus started from Jammu for Srinagar in the morning. A Sardarji in military uniform was seated beside Swamiji. He was a Namdhari Sikh from Punjab who was going to Srinagar, where he was posted. Namdhari Sikhs

are generally very devout, religious and open-minded, and give due respect to the saints and sages of all religions. This gentleman, the Sikh soldier, was also a very religious person with deep interest in spirituality. Finding a young monk with spiritual charm writ large on his face, he could not restrain himself for long. After about fifteen minutes he politely introduced himself to Swamiji and started talking of religious and spiritual matters. Within a very short time, after exchanging his spiritual aspirations and ideas with Swamiji, he became very much attracted, rather devoted, to Swamiji. He asked very practical and intricate spiritual questions and was fully satisfied and convinced by the answers that Swamiji gave to him in simple words, supported by quotations from the Guru Granth Sahib.

The time passed quickly. Moving over the serpentine mountainous roads at a slow speed, at about 1 p.m. the bus reached Kud, a village about ninety kilometres away from Jammu. All the passengers alighted from the bus and went out to the restaurant to have their lunch, except for Swamiji, who alone remained on his seat. He had no money and would not ask for food or anything from anyone in accordance with his vow. In the empty bus, he relaxed himself on his seat, closed his eyes and became absorbed in remembering his Beloved.

Hardly five minutes had passed when the conductor of the bus came in and shouted, “Babaji, here is a cup of tea for you.” He looked emotional and continued, “It is sent by the owner of the small tea stall on the road, who saw you sitting alone calmly in the bus. That man is poor, but very religious. He feels joy in serving the monks. He will not charge anything for it.”

Swamiji replied, “I don’t need tea. I had a heavy breakfast in the morning, but taking it as the *prasād* of God, I will not refuse it. Please convey my thanks to that man.” Swamiji took the tea, enjoying it as if it were royal nectar. And why not! After all, it had come from the hands of the Beloved.

After another forty minutes or so, all the passengers boarded the bus including the driver, who started blowing the horn to alert the passengers that the bus was ready to leave. But the Namdhari Sikh soldier had not yet arrived. Swamiji informed the conductor, who told the driver to wait. Five minutes later, the soldier rushed onto the bus and took his seat. The bus started. The Sardarji took out a packet containing some *chapatis* and a vegetable dish and said, “There is a small military camp with a mess a short distance away from here. I went there to take my lunch. I have many friends presently staying in that camp. I have brought a small packet of food for you as well. Please accept and eat it.” He also offered some water to Swamiji from his flask. The young monk’s heart was filled with emotion as he pondered over the unfailing grace of the sweet Lord. As he ate his lunch he continued to marvel over how the Divine was taking care of him in every way. He attributed it all to the grace of Babaji, who he took as the Divine incarnate.

The bus reached the Srinagar tourist bus station at about 10 p.m. Incidentally, the Sardarji had been to Shri Chander Chinar Ashram before. It was not far away from the bus station — only a fifteen to twenty minute walk on the main road. Sardarji guided Swamiji to the ashram and bid him goodbye, saying, “God willing, I will see you again.” Swamiji walked to the ashram with his small bag containing two books and a woollen shawl. Thus in May, 1953, Swamiji arrived in Srinagar.

In the Holy Company of Swami Krishna Dassji

When Swamiji reached Shri Chander Chinar Ashram, Swami Krishna Dassji, whom Swamiji reverentially addressed as Maharajji, was present in the ashram, and was going for his dinner. He was delighted to see Swamiji and hugged him affectionately. In fact, he was expecting him because only a few days before he had heard from a *sadhu* that Swamiji had proposed to come to Kashmir by foot. He had not liked the idea of Swamiji walking all the way to Kashmir, as it would have taken over a month. He therefore wanted to arrange a bus ticket for Swamiji through one of his devotees from Jammu or Pathankot, but could not do so as he did not know of his whereabouts. Now, seeing that Swamiji had reached Srinagar in only a few days, His Holiness smilingly remarked, “God knows what is best for His devotees, and invariably creates situations in which lie their true good.”

Then Maharajji shared his meal with Swamiji. When they finished the meal, Swamiji wanted to wash all the plates and utensils. To his great embarrassment, Maharajji too tried to do the same.³ Swamiji said humbly, “Maharajji, if you do so I will feel ashamed. Kindly give all the plates to me for washing.”

Maharajji replied, “If a mother cleans the used utensils of her child, would the child be ashamed?” In the meantime, the servant of the ashram came and took away both of their plates.

About Swami Krishna Dass and the time he spent in his holy company Swamiji observes:

³ In India it would be considered very disrespectful to allow any elder, let alone a senior monk, to wash one’s used dishes.

“Swami Krishna Dassji Maharaj was humility incarnate. He gave respect to the lowest of the low. He was one of the greatest sages, yet he was so simple, humble and humane that even some of his devotees, unable to comprehend his greatness, would sometimes feel embarrassed by his humble behaviour. He was totally free of ego, incapable of thinking himself to be a sage or a great man. He lived with the spontaneity and innocence of a child.

“He was a priceless spiritual gem, generally unrecognized by the so-called wise (in reality the foolish and ignorant) men of the world, who are always hungry for name, fame, position and power, and who spend their whole lives running to catch hold of shadows.

“As long as I lived with him, it was a great opportunity to learn from him. Every act of his inspired me to follow the footprints of great sages like Babaji, Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and others.

“I lived near Maharajji for not more than five months in Chinar Ashram in 1953. Then I had another few months association with him on the forested island in Sapta Sarovar during the winter of 1957, when he graciously agreed to stay with me there,⁴ and about four months at random, for a few days each time, at different times. But I learnt so much from his practical life that I am still trying to assimilate it all into my own life.”

The following anecdote demonstrates Maharaj Krishna Dassji’s utter humility. Maharajji had related the incident to Swamiji in somewhat the following words, which Swamiji in turn recounted to us:

⁴ Swamiji lived on the forested island for about a year in 1957-58.

“Once I (Swami Krishna Dassji) was walking on a village road when a person, barefooted and in dirty clothes, approached me and threw before me a ten *paisa* coin. I felt that perhaps he had taken me for a beggar. So I picked up the coin and gave it back to him. The man took the coin and walked away in the opposite direction. Within a few seconds, I realized that I should not have reacted like that. I turned back and called out to the person to stop. I went to him and begged his pardon and requested him to give that coin back to me, to which the man obliged.

“I reflected and realized, who was I if not a respected beggar after all? I have accepted gifts in kind and cash from many others when offered in big amounts. But I don’t earn the money myself for my maintenance. I should not have refused to accept a ten *paisa* coin from that poor and uneducated person who did not give the money in a proper, courteous way. But he gave it of his own goodwill.”

After narrating Maharajji’s above words, Swamiji added in his own humble and humorous way: “Perhaps Maharajji wanted to teach me by relating this incident. Whenever someone offers me anything I am reminded of these words of Maharajji.” And Swamiji ended the story with his own experience: “Once at the Frankfurt airport an officer, while checking my passport, asked me: ‘What is your profession?’ I said, ‘Sir, I am a respected beggar.’”

Swamiji stayed in the Chander Chinar Ashram in Srinagar up to the end of September, 1953. In those days Swami Govind Dassji, the eldest *gurubhai*,⁵ was the Mahant of the ashram. Swami Ram Sharan Dassji, the younger *gurubhai*, was managing all the affairs of the ashram, while

⁵ *Gurubhai* means spiritual brother, disciple of the same Guru.

Swami Krishna Dassji, the youngest *gurubhai*, was totally devoted to his spiritual *sāadhanā*. Maharajji would remain closed in his small, cell-like room for the whole day except in the afternoon when he would come out to meet the waiting seekers. He virtually did not participate in the management of the ashram. Swami Govind Dassji had known Chandra Swamiji since his student days in Dehradun. Though Swami Govind Dassji and Swami Ram Sharan Dassji showered their love on Swamiji and took care of him in all ways, it was the unreserved love, care and spiritual guidance of Swami Krishna Dassji that kept Swamiji in the ashram for those five months.

Swamiji was lodged in the room of Swami Ram Sharan Dassji, who was busy in the management of the ashram for the whole day, and would only come to his room at night to sleep. Swamiji spent most of his time in *sāadhanā* in his room up to lunch and then, in the afternoon, on the secluded open veranda adjoining the room. Here he engaged himself in meditation, *japa* and *svādhyāya* (study of the scriptures). He would meet Maharajji at the time of lunch and also have his *darshan* in the afternoon when other seekers came to ask spiritual questions. There he would simply listen to Maharajji's answers attentively.

Swami Krishna Dassji was charming and humorous and his personality was extremely magnetic. He addressed Swamiji as 'Chander' out of affection. Years later he used to say to others about Swamiji, "He hides himself. In fact, he can do anything."

Once Doctor Satpalji Gupta of Jammu, a very old and close disciple of our Swamiji, asked Maharaj Krishna Dassji, "Maharajji, shall we ever be blessed with the *darshan* of



Chandra Swamiji standing under the sacred Chinar tree in the courtyard of the Shri Chander Chinar Ashram (1950's).

Bhagavan (God)?” He replied at once, “But you have already had the *darshan* of *Bhagavan*. Chandra Swami is none other than God and you see him frequently.”

Along with deep love for Swamiji, he held him in such high respect that whenever they met he would even try to touch his feet as a sign of respect. Of course, our Swamiji always touched his feet instead. And seeing this sweet *līlā* of the two sages lovingly and reverentially trying to touch each other’s feet, some devotees would be moved to tears.

In 1994, at an age of over ninety years, Swami Krishna Dassji left his body in Delhi at the house of his beloved devotee Shri Jagdish Chandra Sharma. Sharmaji and his wife Lajjaji served the aged and disease afflicted Swamiji day and night before his passing away.

Mysterious Sadhu, Sant Singhji

Considering the profound influence Swami Krishna Dassji had on the life of our Swamiji, we feel it worthwhile to make a brief digression from the account of Swamiji’s stay in Srinagar in order to relate a mysterious incident associated with the life of Swami Krishna Dassji.

About twenty kilometres away from the district of Ludhiana, Punjab, there is a village named Jassarh. Most of the residents in the village are Sikhs. In 1938, a very simple monk arrived in that village. The people said that he was first seen meditating under a tree. No one knew who he was, from where he had come and what was his name. By and by people started calling him by the name Sant Singh.

The monk was fair-complexioned, tall, handsome and very impressive. No one had ever seen him sleeping. When

he first arrived in the village, for many days he did not eat anything because nobody offered him any food and he did not ask for food from anyone. Later, everyday the villagers would take turns bringing him to their homes and feeding him. He used to eat only one meal a day.

Sant Singh lived in the village until October 1959, for almost 21 years. He was an amazing person, regarded as a benevolent angel for that village and the villages around. He was proficient in the fields of building, welding, tailoring, carpentry, cooking and medicine. He had thorough knowledge of allopathy, homeopathy, ayurveda and the *unani* (Persian) system of medicine. He used to prepare many types of medicines himself and gave medicines to at least fifty to sixty patients daily. Besides this, he used to go from village to village around Jassarh on his bicycle to distribute medicines to the needy patients. All his medicines were free. If someone contributed something for making medicines, he would accept it. This wonderful monk had knowledge of Hindi, English, Urdu and Punjabi and the then prevalent Landhe-Mundhe language. He served the villagers in other ways too. He would even purchase goods and articles from the market when the daughters of that village got married. He would himself prepare sweets and food for the marriage party. He was totally unaware of his own needs, as if he had no personal need at all.

Sant Singh was an accomplished painter as well. He had full knowledge, through intuition, of an incident associated with the life of the sixth Sikh Guru, Shri Hargobindji Sahib. In that village, the Guru had killed a dacoit with an arrow at a particular spot. Sant Singh therefore arranged for a *Gurudwārā* to be built at that very spot, which is now

known as Teer Sahib. That *Gurudwārā* has an oil painting made by Sant Singh, which depicts the incident of the Guru killing the dacoit. Adjoining the *Gurudwārā*, there is a small room in which the monk stayed after the *Gurudwārā* was built. In that room there were also other beautiful paintings of various gods and goddesses.

Besides these uncountable virtues, the monk was so soft and sweet by nature that even today some of the elders start weeping when they talk of him. He was also very shy. Most of the time he remained silent, and he used a minimal number of words to deal with the people and carry out his work. While talking to people and during day-to-day dealings his eyes were often fixed on the ground. Despite serving the needy and afflicted with motherly compassion, he had strong inner detachment towards the world and its *māyā*. While doing anything, he always appeared to be united with God. The people of the neighbouring villages took him as nothing less than an angel in flesh and blood.

Every year for a few days Sant Singh would go to an unknown place in the direction of Pathankot. Suddenly and unexpectedly on the 10th of October, 1959, cutting asunder all ties, he left Jassarh, which he had served ceaselessly and selflessly for twenty-one years with motherly tenderness, for an undisclosed place, never to return again. It was a shock to all the villagers, but a cruel fact. Before departing, he forbade the villagers from following him. At the time of bidding farewell, his close devotees, Shri Surjeet Singhji, Shyam Prakashji and Dayal Singhji, took his luggage on a bicycle and with tearfilled eyes and disbelief they put him on a bus heading towards Jalandhar. From there they do not know where their beloved saint went.

Sadar Buddh Singhji of the same village told us that just one day before leaving, the saint had given a hint that he would be leaving the village forever. Buddh Singhji, who was then a child, asked the saint innocently, “Then who will give me medicines? I get cured only by your medicines.” In childhood Buddh Singhji had suffered greatly from asthma. To treat this chronic ailment, the saint had lovingly put a few homeopathic pills in his mouth. Buddh Singhji informs us that since that day he has never again suffered from asthma. Likewise, Shri Harbinder Singhji of the same village told us many stories about the saint’s love, service and divine compassion.

After the saint left the village forever, the poor villagers, mad in his love, kept searching for him in various villages and far-off places, but they failed to find any trace of him. More than a decade later, perhaps in 1970, Sadar Jaswant Singhji, from the nearby village Gavaddi, went with his wife to Srinagar and Kashmir, where they visited Shri Chander Chinar Ashram. As soon as they saw Swami Krishna Dassji, their joy and wonder knew no bounds, for they had found their lost saint, Sant Singh. But to their amazement Maharaj Krishna Dassji refused to recognize them. When Jaswant Singhji told the whole story, Maharajji told them lovingly, “I am not your lost monk. You are mistaken.” But Jaswantji did not agree. Everything was the same. For him, he was the same Sant Singh. He felt there was some unknown reason for which Swamiji no longer wanted to have any relationship with the village. After returning to Jassarh, he related the whole story to the villagers. Immediately Sadar Dayal Singhji also went to Shri Chander Chinar Ashram in Srinagar. When he met Maharajji he was so overwhelmed

by his love that for three days he kept weeping and he couldn't speak at all. It will not be out of place here to mention that the villagers who took Swami Krishna Dassji to be the same Sant Singhji were not emotional or uneducated persons. Among them were many educated and socially well placed persons, including a superintendent of police, a major in the army, an officer in the language department of the Patiala University and many other well known people.

All the stories and incidents connected with Sant Singhji have been collected by the author personally by talking to those devotees from Jassarh Village who remained in the holy company of that saint for years.⁶ According to their accounts, during the time period that Sant Singhji was living in Jassarh, Maharaj Krishna Dassji was at the same time living in Shri Chander Chinar Ashram in Srinagar. Therefore there is a clear conflict with the dates. When someone spoke to our Swamiji about this apparent paradox, he replied, "You have read the scripture Yoga Vashishta. It is possible for a *yogī* to assume two different bodies at the same time." It appears to us that for some reason, Maharaj Krishna Dassji lived in two bodies at the same time. With one body he did intense meditation and *sādhanā*, and with the other body he plunged himself into the selfless service of the poor and needy as a part of his spiritual *sādhanā*. We

⁶ After Swami Krishna Dassji shed his body, the whole village came to have deep faith, love and reverence for Shri Chandra Swamiji and the devotees of that village to this day come regularly to Sadhana Kendra Ashram where Swamiji now lives. Many times they have invited Swamiji to their village and arranged for him to stay in the same small room where, many years ago, the mysterious Sant Singh lived a life of austerity and incredible selfless service.

have already mentioned the supernatural powers of Maharaj Krishna Dassji as told to us by Swamiji himself.

Once this writer asked Sardar Buddh Singhji, “What proof do you have that Maharaj Krishna Dassji is your lost Sant Singhji?” He gave a beautiful reply, saying, “We do not care whether he was the same Sant Singhji or not, but it is only because of the grace of our Sant Singhji that we have been able to meet and come to the feet of great enlightened sages like Maharaj Krishna Dassji and Shri Chandra Swamiji. And this is a matter of rare good fortune for all of us.” What an admirable and insightful way of looking at this mysterious divine incident.

Satsang Born in a Park

We now return to the summer of 1953, when young Swamiji lived for five months in Srinagar at the Chander Chinar Ashram. In the evenings, Swamiji used to go for a walk in a park half a kilometre away from the ashram. He would walk for forty minutes and then sit quietly for about twenty minutes on a bench in a remote corner of the park. This was practically his daily routine.

One day in the evening, when Swamiji was sitting calmly on the bench, two elderly persons came and shared the same bench with him. Though they seemed to be attracted and impressed by the strong presence of the young monk, they remained quiet without saying anything to him. They kept coming, the second day, the third day; they felt a sort of peace near him. On the fourth day, one of them, Paṇḍit Agyaram Dogra, could not restrain himself any longer, and he humbly introduced himself and his colleague to Swamiji.

Paṇḍit Agyaram Dogra was a retired reception officer of J&K state and the other gentleman, Sardar Hari Singhji, about eighty-five years old, was a retired settlement officer of the same state. They had come to spend their summer in Kashmir. Paṇḍitji was an Ārya-Samājist,⁷ a religious minded old man. But in 1947, when India was partitioned and hundreds of thousands of innocent and virtuous people were massacred in cold blood during the communal riots, and millions suffered untold miseries without any apparent fault on their part, his faith in the existence of God had been shaken. He had stopped performing *trikāla-saṅdhyā*;⁸ his mind became overwhelmed with doubts in the *karma* theory as also in God, who he had thought was just, merciful and omnipotent at the same time.

After introducing himself, Paṇḍitji enquired from Swamiji about his name, residence, education, the purpose of his becoming a monk at such an early age, and asked other questions about suffering, God, etc. Swamiji gave him short, simple, convincing and lucid replies, somewhat in the following words:

Swamiji: I have heard the call of God. It is irresistible. I cannot ignore it, much less suppress it. I must see Him. I have resolved to realize Him first-hand. I am seized with the aspiration to discover Him.

Paṇḍitji: Where is God? How do you know that He really exists? Why do you waste your life seeking something which may be a myth?

⁷ Ārya-Samāj is a reformist spiritual tradition founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875. It believes in the fundamental trinity of God, *Prakriti* and soul, as opposed to the non-dualism of *Vedānta*.

⁸ *Trikāla-saṅdhyā* is a Hindu practice of performing prayer and worship of God three times daily.

Swamiji: I do not know God. I do not know what He is or what He does. I do not even know much about this world. But I have faith in God and in the words of sages and saints.

Paṇḍitji: Why is there so much suffering in the world created by God? Floods cause havoc where there is no need of water, washing away men and animals, and destroying crops and properties; but where water is needed, He causes drought, crops wither away, and the people suffer. Again, there are people in the world who die of starvation, and there are also those who have so much wealth in surplus earned by hook or crook, that their extravagant and luxurious way of living matches that of kings and rulers. How does God, who is just and merciful, tolerate all this?

Swamiji: I think it is man himself who is responsible for all this mess, all this suffering. The various mal-adjustments in society and degeneration in moral values have contributed greatly to the suffering of man. In the mad pursuit of more and more comforts and conveniences, he has polluted the atmosphere and is making his own life more and more miserable. He has cut and destroyed the forests and disturbed what we would call today the 'ecological balance' in nature, causing floods and droughts. His selfishness has crossed the legitimate limits and doomed him to be violent, aggressive and militant, creating, as it were, a hell on earth.

Paṇḍitji: Why don't you do good to others? Serve your parents, your society and your country. Is it not selfishness to seek your own salvation?

Swamiji: I appreciate your noble ideas. I am not against your observations and suggestions. But all men in this world do not have the same feelings, ideas and inborn tendencies. Some live and die only for themselves; they cannot see be-

yond their own noses. There are some who live and die for their families. Others, fewer in number, sacrifice their lives for their country, caring for nothing else. But there are still others, though very, very few, who live and die to realize God, the ultimate Truth. To call such chosen people selfish would be quite absurd and unjustified. The innate urge in man for immortality and infinity is irresistible. It is a fact which cannot be disputed.

By this time it was getting late and dark, so they bade farewell to each other, and the meeting dispersed.

The next day, when Swamiji reached the park, Paṇḍitji and Sardarji were already there. Obviously, they were waiting for him, near whom they had felt a peace which was palpable and an assurance which could satisfy their questioning hearts and dispel their disturbing doubts.

Soon such park meetings became almost a daily routine. Besides these two gentlemen, some other people from different walks of life, including a retired Muslim officer and a Sufi Haaji who owned a transport business, were also attracted and started coming to these informal spiritual talks. What was beautiful was that all participated in the discussions, which were held in a very cordial and friendly atmosphere with open minds under the spontaneous guidance of Swamiji. Swamiji's sweet and convincing answers, supported by scientific explanations, touched and appealed to the reasoning minds of the intellectuals and the hearts of the emotional ones alike. Swamiji's holy presence had become a sort of spiritual feast, which these yearning souls enjoyed more and more. Soon many people became his friends and started inviting him for meals at their homes as a token of their devotion, which he often accepted. For many

friends, the sweet and devotional relationship with Swamiji became their most precious possession, which they treasured for as long as they lived.

Sardar Hari Singhji was one of the many who became Swamiji's ardent devotee. He had started his career as a peon, but with hard work and honesty he rose to become the settlement officer of the J&K state. He was a pious soul and very compassionate by heart. He confessed to Swamiji innocently, "I do *japa*, but my mind wanders." Many times he disclosed to Swamiji a strange experience of his. He saw in a dream a magnificent congregation of saints, many of whom had their hair twisted into long dreadlocks. He also saw Swamiji among those saints.

Years later, at the time of his death, just before proceeding on his onward journey, he came to Swamiji in his astral body. About this incident, Swamiji once told us: "I was staying on the forested island near Haridwar. At midnight I woke up, feeling the presence of someone in my hut. When I opened my eyes, I saw Sardar Hari Singhji sitting cross-legged on the ground facing me. He was smiling and looked peaceful, but did not speak. After about fifteen minutes, he disappeared. The next morning, I told this incident to a devotee who had come from Jammu. The same evening I received a telegram that Sardarji had expired the previous night."

Trance in the Cave-Temple

Throughout Swamiji's stay in Srinagar, the Namdhari Sikh soldier who had traveled to Srinagar with Swamiji by bus kept visiting him on Sundays. Once he requested

Swamiji to visit a cave-temple, which had a natural *Shivaliṅgam*.⁹ This gentleman stayed in a military camp at Khrew Village, some kilometers away from Srinagar. The village was at the base of a hill, near the top of which the cave-temple was situated in a crevice. People of the neighbouring villages knew of that cave-temple. Some Kashmiri *Paṇḍits* also used to go and worship Lord Shiva there once a year. One had to climb a steep distance of three kilometres aided by a village guide in order to locate the cave, as it had a very narrow and hidden entrance. Swamiji accepted the Sardarji's invitation to go with him to the cave.

Swamiji himself has narrated the incident as follows: "We engaged a guide from the village who informed us that sometimes an encounter with wild bears takes place near that cave. In winter, some bears even take shelter in the cave. The guide also told us that once a monk in Tibet had seen that cave in a vision, and had come and spent four months in the cave practising spiritual *sādhanā*. The guide took some articles like sticks, rags and kerosene oil to light a fire, if necessary, to scare away the wild bears. He also took a torch and a lamp, saying that it was always dark inside the cave. For refreshment we took a flask of milk and some snacks. It took us about an hour and a half to reach the cave-temple. Fortunately, there was no encounter with any bear on the way. As the entrance to the cave was very narrow, only one person at a time could enter it with a light. First of all the guide entered and lit a lamp inside. We followed one after another in that light. From inside, the cave was so spacious that fifty to sixty people could sit there.

⁹ A round stone which Hindus worship as a gross symbol of the Absolute, free of all adjuncts, names and forms.

“As soon as I entered that cave, I felt a very strong presence there, which stopped all my thoughts and aroused some peculiar subtle movements of energy in my body. I had to take the support of the Sardarji to walk a few steps in the cave and had to sit down abruptly on the ground, which was wet. My eyes closed, as if compulsively, and my attention rushed to the *ājñā chakra* (the point in the middle of the forehead). I started to have visions of different saints, sages and *ṛishis*. I forgot my body completely. Of the saints and sages I saw during that period of about fifteen minutes of trance, I could recognize only Achārya Shrichandraji. Two of them looked like Tibetan monks with shaven heads and three or four, like Kashmiri *ṛishis* with long white robes on their bodies called *firans* and turbans on their heads. The vision of each sage would have perhaps lasted a few seconds. These visions gave me a feeling of being transported; an inner joy filled me which cannot be described in words.

“After about fifteen minutes, my eyes opened gently and I looked around. I found the guide and the Sardarji sitting quietly beside me. They thought I was meditating. My breathing had become very, very slow and for the first few moments after opening my eyes, I could see very dimly and almost could not speak. I felt much weakness in the physical body. Slowly and gradually, say, after about five minutes, I felt normal and got up.

“The guide showed us the *Shiva-liṅgam*; it was not handmade, but was a natural part of the rock, situated almost in the middle of the cave. And the most wondrous thing was that a drop of water would fall every few minutes from the uneven ceiling of the cave, right on top of the *Shiva-liṅgam*. A few drops also fell on the ground here and there

sometimes, making it wet. The temperature inside the cave might have been around 20°C in the month of June.

“On the opposite side of the cave from the entrance there was a narrow passage going somewhere. We tried to peep into it with the help of a torch, but the beam of light did not go beyond eight to ten feet. The guide informed us that it was believed by some people that the passage went as far as Tibet.

“Having remained in the cave-temple for about one hour, we came out and took our refreshments under a tree. After taking rest for about an hour, we walked down the hill to the village. I had been thinking in my mind about staying in that cave for a few months, for *sādhana*. I made certain enquiries from the guide in this regard and was told that there was no source of water near the cave. The Tibetan monk who had once stayed there for four months had to go two kilometres down the hill to bring drinking water.

“From the village we went by foot up to the main road from where we took the bus and reached Srinagar in the evening. The same evening I told Maharaj Krishna Dassji about my experiences in the cave and my intention to stay there. But Maharajji dissuaded me from doing so. He also told me an interesting story about one of his young Kashmiri devotees who had had a providential escape during an encounter with a wild bear near that cave.”

***Amarnath Yātrā* and Departure from Kashmir**

One day a tourist from Dehradun came and stayed in the ashram with his sister and her two children. He was a rich man. He knew Maharajji and wanted to live near him.

Maharajji introduced him to our Swamiji. Within a few days he became a great admirer of Swamiji. Whenever he went out for sightseeing by bus or taxi, he would also insistently take Swamiji along with him. Thus Swamiji came to see all the natural and beautiful spots in the Kashmir Valley within eight to ten days.

In those days, every year from July to September, about thirty thousand pilgrims including *sadhus* and saints would come to Srinagar from all over India to undertake the historical and famous *Amarnath yātrā*.¹⁰ The holy destination is the cave of Lord Shiva, one of the most sacred places for Hindus, located about 120 kilometres from Srinagar. It was in this same cave that Swami Vivekananda had the vision of Lord Shiva. The cave enshrines a *Shiva-liṅgam* formed of ice, which assumes its full size on the full moon day in August. In those days, Shri Chander Chinar Ashram used to take care of many pilgrim-*sādhus* and arrange for their camping and meals etc. right up to the cave and back. Swamiji also performed the pilgrimage to Amarnath with this group of *sādhus*. At that time Swamiji used only *khaḍauḍ* (strapless wooden sandals) for shoes and thus he completed the whole arduous and mountainous pilgrimage wearing *khaḍauḍ*.

In the month of September, after participating in the birthday celebration of Achārya Shri Chandrajī in the ashram, Swamiji decided to leave Kashmir, as it was getting very cold indeed. During Swamiji's five-month stay in Srinagar, Paṇḍit Agyaramji and Sardar Hari Singhji had become very close to him. Due to his influence, Paṇḍitji's

¹⁰ Nowadays up to three hundred thousand pilgrims visit that shrine every year.

faith in God had been restored and he had again started sitting in meditation and performing *trikāla-sandhyā* daily and regularly.

The wife of Sardar Hari Singhji, who was addressed as Beji, was an old and very religious lady. She also developed deep motherly love for Swamiji and would often invite him to their home for meals. Though not very well educated, she was an authority on Guru Granth Sahib and would often give extempore discourses on Gurubani. Many people were her admirers and devotees, and they often invited her to their homes. It was their strong belief that her intercession with the Divine on their behalf could certainly attract the grace of God, helping them to overcome their problems and blessing them with a happy and spiritual life. She used to devote much time to God-remembrance, but at the same time, she was very miserly. Contrarily, her husband, Sadar Hari Singhji, was very liberal and did a lot of charity, though he did not devote much time to *sāadhanā*. He used to support economically many poor persons, widows and needy students without letting anyone know about it.

About Beji, Swamiji once told us: “Beji gave me plenty of money. She used to say, ‘In my life I have given money only to you; don’t know why!’ A tenant occupied part of their house on rental basis. Sometimes when he failed to pay his monthly rent, Beji would quarrel with him. Then Hari Singhji would quietly give money to him to be given as rent to Beji, but he would instruct him not to reveal it to her.”

Beji introduced many families to Swamiji, who received spiritual inspiration from him. Beji used to tell her admirers that Swamiji’s spiritual influence had transformed

her from a conservative religious woman to a liberal, spiritual person who pays due respect to all religions and their saints and sages.

When Paṇḍitji and Sardar Hari Singhji came to know that Swamiji had decided to leave Kashmir, they requested him to come and stay in their own hometown of Jammu, which, they pleaded, was called a city of temples and which had many suitable spots for *sādhanā*. Swamiji kindly acceded to their request. Paṇḍitji booked a bus ticket for Swamiji up to Jammu. He also informed Paṇḍit Prem Nath Dogra, a renowned and noble personality of Jammu, about Swamiji and requested him to arrange some secluded and remote place suitable for *sādhanā*. Sardarji had also told one of his retired subordinate employees to welcome Swamiji warmly and make necessary arrangements for his stay in consultation with and help of Paṇḍit Prem Nath Dogra.

In an Abandoned Temple

On the day of departure from Srinagar, Swamiji reverentially touched the feet of Maharajji and took leave of him. Paṇḍitji and Sardar Hari Singhji saw Swamiji off at the bus stand. When the bus reached Jammu, Sardarji's retired employee received him respectfully and took him to the famous Raghunath temple to stay for the night and took care of him in every way.

The next morning he took Swamiji to the outskirts of the town and showed him many secluded spots. He had already met Paṇḍit Prem Nath Dogra in this regard, who had given his assurance that any spot selected by Swamiji would be made available to him. After visiting about a dozen spots

in and around Jammu, Swamiji selected a small empty temple in the precincts of Veda Mandir. It was a temple only in name since there was no *murti* or idol in it and it had been lying abandoned and unattended for a long period. No one visited that temple. Some distance from the temple there was an old hall in bad condition, which was also lying vacant. The remaining land attached to Veda Mandir covered many acres. It was virtually a forest except for one small house at the end of the plot, in which the caretaker of the Veda Mandir, Shri Shastriji, was staying with his family.

Shri Mohan Lalji Gupta, a close devotee of Swamiji, gathered the following brief history of the Veda Mandir and some other information about Swamiji's stay there. In his own words:

“Long back, there used to be a dense forest in that place. There also stood a holy sehjan tree, popularly called a drumstick tree. According to the popular saying, Lord Ram used to sit under this tree. Also, an enlightened sage, Swami Champanandaji, used to do *sādhanā* under this tree. The king of the state, Maharaj Pratap Singh, was a pious man and had great reverence for saints and sages. Often he used to come for the *darshan* of this saint. One day Swami Champanandaji expressed his desire to construct Veda Mandir at that place. The benevolent king at once agreed to it and on the 20th of December, 1916 he allotted roughly ten acres of forestland for the objectives of spreading education, establishing a cowshed, and for the welfare of the poor and orphans. Then Swami Champanandaji arranged for the construction of the Veda Mandir and also formed a trust to run its affairs. All the four Vedas were kept in the Veda Mandir. When Swamiji arrived there, Paṇḍit Prem Nath Dogra was its president and Lala Ishwardasji Mengi was its

secretary. Other trustees included Paṇḍit Agyaramji and Paṇḍit Labharamji, among others.

“After the passing away of the sage, Veda Mandir was still there, but there was no activity in it. When Swamiji saw this spot there were shrubs all around. Only in the morning, on the ground in front of the *mandir*, the morning drill of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) used to be held. In the east there was a small temple, but there were no idols in it. Some time before, the priest of the Veda Mandir, who was embroiled in a legal battle with the trust, had taken away the idol of Lord Ram, saying that he had installed it in his personal capacity. After the priest and the idol had been removed, people stopped coming to that temple and it became more or less abandoned.”

Swamiji decided to stay at that place. Paṇḍit Prem Nathji Dogra made arrangement for his food and other necessities. A person used to bring food and milk for Swamiji daily in the morning and in the evening. With Swamiji’s arrival, the place also became alive once again. The people who were sad because the idol had been removed from the temple little realized that a living man of God had come to inhabit it.

Paṇḍit Prem Nathji also provided Swamiji with two mats, one bucket and a mug. Shastriji, the keeper of the Veda Mandir, cooked and provided food for Swamiji. Milk was arranged by Paṇḍit Agyaramji. When Sardar Hari Singh and Beji returned from Srinagar, they often sent fruits and eatables for him. They also used to invite him for lunch at their home.

Swamiji stayed at the Veda Mandir for about three months. In the initial days he used to remain enclosed in the small temple-room, absorbed in his *sādhana* for the whole



Modern day photos of the Veda Mandir where Swamiji lived for three months in 1953. Now the buildings have been renovated, a new *murti* has been installed and the temple is again functional.

day, except when he went out for lunch on invitation from some of his devotees. His *sāadhanā* in those days consisted mainly of *japa* aided by meditation and *svādhyāya*.

In the meantime, Beji and Paṇḍit Agyaramji introduced Swamiji to some prominent, respectable and noble people of Jammu. These included the families of Shri R.D. Lakra, Sardar Harnam Singh Sachdeva, Doctor Mela Ram Chabra, the Chief Medical Officer of J&K, Lala Ishwar Dass Mengi, who was a learned person and a great social worker, Dr. O.P. Mengi, Sardar Amar Singh, the senior most I.A.S. officer of J&K, Thakur Jaffer Singh, Paṇḍit Labhu Ramji, Chief Engineer and others. All loved and revered this young monk and served him in one way or the other. Besides, some seekers of Truth also came to know about Swamiji through the keeper of the *mandir*, Shastriji. Among them, Shri Niranjan Dass Kamotra and Shri Munshi Ramji, a cloth merchant, were very sincere seekers, who often visited Swamiji. They used to sit in meditation in Swamiji's presence and also seek spiritual guidance from him. Lala Ishwar Dass Mengi used to spend half an hour each day in Swamiji's temple room studying the *Gītā Rahasya*, the famous commentary on the *Gītā* written by a great scholar and *kārma yogī*, Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

Do Ghosts Exist?

It will not be out of place to mention here an interesting event that happened during Swamiji's stay in Veda Mandir. He mentioned it to us when someone had asked him a question relating to ghosts. He explained, "I have never

seen a ghost, but once I did feel the presence of a disembodied soul.”

When Swamiji was staying in Veda Mandir, a retired *subedar*¹¹ started coming to him from a nearby village. Initially, he talked only of spirituality and religion, but after some days he opened up and said: “Swamiji, I have a big problem at home. A ghost comes to my house every night and greatly troubles all my family members including myself. The ghost enters the bodies of each of us one by one and strangulates us. We want to scream but cannot. In this manner he tortures us the whole night. I have done everything possible to get rid of this horror, but in vain. I brought some *tāntrics*, who tried to exorcise the ghost by performing certain *tāntric* rites, but they could not succeed and expressed their helplessness. They said that the ghost was very strong and even troubled the *tāntrics* themselves. Not only that, any relative or friend of ours who comes to stay in our home is also put through the same tormenting experience.

“A competent doctor, who is a friend of mine and who does not believe in ghosts, took this whole incident as some sort of psychological disease in my family. I once invited him to stay at my house and to his great surprise and horror, he too was put to the same ordeal in the night. Now he no longer visits my home. We even left that frightful house and went to live in another village for six months, but the ghost would not spare us. He came there too. He follows us wherever we go.”

With tears in his eyes he continued, “Swamiji, I am a brave soldier and can manage to pass the remainder of my

¹¹ A supervisory post in the Indian army.

life bearing this horrible fate of mine, but I am very distressed about the agony of my two children. Please Swamiji, help me. I have great faith in you; save me.”

Swamiji consoled him and said: “I don’t know anything about *tāntric vidyā* (science of the *tāntras*) nor have I ever seen a ghost. However, I have deep sympathy for you and I will pray to God to free you from this ghost, if there is one. Come to me after a week and tell me what happened.” With a ray of hope and somewhat assured, the *subedar* returned home.

After ten days, the *subedar* turned up and after doing *praṇam* to Swamiji said: “Thank you, sir. I cannot express my gratitude to you in words. After many, many years, since this horror started, at last, only this week we have had respite from that ghost. But for the last two days it has again started coming in the night, though now it is not troubling us as much as before. This time the ghost only entered the bodies of my children, but went away within a few minutes. Now I am very confident that you can also save my children from the ghost. Though I don’t want to give you more trouble, it is my heartiest and humble request that you should come and stay in my home for at least one night. I will bring a *tongā* (horse cart) to take you to my home and bring you back here the next day.”

Swamiji agreed to go to the village of the *subedar* and stay there for the night. Two purposes prompted him to do so. Firstly, the possibility of alleviating the suffering of *subedar’s* family and secondly, he himself wanted to experience what a ghost was, even if the latter harassed and troubled him.

Therefore, as arranged, Swamiji reached the *subedar's* home in a *tongā*. Some of the relatives and neighbours of the *subedar* had also come to receive Swamiji. In the evening, after dinner, as directed by Swamiji, *sankīrtan* (singing the praises of God) was held in the big room where all the family members used to sleep together at night. At about 9:30 p.m., when the *sankīrtan* stopped, Swamiji said, "I would like to sleep alone in this room in which the ghost comes and troubles you. All of you should sleep in the next room, leaving the common door open." All obeyed his instructions.

With his unbelievably sharp and powerful memory Swamiji narrated the exciting sequence of the fifty-year-old incident in minute detail: "From 9:30-10:30 p.m. I sat in meditation and then lay down to sleep. At midnight, while I was not fully asleep, I felt the presence of some being in my room. I flashed my torch all around the room. There was no one who could be seen with the eyes. But the feeling of someone else present in the room persisted. After a few minutes I felt an invisible force entering my body, but it came out immediately. Within a few seconds I heard the screaming of one of the *subedar's* children from the next room. All of us got up and lit a lamp. The child stopped crying after a minute or so. Then we put out the lamp and went to sleep again. Nothing happened for the rest of the night and we all had a sound sleep up to 6 a.m. in the morning. After my daily meditation and *japa*, I took breakfast and left for Veda Mandir by *tongā*. While leaving his home, I told the *subedar*, "I shall pray for you with the hope that everything will now be alright."

Swamiji reached Veda Mandir before lunch. After that, for a number of nights, Swamiji felt the presence of that disembodied soul in his temple-room. But it did nothing wrong and did not harm Swamiji in any way. After about twenty days the *subedar* again visited Swamiji and informed him, with a sense of great relief, that for the last several weeks the ghost had stopped coming to his home and harassing them. He told him that only the previous night the ghost had come to his home but did not harass anyone. The *subedar* had tears of gratitude in his eyes.

Later, when Swamiji shifted to the cave from Veda Mandir, the *subedar* again came there, after about six months and informed Swamiji that though the ghost was still coming to his home the frequency of its visits was gradually decreasing and that it did not trouble anyone in the family anymore. Thus came an end to the horrible tale of sufferings of the *subedar* and his family merely on the strength of Swamiji's sincere intercession with God and by his purity and compassion.

If we look at this incident, a few of Swamiji's innate qualities become evident. First, his compassionate and tender nature. No sooner did the *subedar* entreat him to help alleviate the suffering of his family than he started praying for them. In the words of Saint Tulsidas:

*santa hridaya navanīta samānā
kahā kavina, pai kahā na jānā.
nija dukha dāha dravahī navanīta
par dukha dravahi santa supunīta.*

The heart of a saint is soft like butter, but whereas the butter melts on its own, a saint melts (is moved) by the sufferings of others.

The second is his honesty and straightforwardness. He told the *subedar* clearly, “I don’t know the science of exorcizing ghosts.” And the third is his firm and unshakable faith in God and the power of prayer. Without the help or knowledge of any *tāntric* or ritual, he relied and called upon the supreme Lord alone with the innocence of a faithful child. The Lord also responded at once and granted his prayer.

The fourth quality shines as his courage and commitment to know the truth first hand, tearing apart the veil of mystery even at the cost of risking his own life. Only on the strength of such rare qualities could he become a pilgrim of the pathless path and eventually reach his destination.

Experience of *Bhikshā*

Swamiji once told us about another amusing incident which took place during this period. When a devotee asked whether he had ever begged for his food, Swamiji laughed and wrote:

“When I was staying at Veda Mandir, one day I wished to have an experience of *bhikshā* (begging for food). I told Shastriji not to bring my lunch on that day, and after finishing my daily schedule of meditation and *japa*, I took my *bhikshā* bowl and went to a nearby village. I stood in front of a house, the door of which was half open. I called out the words, ‘Hari Om, please give me *bhikshā*,’ in the traditional way that wandering monks beg for food in India. But no one responded or came out. I repeated the same call, but to no avail. I waited for five minutes, standing in front of the door and then moved on to the next home. Its door was closed. I gave the call, this time a bit louder, ‘Hari Om, please give

me *bhikshā*.’ Within a minute an old woman came out with a handful of corn flour and offered it to me. I gently refused it, saying that I needed cooked food. She said there was no cooked food with her and went back. I, therefore, moved on to the third house for *bhikshā*.

“‘Hari Om, a *sadhu* is at your door asking for *bhikshā*,’ I called once again. A young man with a strong, athletic build came out. He looked at my face, bowed before me and requested me to come in. I followed him inside his simple village house. He offered me a cot to sit on and seated himself on the floor upon a mat. He was a very devoted gentleman with simple faith in God as also in the saints and *sadhus*. He first offered me water to drink and said, ‘Sir, *khichari* (rice mixed with pulse) is cooking on the fire. It should be ready within fifteen minutes. I will then serve it to you.’ In the meantime, he humbly introduced himself to me saying that he was a soldier in the army, who had come on leave to see his parents in the village. He was very much interested in God-Realization and seemed to have read many religious and spiritual books. He asked me some searching questions about the Divine, as also about the *sāadhanā* to realize Him. I was moved by his sincere spiritual aspiration and guided him according to my knowledge, telling him an example of a soldier turned *sadhu* who had attained the summit of spirituality. He was pleased and smilingly remarked, ‘Sir, my life is also like that of a saint, based on discipline and self-sacrifice. Having been posted on the border where exchange of fire so often takes place between the troops of the two countries facing each other, life can pass into death anytime. Therefore, I remember the Divine each and every moment.’

“By that time the *khichari* was ready. He offered me to wash my hands and then served me a full meal of *khichari* with a lot of fresh butter. His devotion and faith had to be seen to be believed. It made the food all the more delicious and enjoyable. While I was eating I wondered if I was having *bhikshā* or a feast!”

Chapter Three

Intensive Sadhana

Drawn to Solitude

After having spent about three months in the Veda Mandir, Swamiji felt the urge to go to some more secluded place and plunge headlong within himself in search of Truth. The examples of Swami Ram Tirth and Paramahansa Ramakrishna made him restless to fathom the depths of divine Consciousness. Babaji's inspiration infused in him the spirit of 'do or die.' Life without a first-hand experience of the Divine seemed to him totally meaningless and unbearable.

One day he told *thakur* Jaffar Singh of his intention to leave Veda Mandir and go to some more quiet and solitary abode. The *thakur* told him about a small cave on the bank of the Tawi River, which was renovated for meditation under his supervision for the Guru of the queen of Poonch state. He said, "That is the most suitable place for *sāadhanā*. Although it has been lying abandoned for more than ten years and is in very bad shape now, I will get a door fixed to it if you like the place and decide to stay there."

The next morning he took Swamiji to the cave. They had to walk along the bank of the river, crossing over big boulders. There was no footpath leading to the cave, let alone a road. It took them over forty minutes to cover a distance of not more than one kilometre along the bank of the Tawi River.

To quote Swamiji, “I saw the cave. There was a small room built in front of the cave and a kitchen and storeroom attached to it. The wooden doors of the rooms and the cave had been taken away by thieves. Only a structure of cement and bricks stood there in very bad condition. The concrete platform in front of the rooms was half broken and had been partially washed away by the floods of the Tawi River, which was flowing about ten feet below, touching the broken platform. Across the river, there was a vast dry river bed of stones and sand, and beyond it, a dense forest spread over one kilometre on the opposite bank. There was pin-drop silence at the place. About half a kilometre downstream, some people could be seen taking a bath in the river. I sat there on the broken platform in silence for fifteen minutes to feel the vibrations of the place, and enjoyed it. I told the *thakur* that I liked the place and would soon come to stay there.”

Little did Swamiji know at that time that fifty years later, the dilapidated cave would be renovated by his devotees and turned into a beautiful *āshram* in his name, as a living monument to the difficult *sādhanā* undertaken by him at this place.

The picturesque scenery around the cave has been described by Shri Mohan Lalji Gupta of Jammu, an ardent devotee of Swamiji who later became instrumental in the renovation of the cave into the present Shri Chandra Gufa Sadhana Mandir Ashram:



In this photo, taken around 1980, the rooms built in front of the cave can be seen somewhat as they would have been when Swamiji lived there. In 1981 a massive flood in the Tawi River washed these rooms away.



Shri Mohan Lal Gupta sitting in front of the cave entrance in 1995, before the construction of the *āshram*.



Shri Chandra Gufa Sadhana Mandir Ashram, built around Swamiji's cave in Jammu (2015).



View in front of the ashram with the Trikuta Hills visible in the distance (2015).

“The River Tawi, believed by the common people to be the daughter of the sun, flowed by the side of the cave. Both banks of the river were flanked by a silvery bed of white sand and beyond it, towards the east, was a series of small hills covered with greenery. There was a thick forest around the cave. The Tawi looked bewitching in the midst of the vast natural garden in the heart of seclusion. In the morning and evening the music emanating from the river and the chirping of birds joined together to compose a sweet symphony eulogizing the infinite glories of the omnipotent Lord. To the left of the cave, towards the north, stood the Trikuta hills, the abode of the blissful mother of the universe, *Vaishno Devi*,¹ giving peace and protection to all.”

Swamiji recalls: “When I decided to shift to the cave from Veda Mandir, I was invited for lunch by Paṇḍit Prem Nath Dogra. A saint from Ramakrishna Mission who ran an orphanage in Srinagar was also present. When he came to know of my desire to go live in the cave at the bank of the Tawi River, he forbade me from going there and said that someone would kill me in the night. But I didn’t change my decision, and am still alive to this day!”

Right from the beginning Swamiji was quick and decisive in his plans and actions, a quality which we observe in his day-to-day life even now. So, the very next day Swamiji left Veda Mandir for the cave at 9 a.m. It was the month of December 1953.

In Swamiji’s words: “It was very, very cold at the bank of the river. I felt it especially in the evening. I had no warm clothes or bedding. The sun set behind the hill at 3 p.m. By

¹ *Vaishno Devi* is a popular Hindu pilgrimage place consecrated to Goddess Durga. It is visited by around 10 million pilgrims every year.

seven o'clock it became very dark. At about 7:30 I went inside the cave. In those days I used to wear only a *dhotī* (a piece of cloth worn around the lower part of the body and legs) as you see Swami Ram Tirth wearing in his photographs. So I had to make two pieces out of the *dhotī*; one piece I used as a *dhotī* and the other I used as a curtain at the opening of the cave where a door used to be.

“At about 8 p.m. a devotee, Shri Munshi Ramji, arrived at the cave with a labourer who was carrying some bedding. I was surprised and asked him how he had reached there with the bedding. Munshi Ramji told me that for so many days he had been thinking of bringing bedding for me. But on that particular day, at about 2 p.m., he felt an irresistible urge to bring it to me. He was a cloth merchant. He gave some cloth from his shop to a tailor and asked him to make a quilt, a mattress and a pillow, which were made in two hours. He stuffed the cotton into the covers himself, and the bedding was ready by 6:30 p.m. Then he went to Veda Mandir. There he came to know that I had moved to a cave on the bank of the Tawi near the waterworks. With great courage he managed to find the cave in the dark and he gave me all those things that he had brought. I spread the cotton mattress and the bed sheet on the ground and wanted to return the pillow and the rolled quilt to him. But he refused to take them back and left for his home, saying that it had become dark and the way was not easy.

“Also, on that same day, Paṇḍit Agyaram sent me, through the keeper of Veda Mandir, a mat, a bucket and a large canister of *pañjīrī* (a wholesome preparation of wheat flour, sugar and *ghee*).



Early days in the cave.



On the platform outside the cave entrance (1950's).



Panoramic view in front of the cave (2015).

“The next morning, after bathing, etc. I sat for meditation in the cave at 6 a.m. When I came out of the cave at 9 a.m. I was very surprised to find many articles left in the room adjacent to the cave. They included pulse, wheat flour, rice, *agīnthī* (a kind of firewood oven used by villagers), a bag of coal, potatoes and a matchbox. There were some utensils for cooking and other things as well. I wondered who had left these things there. At 11:30 a.m. I lit the *agīnthī*, cooked *kicharī* and ate it. That was my maiden experience of eating food cooked with my own hands.”

At 5 or 6 in the evening Shri Munshi Ramji came from the village and told Swamiji that it was he who had brought all those things and placed them in that room with the help of two labourers. He said, “Last night you told me that you would observe silence from the next morning. I thought, ‘Who will bring things to this far off and difficult place?’ I had already seen the way to the cave. So by God’s inspiration I brought all these things. You were sitting in *sādhanā* inside the cave, so we did not think it proper to disturb you, and therefore quietly left all these things here in the room.”

Thus we observe that Baba Bhuman Shahji, ever the protector and provider of his devotees, did not allow his beloved Chandra Swami to be put through trouble even for a single day. Indeed, it was not Chandra Swami alone who was pursuing God. God was pursuing the young monk more closely than the young monk was pursuing Him! As a mother runs after her child with delicious eatables in her hands, so also was God ensuring the welfare of His devotee at every step of his journey.

Who will not feel touched thinking about the young Swamiji’s innocent and total faith in God, and God’s moth-

erly concern and care for him? Who can fathom the sweetness of the infinite Lord who infused love, compassion and kindness into the hearts of mankind? See what the holy Gurubani sings about the Guru's protection of his disciple:

Guru kā bachan base jī nāle

The holy name of God, given by the Guru, ever upholds and accompanies the disciple.

The impact of the divine name cannot be drowned by water, nor burnt by fire.

Attain, O mind, to the bliss divine by remembering God.

He protects you with each breath. He protects you here and hereafter, at every time and at every place.

He provides support to the lame and wealth to the poor.

Even as a mother nurtures her child with her own milk,

Similarly He takes care of His devotees.

Nanak exclaims, "By Your grace I found You as my anchor, as a ship lost in the midst of the ocean."

After coming to the cave, Swamiji continued to cook food himself for about a month. Afterwards, the family of his ardent devotee Shri R.D. Lakra started sending him lunch and milk daily. Throughout his life as a *sādhaka* he took only one meal during the day. In the evening he took only milk.

Hanumanji's Presence in the Jammu Cave

We have learnt directly from Swamiji that an invisible shadow or spirit of Hanumanji was present in the cave. In India it is well known that Hanumanji is a very pure and powerful deity and it is not possible for an ordinary person to bear the strength of his mighty presence. In the beginning Swamiji too felt a little scared of the mysterious presence

inside the cave, but after a short time he overcame his fear and everything was all right. Pure and evolved soul that he was, he was never harmed or disturbed by the spirit of Hanumanji during his long stay of many years in that cave.

The following incident was narrated by Swamiji himself: “Whenever Mr. Lakraji went out of Jammu, he would make arrangements for milk to be brought to me on a daily basis. An old retired gentleman who came to the Tawi River daily to bathe would bring milk for me. At that time I used to be sitting inside the cave in meditation. The door of the outside room in front of the cave used to be kept open. The old man would gently place the milk in that room and then return home. One day, I don't know why, after putting the milk in that room, he wanted to know what I was doing inside the cave. So he quietly lifted the curtain which was hanging in front of the cave entrance. As he removed the curtain, (according to him) he saw Hanumanji standing with a club in his hand, in an aggressive posture. The man was terrified. But I knew nothing of all this; I was meditating. As soon as the man returned home he was overcome by a fever, which also affected his brain. With the lights on, he spent the whole night pacing to and fro in his room. For two days he did not talk at all to anyone. He also stopped bringing milk for me. On the fourth day his wife and son brought him to me. He had become very weak and it was difficult for him to walk. He was held by the hand and helped to come to me. When they reached me, touching my feet, they repeated again and again, ‘Please forgive him,’ and started weeping. I was in silence. When I enquired by gesture what had happened, they related the whole incident. They also informed me that sometimes he was possessed by the anger



At the home of Shri R.D. Lakra in Jammu during the early period of Swamiji's stay in the cave.

of Hanumanji and would abuse all his family members. Otherwise he had always been a man of peaceful disposition.

“They had come to me on a Sunday. I told them in writing, ‘Don’t worry. He will be all right. Go to the temple of Hanumanji the day after tomorrow, on Tuesday (the designated day for the worship of Hanumanji), offer him *naivedya* (offering made to a deity) and also beg for his pardon. Do it every Tuesday till he becomes well.’

“By going to the temple and doing as I had asked, he started recovering. Gradually, he became well again, and for a short time he began bringing milk for me again. But six months later he passed away.”

Knowing all this, this writer asked Swamiji, “Maharajji, why did such a thing happen? Hanumanji is the deity of purity, *sevā* and devotion.”

Swamiji replied, “There are many incidents which you cannot explain logically. They are not against logic, but cannot be explained by logic either. I have no knowledge of such things. I was told by Paṇḍit Nityanandji, the famous *tantric* of Kashmir, that somebody had performed an *anuṣṭhāna* or ritual in that cave to try to possess Hanumanji, which went wrong. Therefore the spirit of Hanumanji in an angry mood dwelt in that cave.

“In the beginning, when I first started living in that cave, Hanumanji started entering my body too. Every tenth or fifteenth day he would enter my body and my whole body would start trembling. The first two or three times I felt a little afraid. But at that time I did not know that it was Hanumanji. He would come in the night. I was then in silence. In the day, I would think, ‘What was it and why did it happen?’ I experienced it three or four times. When he en-

tered my body, I wished that he would immediately leave. I used to do *japa* at that time, but he would leave only after staying thirty or forty minutes inside me. Later, I pondered over the matter and concluded that if he comes, let him; he does me no harm, why should I be scared? Then slowly and gradually the interval between his visits increased. Then he would come once in a while in a period of six months. Eventually he stopped entering my body. The incident with the old man took place three or four years after this.”

Another incident that happened several years later further suggests that the shadow/spirit of Hanumanji was present in that cave. In Swamiji’s words:

“In 1957, when I left the cave to live temporarily on the forested island in Haridwar, I had left behind a *brahmachāri*, as some goods and provisions were still in the cave. The *brahmachāri* was a boy from the Garhwāl province in the Himalayas. I was not very well acquainted with him. I told him, ‘I am going to Haridwar; perhaps I will live in the *jhāḍī*. I will inform you. Should you like, you can come to join me, or you may stay on at this place if you feel good here.’

“He did not know about the incident related to Hanumanji and the old man. After going to Haridwar, I erected a thatched hut in the *jhāḍī*. Then I wrote him a letter that he could stay on in the cave if he liked to be there. He came to me in the *jhāḍī* and stayed there in the hut for several months. There he told me his experience in the cave. He explained that every evening he used to recite the Hanuman Chālisa, a popular hymn of forty verses in praise of Lord Hanumanji. On the very first day when he lit the *gyot* (a small earthen oil lamp with a wick) and started to recite the Hanuman Chālisa he felt as if the whole cave and

the adjacent room were shaking. He thought perhaps an earthquake had struck. So he came running out of the cave. But outside there was no earthquake. It was absolutely normal. So he again entered the cave, but he felt the same tremors inside and had to run out. He tried to go inside the cave many times, but every time he had the same experience. Very frightened, he sat outside the cave the entire night. Thereafter, whenever he tried to recite the Hanuman Chālisha he would have the same experience of tremors. So he stopped reciting it.”

Upon learning of this mysterious episode I once again asked Swamiji, “How would you explain this incident?” Swamiji replied, “I have no knowledge of such things. There are two words: *sarvajñā* and *sarvavid*. Both of these words appear in the Upanishads. *Sarvajñā* means omniscient, which applies only to God. The *jñānī* is *sarvavid*, the one who knows first-hand the essence (*sāra tattva*) underlying all. The spiritual seeker is interested in the Realization of God, the Divine, and not in knowing the secrets behind the worldly phenomena.”

From the above incidents it may be inferred that the spirit of Hanumanji in a wrathful mood lived in that cave, but it never harmed Swamiji. Rather it would seem that it even helped Swamiji on his spiritual journey, as indicated by the stream of high spiritual experiences that he had there. And we must remember that it was the Divine who was supernaturally prompting and guiding, in each and every way, the spiritual journey of this God-inspired monk. It was He who selected this cave, out of infinite options, for Swamiji's initial stage of *sādhanā*. It was certainly the most blessed choice.

Recently I requested Swamiji to kindly tell us if the shadow of Hanumanji is still present in that cave. Swamiji replied that now no one has such an experience in that cave, which suggests that the shadow is no longer present there. Swamiji also wrote, “Hanumanji is free to live or not live at any place.”

Well, the above is an esoteric happening and we cannot, in the normal course, understand the ‘what and why’ of it with our limited intellect.

Love of Silence

Swamiji’s coming to live in the Jammu cave marks a most important phase of his spiritual journey. It was there that he began his long and arduous *sādhana* for God-Realization in right earnest, with strict discipline, meticulous planning, and full vigor, utilizing all of his energies to the fullest extent.

From the very next day after moving to the cave, Swamiji started observing silence. This was his first experiment with silence. He began by observing silence for one month. With a break of one day, he again observed silence for another month. Thus it continued for six months or so. He was assessing its impact on his *sādhana*, and he loved it. After this period, he went to spend the summer at Hari Parbat, a hill near Srinagar, Kashmir, as we will see later. When he came back to live in the cave again in the winter, he again observed silence, this time for one and a half years continuously. That summer he did not go to live at Hari Parbat in Srinagar, but remained in the cave in silence. This was the first long period of silence he observed. So we can see that

observing silence is his old love, and it continues to be so to this day.

It has now been more than sixty years since he first started observing periodic silence, and since the 15th of October, 1984, he has been observing continuous silence for an indefinite period. Let us now see what he himself wrote a few years ago about his initial period of silence:

“About fifty-five years ago, I started observing silence by taking a vow of silence for one month. I would open the silence for one day and then again take silence for one month. After six months, I took a vow of silence for one and a half years, during which I practised a *mantra* almost continuously, day and night, as directed by the Kumara brothers.² After that, I used to observe complete silence (no writing, no speaking) for six months a year, and for the remaining six months I used to speak for about two hours or so in the day. It was very, very helpful for my *sāadhanā*. It helped me in being one-pointed, and in avoiding so many distractions from outside. It helped me to dive deeper and deeper within myself. And slowly and gradually, I fell in love with silence. At present, my silence is not motivated. It is not a vow of silence.”

When recently asked who inspired him to observe silence as a means of *sāadhanā*, Swamiji replied, “It was an inner inspiration. Of course Baba Bhuman Shahji has been the guide and motivator of my *sāadhanā* all through, but I spontaneously loved silence from the very beginning. In my college days at Dehradun I used to visit two saints who were observing silence. One saint had been in silence for twelve to thirteen years and was a great scholar of the English lan-

² This is discussed later in the section “*Japa Anuṣṭhāna* of a Thousand Nights.”

guage. There is a village called Majra near Dehradun on Rishikesh Road. He lived there. There was another monk, a retired judge, who was also in silence. He was living in a temple located at a secluded spot towards Nashvilla road in Dehradun. There was a small room attached to the temple in which he lived. Nobody else lived there. I saw that he used to bring water from a water tap about a quarter kilometre from that temple. He was a great renunciate and he covered his body only with a small cloth around his waist. He cooked his food himself. My love for silence was strengthened by the association with these two saints.”

Integral Daily Schedule

Having shifted to the secluded Jammu cave and embarked on his first experiment with silence, the young monk now plunged into the inner depths of his being. The main parts of his *sādhanā* at that time were prayer, meditation, *japa*, *prāṇāyāma*, the practice of witnessing consciousness, and above all, total surrender and taking refuge in the Divine. And beneath all this lay deep irresistible longing to meet his Beloved, God. Swamiji himself once wrote in reference to this period of his *sādhanā*, “There was a time when I used to weep all night in God-remembrance. My pillow would become wet with tears.”

At another time Swamiji told us, “I had devotion both for child *Krishna* and *Devi Shakti* (the Divine Mother). My *sādhanā* was predominantly devotional, though I had full faith in *Advaita Vedānta*.³ When I read the *bhakti* scriptures of loving devotion, I would weep.”

³ Non-duality as taught in the *Upanishads*.

Once, when a seeker commented that *bhakti mār̥ga* (the path of devotion) involves duality, Swamiji remarked: “All paths of *sādhana* do involve duality, implicitly or explicitly. That is to say, there is duality in *sādhana*, but the final attainment is that of the One without a second.” Even today we see a golden blend of devotion and knowledge in Swamiji’s divine and integral personality.

Let us now see what a demanding but inclusive daily *sādhana* schedule Swamiji set for himself in those initial days in the cave. We were fortunate to discover this timetable, written in his own hand, in one of his very old diaries.

Daily Timetable

2 a.m.	Getting up
2 - 3 a.m.	Prayer
3 - 4 a.m.	<i>Prāṇāyāma</i>
4 - 5 a.m.	Meditation
5 - 6 a.m.	Brushing teeth, call of nature, etc.
6 - 7 a.m.	<i>Japa</i>
7 - 8 a.m.	Light <i>āhār</i> (breakfast), setting, cleaning and putting things in order
8 - 9 a.m.	<i>Svādhyāya</i> (scriptural study)
9 - 10:30 a.m.	<i>Vyāyāma</i> (physical exercises/yoga <i>āsana</i>) and bath
10:30 - 11:30 a.m.	<i>Nitya Karma</i> (<i>pūja</i> /worship), prayer, reciting <i>shlokas</i> from holy scriptures & praying for the good of all beings
11:30 - 1 p.m.	<i>Prāṇāyāma</i> (breathing exercises) and meditation
1:00 - 4 p.m.	Lunch (cooking, eating, washing vessels) and rest

4:00 - 5:30 p.m.	Attending to visitors or <i>svādhyāya</i>
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Light refreshment (a glass of milk)
6:30 - 7:30 p.m.	<i>Vyāyāma</i> (<i>yoga āsanās</i>)
7:30 - 8:30 p.m.	<i>Prāṇāyāma</i>
8:30 - 10 p.m.	Meditation, <i>japa</i> , prayer
Wednesday	Washing clothes
Sunday	Replying to letters

In addition to the above schedule, every evening he would sing alone the *mahā mantra* “*Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare, Hare Kṛiṣṇa, Hare Kṛiṣṇa, Kṛiṣṇa Kṛiṣṇa, Hare Hare*” with *kaṛhatāls*, an instrument played with one hand for rhythm.

In the same old diary, we found in Swamiji’s handwriting some very useful information about various aspects of *sādhanā*, which he obviously took into account when planning his daily schedule:

“The under mentioned three powers are present in each and every person:

- a) *Kriyā Shakti* — the power of action through which actions are performed.
- b) *Bhāva Shakti* — the power of feeling.
- c) *Jñāna Shakti* — the power of comprehension.

The all-round development of a person involves the refinement of all these powers and directing them for spiritual unfoldment.

- a) For the development of *kriyā shakti*: *prāṇāyāma* and breathing exercises, prayer and concentration on the navel center.
- b) For the development of *bhāva shakti*: *sankīrtan*, *japa*, prayer and concentration on the heart centre.

c) For the development of *jñāna shakti: svādhyāya* (study of inspiring scriptures), *satsaṅg*, *vichār-vimarsha* (spiritual discussion), prayer, *japa*, and concentration on the *ājñā chakra*.”

Observing Swamiji’s life closely, we find how beautifully the power of action, devotion, knowledge and the psycho-physical discipline of *yoga* have been integrated in him. This is also the reason why he is able to effectively guide seekers of different temperaments and capabilities on the different paths to God-Realization. It is also worth noting that in his initial days, besides the various other limbs of *sādhanā*, Swamiji also gave due importance to *svādhyāya* and to keeping the body light and fit through physical exercise and *yoga āsanās*.

When asked what inspired him to undertake such a demanding *sādhanā* at such a young age, Swamiji replied, “It was my love for Babaji. Also, my mother was very spiritual and did a lot of *japa*. Besides, the *sanskāras* (impressions) of the past lives also become active at a particular time.”

Swamiji tells us that due to his early years as an athlete it was initially difficult for him to sit cross-legged for long periods: “My legs were very stiff in the beginning. I could not sit in one posture for more than forty-five minutes without feeling pain. Then by continuous practice for some years, I could sit for about three hours in one posture.”

When we look at the young monk’s strict *sādhanā* regime, we should keep in mind that he did all of this under the most challenging living conditions. The following lines from Swamiji’s own pen give us a glimpse into his lifestyle in the cave at that time:

“There were no wild animals, but many snakes and scorpions would come. Many times I would push snakes and scorpions out of the cave. Once when I got up from my mat in the morning and picked up the rug, I found a dead scorpion there. To this day scorpions and snakes still come there. Once a big cobra came into the meditation hall.⁴ A devotee was sleeping in the meditation hall in the night. He had to take that cobra out. But there are very few snakes now because the place is completely changed – with rooms and lawns. All the wild bushes have been removed.”

“Once when this body was staying in the cave in Jammu in the fifties, an old monkey became very sick. When it was about to die, it came into the cave and sat there. It was daytime. I got it seated on the veranda outside the cave and fed it for five or six days. After five or six days it left its body at the bank of the Tawi River.”

Recently, when one of his oldest Jammu devotees visited the ashram, Swamiji told us the following story of his stay in the cave:

“Sister Sumitra and her family are perhaps some of my earliest devotees. Her husband was a bank manager. They received initiation from me in 1955-56 when this body lived in the cave in Jammu.

“I recall an incident which took place in 1956. Her husband came to me in the cave in the evening. I went down to the bank of the Tawi River, which was flowing just in front of the cave, to take water from the river. I used to drink that water. When I bent down with a bucket in my hand, the

⁴ Swamiji is referring to the meditation hall of the Shri Chandra Gufa Sadhana Mandir Ashram which was built by his devotees in the 1990's on the property surrounding the cave (photo p.120).

stone under my feet was uprooted and I fell into the river with the bucket. By swimming I came out of the river (the water was very deep) but the bucket was lost in the current. Sumitra's husband, whose name was Prakash, brought a new bucket for me from the city the next morning.”

During his seven-year stay in the cave Swamiji had the opportunity to read many spiritual books, which were lovingly brought to him by one of his Jammu devotees, Shri Niranjana Dass Kamotra. About him Swamiji himself has written:

“Kamotraji from Jammu was a very advanced *sādhaka*. He had a big collection of books on spirituality, on different religions, on saints and sages — thousands of books. He used to bring me books from his home. He brought me books on Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi, Aurobindo, Jesus and various Western and Buddhist mystics. I read from his books on *yoga*, *bhakti*, *jñāna*, Shankaracharya and other *achāryas*, as well as the great book on the Vedas, *Vedanuvachan*, by Baba Nagina Singh.”

Incidentally, Shri K.M. Kamotraji, the son of Shri Niranjana Dass Kamotraji, is also very much devoted to Swamiji and over the years he has shared with us many things about Swamiji. He told us that whenever his father would invite Swamiji to his home, Swamiji used to love browsing through his vast spiritual library and selecting various books to read.

Swamiji also told us a number of amusing incidents from his days in the cave: “Once when I was staying in the cave in Jammu a very rich family came to see me. They had a child with them. There was an old broken broom lying in the corner of the cave. The child fell in love with that broom.

When the family was getting ready to go, he would not leave the broom. He insisted on taking it to his home. His family tried everything to dissuade him and told him ‘We will buy you many such brooms, please leave this broom here.’ But the child was so adamant that he refused to listen to anyone and in the end he took that broken broom with him to his home. I told the family ‘We all are, in a sense, like this child. We fall in love with worldly things which, from a higher standpoint, are only like this broken broom. When you become spiritually mature you realize this.’ When I was speaking, I told this story many times during my talks.”

Recently this author humbly requested Swamiji to share more about his daily *sādhanā* schedule and about his spiritual practice in general during those early days. Swamiji very kindly agreed and the following question and answer session ensued:

SPV: Maharajji, it seems that in your childhood you were not exposed to the atmosphere which would have helped you to make such a wholesome and balanced *sādhanā* schedule. Perhaps you had never before done *prāṇāyāma* either. What guided you in this regard?

Swamiji: How would a *sādhaka* living in seclusion spend his whole day? Naturally, one will work out one’s daily routine according to whatever one has read or heard about *sādhanā*. I did the same. I had read some books and also observed Swami Krishna Dassji, who was very regular and sincere in his *sādhanā* and did everything at its proper time.

Whenever I went to Hari Parbat in Srinagar for *sādhanā* I would first stay for two or three days in Chander Chinar Ashram with Maharaj Krishna Dassji and also while coming back to Jammu from there. If I had any doubt or question



Swamiji's devotees used to periodically organize a *bandhārā* (community feast) on the platform in front of the cave. Swamiji would actively participate in the food preparation and arrangements as seen above.



Bandhārā on the platform in front of the Jammu cave.

I would get it clarified from him. Maharaj Krishna Dassji was a great enlightened saint who himself practised *japa*, meditation and *prāṇāyāma* daily and regularly. Sometimes he used to come to Hari Parbat to see if I was well or not. Once he came and stayed with me in the cave in Jammu for one day and then we went together to Vrindāvan⁵ on a pilgrimage for five days. At that time I left behind a Kashmiri Paṇḍit, Sham Lal Pir, in the cave. But he felt afraid during the night. So, he went to Lakraji and requested him to shift to his house all the articles in the cave.

In the cave I had read many books on the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, including *Rāja Yoga* by Swami Vivekananda. I had also read a big book in Hindi published by Gita Press Gorakhpur on Patanjali's *yoga*, which contained a detailed commentary by a saint.

Also, I used to meet many other saints at Chander Chinar Ashram. Mahant Gobind Dassji, the head of the ashram, was himself a great scholar of *Vedānta*. Above all, there was the constant guidance from Babaji available to me.

SPV: According to your schedule you were doing *prāṇāyāma* three times a day for a total period of three hours. Which type of *prāṇāyāma* were you doing?

Swamiji: For the first few months I did only *anuloma-viloma prāṇāyāma* in which the breath is not retained. Then I used to do inner *kumbhaka* in which after inhalation the breath is retained inside. After some time I started doing *bāhya* (outer) *kumbhaka* in which after exhalation the breath is retained outside. But I used to do different *prāṇāyāmas* at different

⁵ A famous pilgrimage place associated with Lord Krishna.

times. During the practice of *prāṇāyāma* I used to keep my attention on the incoming and the outgoing of the breath.

SPV: Earlier you had told us that you had an *Iṣṭa*, but you did not reveal who He was. Would you kindly tell us who your *Iṣṭa* is?

Swamiji (after a long pause): Krishna. Since childhood I had deep love for Lord Krishna. During my stay in the cave I read the biography of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, published by Gita Press. It strengthened my love for Lord Krishna.

SPV: Kindly tell us the way you used to meditate in those days.

Swamiji: I used to meditate on the form of Lord Krishna at the *ājñā chakra*, the centre on the forehead between the two eyebrows. And at other times I meditated using the witnessing technique. I used to watch my thoughts disinterestedly at my heart centre. Besides, during the day, while doing daily activities, at times I also used to practice being a witness.

SPV: Do you still meditate on Lord Krishna even now?

Swamiji: In the beginning one has to practise it. Afterwards it happens spontaneously and effortlessly by itself. There is no longer effort made to meditate on an object if the object has been realized or achieved.

SPV: From where did you learn the witnessing technique of meditation?

Swamiji: I learned it from Swami Krishna Dassji.

SPV: What was initially the goal of your *sādhana*?

Swamiji: To realize God who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, the creator and the sustainer of this universe, the most compassionate and sweet, as everyone believes God to be.

SPV: But now you more often define God as *Sat-Chit-Ānanda* — Absolute Existence, Consciousness and Bliss.

Swamiji: As the level of consciousness rises, your concept of God naturally becomes broader, higher and more integral.

SPV: What impediments did you face in your *sādhanā*?

Swamiji: There were no impediments as such. Sometimes the concentration in *sādhanā* was good, and at other times not so good. You may call it an impediment. There was a firm resolve for complete renunciation of all worldly things. I used to follow my schedule of *sādhanā* no matter whether my concentration was good or not. Even when I was sick I used to follow my *sādhanā* schedule. Also I used to do everything in a planned manner. During the long period of seclusion in the cave, Srinagar and the forested island, I did not allow indolence to prevail over me. I followed the schedule of my daily routine strictly.”

SPV: Did you feel joy in your *sādhanā*?

Swamiji: The joy comes with deep interest. The joy of the Divine is the joy of spiritual Fulfilment. That is the greatest of all types of joy. But there is a peculiar joy in *sādhanā* as well.

There were ups and downs in the *sādhanā*. This is the very nature of the process of evolution. Energy moves in a wave form and not in a straight line. Sometimes I would enjoy my *sādhanā* more, sometimes less; sometimes it became intense and on other occasions it was not so intense. But my *sādhanā* went on.

SPV: Did you acquire any supernatural powers as a result of your *sādhanā*?

Swamiji: My aim was God-Realization. I did not do *sādhanā* for acquiring any supernatural powers. However, in my child-

hood I could read the minds of others or foretell some future events without any wish on my part to do so.

Inner Experiences and Visions

Aided by dispassion and deep aspiration to know firsthand the truth of his Being, silence and deep one-pointed meditation turned the young monk's mind more and more inward, opening up the world of inner experiences. Some of the inner experiences that came to him in the beginning were frightening, while others which followed were quite engrossing. After these initial experiences, his consciousness entered a realm in which he started having visions of numerous sages, gods and goddesses.

In Swamiji's own words: "After going to live in the cave, for the first fortnight or so I had some very horrifying and painful experiences. During meditation, and even in dreams, I would feel as if I was sinking in a pit full of excreta; sometimes I would see 'beings' with frightening forms and faces. Passing through raging fires and being tossed in ruffling waves of the ocean was also felt. At that time I did not know how and why all this was happening. It was so terrible that if not for my deep faith in God and the protection of Babaji, I would have given up, left the place and even stopped the *sādhanā*. I prayed to the Lord again and again to bring me out of this predicament. Gradually the frequency of such experiences slowed down and finally they stopped after about twenty days.

"Then the nature of inner experiences suddenly changed. The painful ones were replaced by some thrilling ones. During meditation I started to see very beautiful scenes

and landscapes of rivers and mountains. Many kinds of musical sounds were also heard in the right ear. Very often I would witness the play of lights of different shades at the *ājñā chakra*.”

Swamiji further explains these experiences in his book “*The Practical Approach to Divinity*,” which we firmly believe is a sort of spiritual autobiography in many ways. Swamiji himself has confirmed that he wrote the chapter “A Few Inner Experiences” on the basis of his own first-hand experiences:

“These sounds and colours, which are inconstant, and which come and go alternately, are those of the five subtle elements in their pure form (*tanmātrās*), that is, earth, water, fire, air and ether. On hearing these sounds and seeing these colours during concentration, some *sādhakas* imagine that they have advanced far in contemplation. This shows their lack of knowledge of spiritual matters. There is nothing spiritual in seeing these colours or in hearing these sounds; they are reflected in consciousness only because of the contact of the mind with the subtle physical plane. These sounds and colours actually disintegrate consciousness and hamper one-pointedness. As such, they should not be entertained and given importance. An adept calls them empty colours and spiritually useless sounds.

“A little deeper inwardness takes one to the astral (*prāṇic*) plane where a number of things are seen and experienced. Very often one hears voices whispered in the ears. Sometimes one hears messages, which are quite clear, but few of them are genuine and many are false and misleading. Here the *sādhaka* must be on guard and should not follow blindly any message, voice or suggestion. Besides this, a

multitude of visions come during contemplation at this stage. At the lower levels of the astral plane some frightful scenes appear, while at its higher levels many kinds of fascinating scenes are seen. Most of them are the symbolic representations of things, states, forces and beings of the astral plane, while some represent actual happenings in that plane. It is not prudent to get entangled in such visions and voices, which just come and pass away. Disregarding them, one must move deeper and deeper inwards and try to achieve one-pointedness. In fact, the fervent and sincere *sādhakas* do not remain at this stage for long, but pass over it quickly and safely.”

This is precisely the attitude Swamiji had towards his varied experiences of the astral world. Though encouraged by the positive experiences, he did not give them undue importance and thus was not distracted from his ultimate aim. In Swamiji’s own words: “Such experiences encouraged me to go deeper and deeper within. Consequently, the visions of great saints and sages started coming to me, some about whom I had heard or read, and some who were unknown to me. I did not contemplate or meditate on any of them, though I have felt great respect and adoration for some of them.”

“In many cases, with the exception of three or four, I had the vision of the saints/sages before I had even heard about them. And after the vision, within a few days someone would bring me the works of that sage to read — maybe the sages themselves sent their books to me. When I had the vision of Ramana Maharshi, I did not know who he was. For three consecutive days I had a vision of him during meditation. On the fourth day a man brought me the book *Ramana Maharshi and His Teachings*. When I saw the photo of Ramana Maharshi in that book, I came to know that the

sage I was seeing during meditation for the last three days was Ramana Maharshi. I still have in my memory the faces of several of those saints whom I saw in those days in visions, but still I do not know who they are and where they are. No one brought me their books or their photos.”

Regarding his horrible experiences in the cave, this writer asked Swamiji as to why he had to undergo such an ordeal, considering that he was a sincere seeker making earnest effort in the right direction. He replied as follows:

“When one becomes introverted, one may come in contact with such worlds in which predominantly demonic forces live. But such experiences cannot make the sincere *sādhaka* deviate from his or her path. These experiences come from the astral world (*pret loka*), which is a lower part of the subtle world. The subtle world has many layers. The astral world is inhabited predominantly by ghosts. When a departed soul, good or bad, does not want to move on to its further journey due to its strong attachment, it prefers to stay in the astral world which is closest to this earthly world.

“In the scriptures it is written that before the experience of heaven, one has the experience of hell. But a spiritual person crosses it in no time. If a *sādhaka* has a glimpse of hell in meditation, naturally he/she will experience the pain and suffering associated with hell. I did not have the experience continuously. It was for some moments during meditation. Time is relative. When you are feeling pain, it feels very long, and when you are glad the time feels very short. It is also possible that with divine grace some seekers go through the experience of hell rather swiftly in meditation or in dream, which otherwise they could have taken years or lives to go through.”

Here it will again be relevant to quote Swamiji from *The Practical Approach to Divinity* regarding the visions which followed:

“After leaving the astral plane, one-pointed concentration gains momentum and soon ripens. One begins to have the elevating and blissful experience of the higher planes. Saints of a higher order, living or departed, often appear during contemplation. They come to bless and help the *sādhaka*. They should be saluted and adored. Sometimes they talk about spiritual matters and guide the *sādhaka*. Visions of gods and goddesses also occur at this stage. The personal *Iṣṭa* of the *sādhaka* appears many a time during contemplation. Not only this, he gives *darshan* even when one is sitting or lying in a relaxed mental state, with eyes open. Such experiences give much *ānanda* and uplift the mind. The soothing and sweet impact of such visions lasts for many days.”

In addition to those mentioned earlier, Swamiji had visions of Shri Aurobindo, Guru Nanak Dev, Achārya Shrichandraji, the great ancient sage Sukadeva (son of Ved Vyasa) and Swami Ram Tirth during meditation. He also had the *darshan* of Ramakrishna Paramahansa in a dream. When asked about where such visions come from, Swamiji explained, “These visions come from the universal psychic medium, which is the cosmic reservoir of all the names and forms that have ever existed.”

When this author requested Swamiji to kindly reveal more about his visions of Baba Bhuman Shahji and Lord Krishna, Swamiji replied:

“Baba Bhuman Shahji is my Guru. I had visions of Babaji many times in meditation. I would remember him

spontaneously and effortlessly. One effortlessly has the vision of one's beloved so often in meditation.

“Lord Krishna was my *Iṣṭa*. I had visions of him too. I used to meditate on his form. But mostly I used to practice *japa*. The spiritual experiences that come on the path are not similar for all *sādhakas*. Someone has the vision of Lord Shiva, another has the vision of Ganesh. Some see only light and others only hear sounds, and so on.”

As already mentioned, Swamiji used to spend an hour or so every evening singing the *mahā mantra*: “*Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare, Hare Kṛiṣṇa, Hare Kṛiṣṇa, Kṛiṣṇa Kṛiṣṇa, Hare Hare.*” He was inspired to begin this practice after reading the life of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the great Indian saint who is well known for his ecstatic *sankirtan* in the love of Lord Krishna. And like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, young Swamiji would at times become so intoxicated while singing the name of his beloved *Iṣṭa* that he would spontaneously enter the state of *mahābhāva*, a very high spiritual state in which one is submerged in the ecstasy of God's love to such a degree that one becomes oblivious of the external world. Usually this divine state is attributed only to very highly advanced souls. A sincere seeker may devote many years, even lives, to spiritual *sāadhanā* without getting so much as a glimpse of *mahābhāva*. Yet Swamiji experienced this exalted state within only a few months of beginning his intensive *sāadhanā*!

In response to our humble entreaties, Swamiji very kindly acceded to share with us some further details about his experience of *mahābhāva* during this period:

“The spells of *mahābhāva* were for short periods. They usually came while I was reciting the *mahā mantra* in the cave in Jammu. The feeling of body-consciousness used to disappear when the spell of *mahābhāva* would occur. At such times a deep and specific feeling of joy was experienced.

“The experience of *mahābhāva* would happen a few times a day. It continued for some months. It did influence my normal routine of *sādhanā*. Sometimes I experienced shivering in the body during the spells of *mahābhāva*. After coming down from the *mahābhāva* I would feel weakness in the physical body for some time.”

***Japa Anuṣṭhāna* of a Thousand Nights**

After following the previously mentioned *sādhanā* schedule for several months, Swamiji had an extraordinary vision of the four great *Vedic ṛiṣhi* brothers, Sanak, Sanandan, Sanatan and Sanat Kumar,⁶ which was to radically change the form of his *sādhanā* for the next three years to come. In this powerful vision, the *ṛiṣhi* brothers initiated him with a sacred *mantra* and instructed him to practise the *japa* of this *mantra* continuously throughout the entire night for a period of 1000 days. Swamiji followed their instructions explicitly.

During the 1000-day *anuṣṭhāna*,⁷ Swamiji gave up almost all other spiritual practices including breathing

⁶ These four great *ṛiṣhis* are described at the beginning of the book in the section on the Udasin tradition.

⁷ A set of rituals or religious practices performed for a certain set period by invoking the divine power. An *anuṣṭhāna* is usually performed with the aim to realize some specific objective, either spiritual or worldly.

exercises, reading spiritual books and scriptures, and even meditation. He did, however, continue with one hour of prayer in the morning and evening daily and regularly. Regarding his method of prayer, it is fitting to mention here his response to a devotee who sought to know how Swamiji prayed for an entire hour in one sitting. Swamiji replied simply, “I was praying to God to give me His *darshan*. When one feels separated from one’s Beloved and remains in the feeling (*bhāva*) of the need to meet one’s Beloved, it is a sort of prayer in which one can live day and night — not only for one hour.”

During the long hours of practising *japa*, the young monk would repeat the *mantra* with the feeling of self-surrender to God, keeping his attention at the heart centre. As per the instructions given to him by the *ṛishi* brothers, he completely relinquished sleep at night and, while the rest of the world slumbered, he devoted more than eight hours continuously to the practice of *japa*. If and when sleep threatened to overpower him, he would practise the *mantra* in the standing posture with the support of a specially made *bairāgan*⁸ with a long leg. During the daytime he would continue with his *japa* practice and also sleep for a few hours in the afternoon.

In the following question and answer session Swamiji sheds further light on this important period of his *sādhanā*:

SPV: Kindly tell us more about your vision of the Kumar brothers and when exactly you had this vision.

⁸ A T-shaped wooden device with the help of which a practitioner can do *japa* for a long period by resting one’s arm on the flat horizontal part at the top.

Swamiji: I had the vision of the four Kumar brothers during the early morning meditation. I did *praṇāms* to them.

SPV: Which of the four seer brothers initiated you into the *mantra*?

Swamiji: Sanatan Ṛiṣhi.

SPV: How did you know that he was Sanatan Ṛiṣhi?

Swamiji: When some divine power is experienced, its name and form may also become known automatically. It is only with the direct experience/realization that something or someone is truly known. The experience of a divine power has such an impact that in certain cases, even without it disclosing its identity, you come to know about it completely.

SPV: How much time did that vision last?

Swamiji: One does not know how long such visions last. One becomes aware of the time when meditation stops. For example, in a dream you may experience an incident of twelve years' duration in a few minutes. Time has no absolute value.

I have had visions of the Kumar brothers periodically many times. But it was not fixed. I would have their *darshan* all of a sudden in meditation on any particular day. Even now sometimes in meditation I get a glimpse of them.

SPV: What was the fruit of successfully completing the *anuṣṭhāna* of 1000 nights of *japa* of this *mantra*?

Swamiji: The fruit was the ripening and deepening of my devotion and faith in God. I enjoyed the practice of *japa*. Inner joy is the fruit of spiritual *sādhanā*. The result of *sādhanā* is that the *sādhanā* becomes deeper and stronger. But if you have some other motive, then that motive may also be fulfilled.

SPV: Does it mean that before being initiated by the Kumar brothers you were doing *japa* of a different *mantra*, perhaps the one given to you by Mahant Girdhari Dassji when he initiated you into the Udasin order in 1947?

Swamiji: Yes, it was a devotional *mantra* connected with Baba Bhuman Shahji.

Swamiji's intensive *japa anuṣṭhāna* went on for a period of nearly three years, from February 1954 to December 1956. During the first summer of the *anuṣṭhāna*, Swamiji returned to Srinagar and stayed for several months on a secluded mountain called Hari Parbat, which we will describe a little later. In the winter he returned to the cave in Jammu, where he stayed continuously for one and a half years, after which he again spent the summer months at Hari Parbat.

Whether in Jammu or Srinagar, the intensive program of *mantra japa* went on uninterrupted. For the entire night he would practise the *mantra* on the beads of a very long rosary made of over 1000 beads, and in the day he would continue with *japa* for many hours, both while sitting in meditation posture as well as during his daily activities. Gradually the *mantra* became synchronized with his breathing and went deep into his subconscious, submerging him in an indescribable bliss.

In Swamiji's own words: "The *mantra* had overwhelmed me and permeated all my outer and inner activities. I would take my food with the *mantra*; I would walk with the *mantra*; I would even sleep with the *mantra*. I was possessed by the *mantra*, as it were, all the time. My whole being had become soaked with the *mantra*. The *mantra* had brought a sort of inebriation in me which persisted ceaselessly. I don't know how to explain the purifying effect of a

mantra embodied with the divine holy Name. The holy Name of the Lord is verily divine elixir.”

Victory in a Village Wrestling Bout

From the start, Swamiji had always been quite reserved when it came to speaking about his own inner experiences. Thus even while experiencing sublime states as described above, he had the full capacity to integrate his spiritual experiences in the depths of his being, and outwardly he remained very balanced and even playful.

In this vein, we now make a slight diversion from the days of his austerities in order to enjoy the *līlā* the fun loving young monk enacted one day during his stay in the Jammu cave. The incident relates to the time period between 1955-56, when he spontaneously took part in a village wrestling competition some distance from his cave across the Tawi River. Let us watch that unusual match through the pen of Swamiji himself, who related the incident with great amusement:

“When I lived in the cave in Jammu, one day I heard the sound of beating drums from the hill across the Tawi River. It was summer and would have been around three or four in the afternoon. I swam across the Tawi and with my loin cloth still wet, went into the forest in the direction of that sound. When I reached the place, I saw that a wrestling competition had been organized by the local villagers. When eight to ten wrestling bouts had taken place, a *gujjar* who had already won a bout and was a well-known wrestler of that area, dug a small flag mounted on a wooden stick into the ground, signifying that it was an open challenge to any-

one to come and fight with him. There were thirty to forty wrestlers present, but none dared to come into the wrestling ring and accept the challenge. I had some previous experience with wrestling from my college days in Lahore. I went into the middle of the ring. All the public started clapping. There were three to four hundred people present. At the applause from the crowd, the *gujjar* wrestler became very angry. He also came into the middle of the ring.

“Near the wrestling ring a boy was standing who used to take bath in the river in front of the cave. I was acquainted with him by face. I was in silence. I went to him and told him by gesture that I would wrestle against the *gujjar* wrestler and that I needed a *jānghiā* (underwear worn by wrestlers). The boy then brought me the *jānghiā* of a wrestler sitting nearby. I wore it over my loin cloth and entered the ring. Before wrestling, the wrestlers assess each other’s strength by grasping each other’s hands. I saw that the *gujjar* was about three times stronger than me. His hands were hard, as if made of wood. The wrestling started. I played a sleight and felled him on the ground. But he was so strong that he freed himself from me in one or two minutes and got up. The fight continued. After four or five minutes I lost my stamina. Then he felled me. I thought to myself, “Whatever be the outcome, even if it means my defeat, the bout should conclude within six or seven minutes because I cannot fight longer.” He felled me again and tried to apply a sleight in which the person on the ground becomes helpless like a hen. His intention was to incapacitate me and then harass me. In this position one’s head is firmly held by the opponent and it is very difficult to free oneself. Moreover, I was feeling exhausted because of lack of practice. Therefore, as he was

trying to apply that sleight, I, with the spirit of ‘do or die,’ tried with all my strength to get up from the ground and throw him down. Then, I don’t know how, he fell on the ground with a bang and his back touched the ground, which according to the rules meant his defeat. People came running into the arena from all sides and stopped the bout because the back of the *gujjar* had touched the ground. They started shouting and cheering that he was defeated. I was also surprised as to what had happened. All the people encircled me. Someone was giving me one rupee, another five rupees, and yet some others were patting me because of the victory. I took off the *jānghiā*, gave it back to the wrestler to whom it belonged, and ran back to the river wearing only the wet loin cloth. After swimming across the Tawi I again reached the cave. One of the persons who had been present at the bout collected the money and the next day he purchased three kilos of *ghee* and insistently gave it to me at the cave.”

We can only imagine what a sensation it must have caused amongst the onlookers to see the tall, handsome figure of a *sannyāsī* clad only in a wet loin cloth emerge from the forest, defeat within only a matter of minutes an experienced wrestler of three times his strength, and then disappear as quickly as he had come without accepting a single *paisa* of the money showered upon him by the admiring crowd. And all of this while maintaining his mysterious silence. This indeed is our Swamiji!

Once in 2012, when Swamiji was staying for a few months in the Jammu *āshram* that is now built around the cave, an elderly local man came to meet Swamiji. He informed us that he had been present that day of the wrestling competition more than fifty years before and had witnessed



Swamiji on the bank of the Tawi River near his cave. The forest where the wrestling bout was held is dimly visible in the background.

Swamiji's remarkable victory first-hand. He repeatedly told us what an impressive presence Swamiji had, and that his physical body was extremely fit and strong, though not nearly as large as that of the *gujjar* whom he had defeated.

The above incident is not only an amusing anecdote from Swamiji's life, but an insight into the personality of the young monk. Finding the opponent stronger than him, he used grit, determination, all out effort, presence of mind and strategy to defeat him. It also exhibits his spontaneity and playfulness, as he had never planned or prepared for that wrestling bout. Surely, it is on account of these rare qualities that he was able to vanquish the formidable enemies of the spiritual path like lust, anger, greed, attachment, ego, etc.

Around this same period another incident took place which gives us a further glimpse into the firm resolve and gentle nature of the young monk. While Swamiji was immersed in his *sādhanā* in the cave, his worried father, respected Lala Roopchandji, was deeply missing his beloved son. Since leaving Haridwar, Swamiji had not let anyone know about his whereabouts. After making enquiries here and there, Lala Roopchandji came to know that his son was in Jammu, and one day he unexpectedly arrived at the cave to find his son clad in the robes of a *sannyāsī*. He requested his son to come back with him to Babaji's *derā* in Bahauddin, Haryana. But besides being a resolute monk, Swamiji was also very tactful. He could deal with difficult situations calmly and skillfully, a quality which we observe in him to this very day. The young *sannyāsī* gave due respect to his father and calmly persuaded him that he was under the divine protection of Babaji and that he never had any difficulty

on his path. Swamiji also gently reminded his father of the promise he had made to Babaji several years before, that whenever his son wanted to renounce the world in search of the Divine, he would not restrain him from doing so.⁹

Lalaji himself was a very spiritual person, and deep down he knew too well that his son was a lone, committed pilgrim of Eternity and was leading a most blessed life. So he had no choice but to resign himself to the divine will. Seeing with his own eyes his son's extraordinary dispassion and the grace of Babaji upon him, the worried father felt relieved and did not press his son too much to return to the *derā*. He stayed with Swamiji in the cave for two days, during which period Swamiji accompanied him on a pilgrimage to *Vaishno Devi*. Finally Lala Roopchandji returned to Babaji's *derā* alone, reassured that Babaji was indeed looking after his spiritual son in every respect.

Hari Parbat: Faith Centre of Kashmiri *Paṇḍits*

There is a divine intelligence working secretly in this world. It sometimes takes sincere seekers to the realized ones, or even to those who are spiritually more advanced. During the initial period of Swamiji's stay in the Jammu cave, a number of sincere seekers started coming to him. One of them was Vasudev Kaul of Rainawari, Srinagar, who was a government employee and had come to Jammu for the winter.¹⁰ He was a renowned social worker and religious

⁹ This incident is described in the first chapter in the section "The Divine Call."

¹⁰ Due to the extreme cold in Srinagar, every year the government offices move to Jammu during the winter months.

man of Rainawari. He told Swamiji about a place near Rainawari which he said was spiritually charged and very much conducive for *sādhanā*. He persuaded Swamiji to come and stay for the summer months at this holy place. The place was Hari Parbat.

Hari Parbat is a hill on the outskirts of Srinagar. It is known as Siddha Peeth, a place where many saints and sages, both Hindu and Muslim, performed spiritual *sādhanā* and attained spiritual perfection. In those days, hundreds of Kashmiri *paṇḍits* used to circumambulate this sacred hill every day, covering a distance of around four kilometres by foot. The atmosphere of this place was unpolluted and pure and thus very congenial for spiritual practice.

Near the hilltop there were two huge rocks smeared with vermilion, one symbolizing Goddess Hari Devi, the reigning deity of the hill, and the other symbolizing Goddess Lakshmi Devi. On the foot of the hill there was a big temple dedicated to goddess Sharika Devi. Once a year a few devotees used to come up the hill to Hari Devi rock and burn incense and earthen lamps to worship the goddess. Otherwise they performed the regular worship at the bottom of the hill, so the hilltop always remained secluded.

In the summer of 1954, Mr. Vasudev Kaul took Swamiji to Rainawari and temporarily arranged for his stay in the compound of a temple by the name Vital Bhairava. Swamiji stayed in this temple ground for two or three months before shifting to Hari Parbat, where Mr. Vasudev Kaul arranged a very small tent for his stay pitched near the top of the hill under a mulberry tree. For the next seven years this old majestic tree was to bear witness to the intense spiritual *sādhanā* performed by the young monk, as well as his divine knowl-



In the courtyard of Vital Bhairava temple in Rainawari, Srinagar, where Swamiji stayed for a few months before going to live on Hari Parbat (1954).



Recent view of Dal Lake and Hari Parbat Hill, where Swamiji spent his summers for seven years.



Recent view of the sacred Hari Devi Rock near the spot where Swamiji lived on Hari Parbat.

edge and love soaked God communion. Finding Hari Parbat conducive to his practice, from this time onwards Swamiji stayed there for seven or eight months of the year and then returned to Jammu for four or five months during the winter to continue his *sādhanā* in the cave on the bank of the Tawi River. This continued until the month of October, 1961, except for one year from March '57 to April '58 during which he once again stayed on the forested island in Haridwar, which we shall discuss later.

No sooner had the young monk come to stay at Hari Parbat than many young Kashmiri *pandits*, especially from Rainawari, started frequenting him there, drawn by his divine magnetism. Professor T.N. Bhan was one such ardent devotee. He was a senior professor of English at Shri Pratap Government College, Srinagar. He used to bring lunch for Swamiji every Sunday, and also inspired many other devotees to come to Swamiji. For many years after marriage he was unable to have a son, and when he finally did, he named him Chandra out of his great love for Swamiji. Years later, professor T.N. Bhan wrote the beautiful foreword to Swamiji's book *The Practical Approach to Divinity*. In the following excerpt we get a glimpse of Swamiji's divine grandeur, as well as the holy ambience of his hilltop abode and the unmatched scenic beauty and quietude that enveloped it.

“Nearly a decade ago, I walked slowly up a hill towards a solitary, small tent pitched on the top under the shade of an old mulberry tree. The sun was about to set; there was a shower of golden hues on the majestic mountains surrounding the beautiful Kashmir valley. The mid-summer verdure of fields and forests, pastures and plains, rivers and lakes presented a bewitching prospect on

every side. Just opposite the hill, at a distance of only a few furlongs, a lotus-lake reflected the charm of the evening as it began to bloom amidst a feast of colours. There was a stillness and silence which seemed to calm the most restless of all things, the mind of man. As I reached the spot, I found a few young men sitting quietly in a semicircle facing a vacant *āsana* which lay at the foot of the tree. Except for the rustling of the mulberry leaves and twigs, there was no sound or movement. Even the sheep which dotted the right and the left sides of the hill made no motion. I joined the silent, small company and without even knowing it, in a few minutes the silence and stillness of the scene enveloped me. After a while, I became conscious of a gentle stir inside the tent. Soon the flap was lifted and a graceful figure wearing the robe of a *sannyāsī* walked forth and occupied the *āsana*. All of us got up and bowed to him. As he sat there, he seemed to me like a steady and gentle flame of peace and inward happiness. His eyes reflected the repose of his mind. That was Chandra Swami. I fell in love with him at the very first sight.”

Coincidentally, many years later in 1994, Professor Bhan also wrote the foreword for *Song of Silence I*, a book containing Swamiji’s life profile and some of his answers to spiritual questions. When he met Gurudeva again in Jammu in 1994, after a lapse of twenty-five years, he kept on gazing at Gurudeva’s divine face for a long time, all the while shedding tears of joy. In his foreword he wrote, “Meeting him several years later, in April 1994, at Jammu, I felt (I submit it unreservedly, even though I am conscious that I have no competence to say it) that I was face to face with a *yogi* who had only just returned from a dip in the *Triveni*



View from the spot on Hari Parbat where Swamiji used to live in a wooden cabin.
Photo taken during Swamiji's visit to Srinagar in 1999.

(confluence of three holy rivers) of Truth, Consciousness and Bliss. Even while mixing with the people present on this occasion, he was in tune with this *Triveni* — to me it was very, very clear.”

At Hari Parbat Swamiji used to observe silence for the whole day, but would speak for one and a half hours in the evening, discussing spirituality with the young seekers, whose numbers increased as time went on. Even some Muslim seekers living in the vicinity of Hari Parbat would come and make spiritual enquiries. Swamiji, well acquainted with Sufism and possessing a fairly good knowledge of Urdu and Persian, impressed them with his convincing replies.

Loving *Sevā* of the Kashmiri *Paṇḍits*

For his first two summers at Hari Parbat, Swamiji stayed in a small tent. In subsequent years, the devotees provided him with a small portable wooden cabin. When Swamiji would go to live in the cave in Jammu during the winter, they would dismantle the cabin and take it to the home of a devotee. Then they would reassemble the cabin again when he returned to Hari Parbat the following summer.

Before we delve further into his *sādhanā* experiences during his alternate stay at the Jammu cave and Hari Parbat in Srinagar, let us see how Swamiji got acquainted with the Kashmiri *paṇḍits* and how he was tenderly taken care of by them throughout his stay at Hari Parbat. Shri Dwarka Nathji Handu, now in his mid 80's, was one of the Kashmiri *paṇḍits* who first came into contact with Swamiji and served him a lot in those days. A beloved of Swamiji, he has been closely

associated with him ever since and, though now quite old, he presently spends a lot of time doing *sādhanā* and *sevā* in the Jammu *āshram* which has been built around Swamiji's cave. We are fortunate that he and a few others have had an unbroken link of association with Swamiji for more than six decades and have thus told us many enthralling incidents of those golden days more than fifty years back. In a vivid memoir, written on our request, Shri Handuji writes:

“Before I tell about my early association with puja Swamiji, it may be appropriate to give a brief introduction to the Kashmir of the era of the fifties. As history tells us, Kashmir has had a rich tradition of a very strong secular fabric in its social milieu. The Kashmir of that era was much different from the Kashmir that all of us know these days. In those days, Kashmiri *paṇḍits* had a very strong tradition of going for an early morning *parikrama* (circumambulation) around Hari Parbat, where the temple of Goddess Sharika is situated. This daily *parikrama* would happen at 4 o'clock in the morning. People from different corners of the city would cover miles and miles to reach Hari Parbat and do the *parikrama*. One can say that every Kashmiri *paṇḍit* would draw spiritual sustenance from this place.

“It was during one of these daily routine trips to Hari Parbat that I chanced upon Swamiji, who had already started his spiritual journey there.

“Since people would generally visit Hari Parbat in groups, soon word about Swamiji spread from one group to another and surely everybody took note of his presence there. Though everybody had a pious regard for Swamiji, it was quite noticeable that some of us as a group developed a special bond with him. The bond became so strong that we would

delegate different tasks among ourselves to serve Swamiji at his makeshift arrangement at Hari Parbat.

“If my memory serves me right, I can still recall the names of those who took charge of providing food, milk, local bakery items, and water for bathing and drinking, day in and day out for those many years that Swamiji was at Hari Parbat: Sarva Shri M.L. Kaul, Ram Krishna Dulloo, Pushkar Nath Mehldar, Chuni Lal, Mohan Lal Ambardar, T.N. Kaul, Gash Lal, myself (D.N. Handu) and a few others. Vasdev Kaul, S.L. Peer, Professor T.N. Bhan, Chand Narayan Ganju and K.L. Mehldar were also among the close devotees who came regularly to Hari Parbat for Swamiji’s *darshan*.”

Now let us see what Swamiji himself wrote, perhaps in 2004 during his stay in the Jammu Cave Ashram, about the exceedingly sweet *sevā* of Kashmiri *paṇḍits* in those early years:

“There is a colony near Hari Parbat by the name Rainawari. It is about two kilometres from Hari Parbat. The place where I stayed was an extra 500 metres up the hill. When this body lived there, the Kashmiri *paṇḍits* of Rainawari served me very much. Daily they would bring lunch, milk, fruits, etc. They would even take my clothes for washing. Some fourteen or fifteen homes had mutually fixed duties for themselves as to who would bring milk, who would bring lunch, etc.

“They would bring milk in a thermos and Kashmiri bread called *kulchā* in the morning. I would take half of the milk in the morning and half in the evening. In those days I used to take only lunch, no dinner. And then, since there was no source of water on the top of the hill, D.N. Handuji



Swamiji with Shri D.N. Handu (on the far right in the top photo and holding Swamiji's foot in the bottom photo) together with other Kashmiri *paṇḍit* devotees on an excursion in Srinagar in the 1950's.



and Gash Lalji used to daily carry on their shoulders five or six pitchers full of water from the bottom of the hill for my bathing and drinking. There was a drum which could contain eighteen pitchers of water and they would always keep it full. There was a tap in the drum, which was kept on a slightly raised platform, and I would take bath under the tap. They would also bring one large pitcher of water daily only for drinking and fill the pitcher kept on the higher platform.

“They did this daily for six or seven years, as long as I stayed there, coming by bicycle up to the base of Hari Parbat and then climbing to the top of the hill with the necessary things. As for me, I can never, never forget their *sevā*. I don’t know, I must have had some past relation with the *paṇḍits* of Rainawari, otherwise who serves like this! Baba Shrichandraji had studied Sanskrit and the holy scriptures in Rainawari from a learned Kashmiri *paṇḍit* named *Paṇḍit* Purushottam Kaul. Perhaps I also used to go to Rainawari along with Babaji 500 years ago.”

Amazing and inscrutable is the sweet *līlā* of the Lord. It is a sure sign of His direct and tangible grace that for seven years Swamiji was daily provided with cooked food and all other necessities unasked, through the Kashmiri *paṇḍits*. For seven years he did not have to cook for himself even once during his stay in Kashmir. He had all the spare time to take giant strides towards his Beloved God, day in and day out. To this day the devotees and disciples of Swamiji feel eternally indebted to the blessed Kashmiri *paṇḍits* who, on divine prompting, took such loving and tender care of him in those early days of his *sādhanā*.

On his part, the young monk was steeped in intense dispassion. He practically had no possessions. In his small wooden cabin there were only a few books on spirituality and a wooden cot which barely fit inside the tiny cabin. He used a thin mat for a mattress and a bed sheet to cover himself. For a pillow he selected a smooth flat rock from the hillside.

Other Spiritual Experiences in J&K

In December 1956, after completing the *japa* of the specific number of *mantras* as directed by the Kumar brothers, Swamiji once again strictly followed his intensive *sāadhanā* schedule as described earlier. We have already mentioned several of his visions during this period of his *sāadhanā*. In addition to those already mentioned, he had the visions of Lord Rama during his exile in the forest, Swami Vivekananda, Mother Durga astride a lion, and Lord Shiva. He also had the vision of Hermes Trismegista of Egypt, whose strange headdress Swamiji described without ever having seen the headdress of an Egyptian pharaoh before. He also had the visions of some *siddha* saints whom he had not heard or read about. These visions were spontaneous and Swamiji never meditated on these saints or gods as a part of his *sāadhanā*.

Regarding his visions of Shrichandraji, Swamiji told us that though he never meditated on his image, he had visions of him numerous times in meditation as well as in his dreams. In the beginning, he could not believe that he was really seeing Shrichandraji, and thought that perhaps he was seeing a picture or an idol. As soon as such a doubt arose,

Shrichandraji would smile or blink his eyes, or there would be some movement in his body. Then such doubts would vanish from Swamiji's mind. During this period Swamiji used to recite daily the *Mātrā Shāstra*,¹¹ a compilation of thirty-nine verses composed by Achārya Shrichandraji, which Swamiji had learnt by heart during his childhood.

Out of his many visions, Swamiji told us about the following in some detail: "Once I had a vision of Guru Nanak Devji in the state of divine ecstasy listening to *sankīrtan* under a tree along with his devotees and *sevaks*. The vision did not pertain to this world. It was in some different world."

Swamiji had visions of Baba Bhuman Shahji numerous times throughout his *sādhanā* and he also had the feeling of his presence at all times, yet he specifically related to us the following vision:

"I saw him in some other world during meditation. I still remember the whole scene completely." Swamiji drew a rough map/sketch on a piece of paper and further wrote, "A monk was standing on the veranda of a house. I told him that I wanted to have the *darshan* of Babaji. The monk told me that his name was Kahan Dass and he took me inside a room where Babaji was reclining on a *palang* (a sort of cot). I did *praṇām* to Babaji by prostrating on the ground. Babaji gave me his blessing by raising his hand. Thus I had his *darshan* there.

"I had never heard of or seen the monk Kahan Dass. Years later, when I told Mahant Girdhari Dassji about this vision, he told me that sometime previously there had been a monk by the name Kahan Dass who lived in the *derā*."

¹¹ The *Mātrā Shāstra* is revered within the Udasin tradition like the holy Vedas.

Swamiji has written to us many times about such visions. He says, “Visions of saints, whether they speak or not, leave a particular impact on the mind. Their impact evolves you spiritually whether your conscious mind becomes aware of it or not. Any such vision leaves a lingering positive and blissful impact on the mind.”

Another remarkable fact about Swamiji’s inner experiences that recently came to light is the depth of his intimate relationship with Lord Jesus. We were already aware that Swamiji had seen Lord Jesus in a vision during his *sādhana* days, but only recently we came to know that Jesus had appeared to him many times, and not only when he was sitting in meditation, but even with eyes wide open. The following dialogue took place during a morning *satsaṅg* in the year 2009. Swamiji had been telling the devotees about the theory put forward in the book *Jesus Lived in India*, which claims that Jesus did not really die on the cross, but actually went into a deep state of *samādhi*, and later travelled to India where he lived for many years. When a devotee asked Swamiji what he believes in this regard, he replied simply, “I love Jesus. His teachings are divine, as the teachings of the *Gītā*.” Then the discussion turned to Swamiji’s personal relationship with Lord Jesus:

SPV: Swamiji, when did you have the vision of Lord Jesus?

Swamiji: When I lived in the Jammu cave.

SPV: After completing the three year *japa anuṣṭhāna*, or before?

Swamiji: After.

SPV: “Before 1957, when you went to live in the *jhāḍī*? (Swamiji nods yes.) Was it a full vision or only the face?”

Swamiji: Full vision. He was wearing a long robe like yours. It was white.

SPV: Please tell us if your vision of Lord Jesus matches the historical description, as we see him in the paintings? (Swamiji nods yes). Was he young, with a dark beard, in his thirties? (Swamiji nods yes.) In the paintings he often seems to be sad. How did he appear when you saw him?

Swamiji: He was smiling.

SPV: Kindly describe your impression of him.

Swamiji: When you have a vision of God or a high saint, you feel overjoyed and the divine joy persists for hours or even days after the vision.

SPV: Did he speak to you? (Swamiji shakes his head no.) How long did the vision last?

Swamiji: During a vision you are not conscious of time.

SPV: Was it during meditation or when your eyes were open?

Swamiji: Both.

SPV: So you had visions of Lord Jesus more than once? (Swamiji nods yes.) How many times?

Swamiji: Many times.

SPV: As you have a special relationship with Baba Bhuman Shahji, it appears that you also have an intimate connection with Jesus. (Swamiji nods yes.) Can you tell us something about it? You never meditated on Jesus — on his name or on his form? (Swamiji shakes his head no.) So the fact that visions of Jesus and Babaji came to you many times, in such a profound way, what does it signify?

Swamiji: It signifies my inner past relationship with Jesus and with Babaji.

SPV: Maybe you were present at the time of Jesus?

Swamiji (smiling): Maybe you were also with me.

Along with visions of high saints and divine incarnations, it sometimes happened during contemplation that knowledge of future events or events happening at distant places would spontaneously arise in the young monk's mind in full detail. He also found that he was able to read other people's minds frequently and without any effort. At this stage, had he so wished, he could have easily developed these and other such supernatural powers. But Swamiji had his gaze firmly set on the highest attainment — complete union and absorption in the Lord — and thus could not be lured by the attraction of such temporal powers, which are regarded as a distraction and even a hindrance on the spiritual path. Thus he firmly shunned such temptations and continued with his *sādhanā* resolutely. With the grace of Baba Bhuman Shahji, he successfully passed these and many other trials and tribulations.

Amidst his various experiences he also frequently saw flashes of light of a dynamic character. Often, for a few seconds, a golden light would permeate his small cabin at Hari Parbat, even when he was sitting relaxed with his eyes open, and everything would dissolve into it. Swamiji says that such flashes are indicative of some coming spiritual realization. Another uplifting experience was a peculiar thrilling sound which he would hear issuing from his heart centre and which would instantaneously permeate his whole body like an electric current, rendering him completely oblivious of the external world. This would last for a period of about fifteen minutes, after which this sound energy would become centralized in the *ājñā chakra* and turn into a dazzling light. Swamiji tells us that this was a very blissful experience. At times during contemplation Swamiji would

see some words appearing as if written by lightening on his forehead.

Swamiji explained to us that the experiences mentioned above came to him as a result of practising *mantra japa* for long periods daily and regularly.

A Year on the Forested Island

In March of 1957, a few months after completing his 1000-night *japa anuṣṭhāna*, Swamiji felt drawn to go to the *jhāḍī*, the cluster of thickly forested islands surrounded by several streams of the holy Ganges in Haridwar, where he had stayed for about fifteen days during the initial period of his monastic life in 1953. Let us hear about it from Swamiji himself:

“In early 1957 I was in the Jammu cave. In the month of March, I felt a strong urge to go and stay in the *jhāḍī* near Sapta Sarovar, Haridwar. At that time, coincidentally a *brahmachārī* came to meet me in the Jammu cave. He wanted to stay in the cave for a few days. I readily agreed to it. I had no special acquaintance with that *brahmachārī*. He was not educated, nor a very devoted seeker of Truth. He wasn’t even strong physically. He kept a long beard. I did not even ask his name. After two or three days of his stay in the cave, I told him, ‘I feel a strong inner urge to go to the *jhāḍī*. You may stay here as long as you wish. If my stay in Haridwar is finalized, I will inform you by letter. Then you may come to me in the *jhāḍī*, or may continue to live in the cave here, as you like.’ There were enough rations in the cave for two or three months.

“Upon reaching Haridwar, I went to the same spot in the *jhāḍī* where this body had stayed for two weeks with Sant Gurmukh Singhji in April 1953 before going to Kashmir. There I came to know that Gurmukh Singhji had passed away. There was no other monk living at that spot. About one and a half kilometres downstream towards Haridwar, there stood two small newly built thatched huts. In one hut lived Swami Shankaranandaji, a recluse and highly revered saint of that area. He would go to Sapta Sarovar once a day to beg for his food. The other hut was uninhabited. I learnt that it was built by another recluse who suddenly had to go to Punjab for ten days.

“At that time I had about Rs.150. This money was contributed by different devotees in small amounts. My three-year vow of not touching money had already been completed in March, 1956. I bought some roasted cereal from the market for ten or twelve days and came to live in that uninhabited hut. The same evening I met a *gujjar* in the forest. I talked to him regarding making a new hut at a place half a kilometre away from those two huts. He agreed to make a hut for a sum of Rs. 50. I purchased the necessary bamboo and rope from the market. The wood and straw were cut by the *gujjar* from the forest. Within six or seven days, he erected a thatched hut measuring twelve by fourteen feet. As I was assisting the *gujjar*, I also learnt the art of making a hut. The same *gujjar* purchased some rations and cooking utensils from the market for me and I started living in the hut.”

During the week or so that it took to make his hut, Swamiji had a chance to meet revered Goswami Ganesh Dattaji, the founder of the famous Sapta Rishi Ashram.

Goswamiji quickly developed great affection for Swamiji. When he came to know of Swamiji's desire to live in the *jhāḍī*, he tried to dissuade him, saying, "Live here in the Sapta Rishi Ashram. When you feel more disinterestedness, go to the banks of the Ganges." He also told Swamiji about two frightening incidents, one in which an elephant trampled a monk's hut in the *jhāḍī* and ate all the food rations, and another incident in which an elephant broke a monk's hut during the night when he was sleeping inside the hut. The wooden log of the hut fell on the sleeping monk, making him scream loudly. Hearing the scream, the elephant ran over his body and the edge of one of its massive feet struck the monk's belly, crushing his intestines. There were two monks living close by in separate huts, who immediately took him across the Ganges to the Sapta Rishi Ashram. Then Goswamiji took the injured monk to Ramakrishna Mission hospital in Kankhal in his car. On the recommendation of Goswamiji, the hospital authorities admitted the injured monk, however with a murmur of protest, saying to him, "Why do you live in the forest when you do not have the capacity to live in such a dangerous place?" That monk had to remain in the hospital for six months. Later he was able to walk again, but he lived in pain for the rest of his life. Goswamiji personally introduced that monk to Swamiji and both of them did their best to dissuade Swamiji from going to live in the *jhāḍī*. But Swamiji could not be persuaded to give up his iron resolve. And why would he? Even the smallest of his actions was always divinely inspired. He had a rare intuitive ability, even at that early age, to recognize the Divine will guiding and protecting him at every step; he also had the courage and humility to follow this will no

matter where it took him. This is the reason why he had a deep and spontaneous conviction in whatever he did.

Swamiji told Goswamiji politely, “I have come here from Jammu with a resolve to live in the *jhāḍī*. There were many beautiful places for doing *sādhanā* there in Jammu also. Now that I have come here with this resolve, I will live at this place only.”

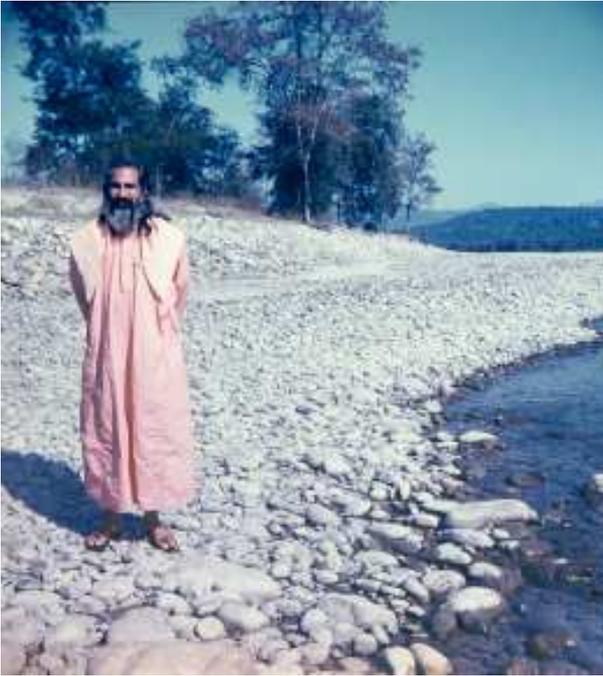
Well, who can change the way of such resolute souls? Seeing the young monk’s determination, Goswamiji then kindly proposed that he would arrange to provide cooked food for Swamiji daily from his Sapta Rishi Ashram. Swamiji politely refused that too, saying he would cook his food himself.

After moving to his new hut, Swamiji built two open shelters nearby, one for doing *sādhanā* and a second for cooking, as it was necessary to cook under a cover during the rainy season. Soon some devotees from Kacchi Ashram came to know that a young monk of unusual spiritual charm had come to live in the *jhāḍī*. It was then, in April 1957, that the spiritual head of Kacchi Ashram, revered Swami Valdasji Maharaj, and his mother had the *darshan* of Swamiji for the first time. Swami Valdasji Maharaj was himself a great saint, and he continued to have deep reverence for Swamiji till he left his body in 1995. The devotees from Kacchi Ashram very often used to bring rations, milk and other provisions for Swamiji in the *jhāḍī*.

Once settled in his new forest abode, Swamiji wrote a letter to the *brahmachārī* who was staying in his cave in Jammu telling him that he could come to the *jhāḍī* if he so wished, or he may continue to live in the Jammu cave. The *brahmachārī* came to Swamiji towards the end of April and



A 1985 photo of the forested island (*jhāḍī*).



Swamiji standing a short distance from his hut on the forested island where he lived for one year in 1957 and then again from 1960 to 1969.

together they cut wood from the forest and made another small hut to store food rations and a fence around the compound.

The *brahmachārī* stayed with Swamiji in the *jhāḍī* until October 1957. During the rainy season, from June to September, the Ganges is completely flooded and it is not possible to cross over to the forested island. Thus Swamiji and the *brahmachārī* remained largely cut off from outside contact during those months. As soon as the waters of the Ganges receded in October the *brahmachārī* left the place. Unfortunately very little is known about this mysterious *brahmachārī* who was so very fortunate to spend many months in direct and intimate contact with Swamiji during one of the most intensive and critical periods of his *sādhanā*. Swamiji was in silence for most of that period, and being completely consumed by his passionate search for the Divine, he never cared to find out the mundane details of the *brahmachārī*'s life. It shows the open and trusting nature of the young monk that he welcomed an almost perfect stranger to share his hut for many months. When asked if he ever saw the *brahmachārī* again, Swamiji replied, "Once after two years or so I saw him sitting in front of an *āshram* and serving water to those passing by on that road."

After the departure of the *brahmachārī*, Swamiji continued to live in the forest for another five or six months. He told us that many a time wild elephants would wander close to his hut. But God always protected him.

A dense forest surrounded the hut. In front, towards the east, the holy mother Ganges flowed southwards. This uninhabited forest was a natural habitat for the young *yogī*. The outside peace and serenity of that secluded dense forest and the inner peace and bliss of the young monk resonated

at the same level. Swamiji told us that this short sojourn of one year in the *jhāḍī* was passed in intense *sādhanā*.

Once during this period the Lord put His dear child through a hard trial. In the rainy season the wheat flour stored in a canister became infected with worms and became uneatable. As the Ganges was completely flooded during those months, there was no way for him to cross the river to replace the spoiled wheat flour or communicate his predicament to others. Undaunted, Swamiji would mix wild leaves called *bathuā* in the pulse and eat it. In that period of a month and a half he also ate wild wood-apples, popularly called bel fruits, by cooking them in a fire. To make matters worse, he also became sick with dysentery due to unclean drinking water and had no access to medical treatment. Let us hear about this difficult period in Swamiji's own words:

“For some days I had to eat wild leaves and wild bel fruits. But not even for a single day did I have to go hungry. In the first year, because of the rain, all the food-stuff became infected by worms and for a month and a half I had to eat the wild leaves and fruits, but never afterwards. In the same year, I fell sick with dysentery. I should have boiled the Ganga water during the rainy season, but I had no experience of living in the jungle and I drank the water after the mud had settled down. So, I got dysentery and worms in my stomach and the body lost eight to ten kilos of weight. Because of the rainy season the approach to Sapta Sarovar was completely cut off. After a few months, when the waters of the Ganges receded and the approach was opened, I was admitted into the Ramakrishna Mission Hospital and had to remain hospitalized there for a few days and was cured. Despite such difficulties, I enjoyed my stay in the *jhāḍī*. Years

later, when I again returned to stay in the *jhāḍī*, devotees got a hand pump installed near my hut for fresh water.”

During this one year stay in the *jhāḍī*, Swamiji was doubly blessed because his *sannyāsa dīkṣhā* Guru, revered Swami Krishna Dassji Maharaj of Srinagar, Kashmir, also decided to spend a few months with Swamiji at that spot starting around November 1957. When Maharajji came to stay at the *jhāḍī*, Swamiji specially made a separate hut for him. He took full care of Maharaj Krishna Dassji and served him in every way. Both the saints took only one meal in the afternoon, which Swamiji cooked himself. Several *gujjars* stayed on an adjoining island with their cattle. Some people used to come to them to purchase milk, and Swamiji would do the same. We have heard from Swamiji that Swami Krishna Dassji had always been a great lover of disciplined *sādhanā* and while staying in the *jhāḍī* he used to get up for *sādhanā* at midnight. Thus these two God-inspired sages spent a month together in sweet divine communion in the quietude of that forested island. Unfortunately Swami Krishna Dassji had to depart after one month because the head of the Chinar Ashram in Srinagar fell seriously ill.

Even during this one year period of intensive *sādhanā* in the isolation of the dense jungle, Swamiji did not fail to keep in contact with his devotees in Jammu and Kashmir who had come to love and revere him as their very own. To this day, many devotees have preserved the letters they received from Swamiji in those early days as a most precious treasure. The following two letters have kindly been made available to us by Sardar Charanjit Singhji Sachadeva, a very close devotee of Swamiji from the old days, currently in his eighties. They give us a glimpse into the mindset of

the young monk during that period and the depth of his faith and surrender unto the Lord:

Sapta Sarovar, Haridwar
24.05.1957

Most Blessed *Ātmā*,
Adorations unto Thee!

Received your affectionate letter. Am very sorry that no letter could be written to you people at any earlier date, though I wished it from the core of my heart. True that the physical bodies are parted by distance of more than 500 miles, yet the communications of the heart do not depend upon distance at all. Very often I see you seated in my heart. Do you ever imagine that I would forget your selfless love towards me? It can never be!

This body has set up in a *jhāḍī* (jungle) situated amidst two streams of the Ganges. For four months of the rainy season the place remains cut off from all sides. At night, there is free movement of tigers, cheetahs and especially elephants. The Power that has created this body, must keep it fit in all respects if it has to play some part in His cosmic play of this world.

Rest all is OK. How is Sardarji now? Does he move around the house and attend the shop work, or is he too weak for it? Many times I think of him. May the Lord, the omnipresent Power, cure him soon.

Sat Sri Akal to all of you.

Yours as ever,
Chandra Swami

Sapta Sarovar, Haridwar
August 1957

Blessed Divine *Ātmā*,

The way to this place has been blocked up for the last fifteen to twenty days. So your letter of 9th July reached late. The money order of Rs. 40/- was realized by Shri Manoharlal,¹² but why did you take up the pains to do that? Your selfless love is quite enough. Where there is spiritual love, money has got no significance; it is the will and the heart that counts.

It is pleasant to learn that you are making yourself docile to the Divine Reality. Humility & simplicity are the doors which open into Divine Illumination. The seeker of Truth must be prepared ‘to die to self’ and so make room, as it were, for God. Keep on with the practice of the divine name. You must devote at least one hour daily to *nām simran (japa)* in addition to your programme of *pāth*.¹³

What follows is a sweet saying of Ansari of Herat, the famous Sufi mystic: “Would you become a pilgrim on the road of love? The first condition is that you make yourself as humble as dust and ashes.”

The way to this place will reopen round about the middle of September. So you should bring Mataji here in the end of September.

Convey my *Sat Sri Akal* to all.

Ever Thy Own Self
as Chandra Swami

¹² Paṇḍit Manoharlalji Bahuguna was the manager of Sapta Rishi Ashram. He had deep love for Swamiji and would offer his loving services in many ways.

¹³ Recital of verses from the Shri Guru Granth Sahib.

With regards to worldly affairs, Swamiji was always very meticulous and law abiding. So, even during this temporary stay of one year in the forest, he painstakingly obtained from the forest department a lease of forest land for his hut. In this regard he once wrote:

“I had made the hut there without any official permission. I didn’t even know that it was illegal to make a hut in the forest without official permission. One month after making the hut, a forester came there and told me to remove that hut. I said, ‘Saint Gurmuk Singhji had also been living here.’ He retorted, ‘The government was also after him to remove his hut. However, he had been living there for so many years and in those days there was no forest conservation law. Therefore it was difficult to remove his hut.’

“So, I submitted an application to lease the land for my hut. In this connection I myself met the District Forest Officer in Dehradun. He assured me that he would grant the lease and also gave me a slip of paper for the local forester saying that he should not harass me. I wanted to take the land for twelve years. But the forester misguided me and made me apply for only a three year lease. He himself came to me in the hut and got the application form filled and signed by me. Then I was granted a lease of land for three years.

“In early 1958 Sh. R.D. Lakraji, who served me a lot in Jammu, came to me in the *jhāḍī* and insisted very much that I should attend the marriage of his daughter Padmaji. So, I went from the *jhāḍī* to Jammu in April 1958 and attended her marriage. From Jammu I went to Srinagar to spend my summer there once again.”

Enlightenment: Experience of the *Ātmā*

In Srinagar Swamiji stayed as usual in his wooden cabin on Hari Parbat Hill and continued with his spiritual *sādhana* with the same profound zeal and commitment. Absorbing and integrating within the impact of his innumerable experiences and visions, he remained ever alert, humble and receptive to the Divine. Gradually all the different planes with which he had been coming into contact for the last several years were transcended and the visions also stopped. Now they were replaced by an ever expanding joy which filled his being more and more, and his consciousness soared to higher and higher peaks.

Finally he had the direct experience of the immutable, eternal *Ātmā*, the absolute Bliss, absolute Existence, absolute Consciousness (*Sat-Chit-Ānanda*) as his essential Nature. During that experience, the outer and inner worlds were completely obliterated. All pairs of opposites like pleasure and pain, bondage and freedom, etc. lost their power over him. Simple Awareness — silent, attributeless and immutable — was directly experienced as the core of his being.

This rare, very high experience was the experience of the *Nirguṇa* (attributeless) aspect of the Divine, or *nirvikalpa samādhi*. As per Swamiji's terminology, the first direct experience of the *Ātmā* may also be called Enlightenment. Swamiji explains the necessity of transcending even very high spiritual planes in order to reach this experience:

“Pure spiritual experience cannot be achieved except through non-polar and contentless spiritual concentration through the contraction of the polar triangle of experience, that is, the triangle of the knower, the knowing and the

known, into the ‘point’ that ultimately dissolves in the boundless ether of Consciousness. This state is the highest possible spiritual experience that can be achieved through contemplation by self-effort.”

This momentous experience came to Swamiji in the early morning while sitting in meditation under the mulberry tree near his wooden cabin. He was then only twenty-eight years old. We have to remember that for the past many years Swamiji’s whole life had been filled with strong dispassion, intense longing for God-Realization and unbroken *sādhana*. Every moment of his life, whether awake or asleep, was an earnest wait for the Beloved. As Swamiji himself often says, it is only when the mind is completely passive but fully alert, pure and stable and in a state of total surrender and receptivity, that the miracle of Enlightenment happens. Thus did he become a rare ‘chosen one’ of the Divine.

About this particular stage of spiritual felicity Swamiji writes with great clarity and beauty in *The Practical Approach to Divinity*; but out of humility he writes in the third person:

“When consciousness sufficiently deepens, the passing visions and flashes cease and one begins to feel an inner spiritual ecstasy, which goes on increasing progressively. This inner ecstasy pulls you within irresistibly. All the temptations and lures of the world lose their power to charm the *sādhaka* when he has attained this stage, and he feels himself drawn again and again to solitary places to sit alone and enjoy this inner delight.

“Here the *sādhana* takes a new turn and becomes more and more spontaneous. The sense of personal effort begins to fade away, but the pace of *sādhana* accelerates vigorously.



Swamiji in Srinagar in 1958.

“This spiritual ecstasy is merged into ineffable, deep peace as the aspirant advances on his path. The outer and inner worlds are completely obliterated and consciousness is plunged into its static, passive repose. Here bondage and freedom, pain and pleasure, with all the other pairs of opposites, cease to exist. *Tamoguna*, sleep and laziness being absolutely absent, simple Awareness — silent, attributeless and immutable — alone abides. This is, according to the new *vedāntins*, the state of merger with *Brahman*. To this very state, the Buddhists give the name *Nirvāṇa*, the

extinction of the world of name and form. *Nirvāṇa*, *shūnya* or void are the terms which denote, according to orthodox Buddhism, not “nothingness” — as is wrongly conceived by some people — but the pure “Is-ness” bereft of the world of name and form. This direct experience of the immutable, pure and relationless *Ātmā* gives one perfect release from the mutations of the *guṇas*. On coming down a little from this experience, when the mind emerges again, the world seems to be a mere shadow with no substance to it — an unreal, vain and useless play of *māyā* composed of the three *guṇas*.”

“Let one more thing be pointed out here. To call this world *mithyā* or unreal on the grounds of logic or intellectualism, or in adherence to some system of philosophy, is one thing and to feel and experience the world as such first-hand is quite another. The lasting experience of the unreality of the world of name and form comes to those alone who are blessed with the direct Realization of the pure, passive, inactive and silent Self, i.e. the *Nirguṇa* aspect of the Divine. This experience is rare. Anyone may, on the other hand, conceive or declare the world to be unreal by establishing intellectually the trivial nature of the world or by means of logic.”

Here we would like to clarify that this first experience of the Self or *Ātmā* was like a flash, a glimpse. A glimpse is not lasting; it comes and it goes. Nevertheless, it completely revolutionized and transformed Swamiji’s outlook.

In his words, “The experience of the Self has a very great impact on your personality. It is like this: you are eating bitter things for many years, taking them to be sweet, but once you happen to eat sugar. For a second it gives you an

experience of the difference between a bitter taste and a sweet taste.”

After this experience Swamiji perceived directly and first-hand the illusory nature of the world. Yet he also intuitively perceived that this was not the final goal. As he himself wrote several years later, “The experience of the silent Self and its corresponding view of the world as a shallow, unreal, useless and purposeless appearance, though a very high experience in the spiritual field, is, let it be known, not the ultimate or perfect spiritual experience.”

Thus he plodded on. Though not yet permanently established in this experience, the taste of it lingered on, colouring all his actions and perceptions. It also infused him with the deep aspiration to have the experience again and again. As he persevered with his *sādhanā*, this glimpse or experience did start happening more and more frequently, and along with it, the process of it becoming *dṛidha bhūmi* (deep-rooted), meaning that the impact of this spiritual experience slowly informed and transformed all the parts of his personality, divinizing his body, senses, mind, subconscious, *prāṇa* and intellect.

Thus, from here on, Swamiji’s sweet play of hide and seek with the Beloved took a new turn, though it continued for many years until his complete merger and union with Him in His wholeness. He continued his *sādhanā* with the same incredible dedication, but now the sense of personal effort gradually started fading away as he slowly and steadily became more and more grounded in the unbroken awareness of his true Being, the immutable *Ātmā*.

In the autumn of 1958, before leaving Srinagar, Swamiji felt inspired to celebrate *Navaratri*¹⁴ by observing a nine-day *japa anuṣṭhana* during which he repeated the *bij mantra* of the Divine Mother “*Om aing hrīng klīn chamundāye vichche*” for many hours throughout the day. As we have seen, Hari Parbat is considered to be the abode of the Divine Mother Herself, and it was, after all, in Her very lap that Swamiji was blessed with the first momentous experience of the *Ātmā*.

After completing the *anuṣṭhana* Swamiji returned to Jammu for the winter as per his earlier routine. But this year he found that a wandering monk was staying in the cave near the Tawi River where he used to stay. Unperturbed, the young monk simply set up a tent on the other side of the river and continued with his daily *sādhanā* as before.

Swamiji recalls the incident as follows, “Once when I came back from Srinagar to live in the cave, a wandering monk was living in that cave. So I lived in a small tent across the Tawi River in which you could only sleep and sit. Then Sardar Hari Singhji’s elder son persuaded me to come and stay in their empty garden house in Talab Tillo, a very secluded place a few kilometres from Jammu. So, I went and stayed there that winter.”

Swamiji spent three months living in that garden house in Talab Tillo, some five kilometres from the cave. He observed complete silence for these three months, but even so devotees used to come to him for his *darshan*. During this period he was inspired to undertake an *anuṣṭhāna* of twelve

¹⁴ *Navaratri* is a popular nine-day Hindu festival dedicated to the worship of Devi.

lakh (1,200,000) repetitions of the sacred *gayatri mantra*.¹⁵ When he completed the *anuṣṭhāna*, a big *bandārā* and *havan* was organized by devotees in which hundreds of people participated.

Incidentally, Sardar Charanjit Singhji Sachdeva told us about an incident from that time. Once, when he and several other devotees went to visit Swamiji in the garden house in Talab Tillo, Swamiji invited them to take lunch with him. Swamiji himself prepared *chapatis* by turning a plate upside down and using an empty glass as a rolling pin. He laughingly told them, “You cannot become a monk unless you know how to cook your own food.” After enjoying the meal personally prepared by their beloved Master, Charanjit Singhji and Padmaji washed the vessels.

In 1959, at the behest of a strong inner urge, Swamiji again went to Haridwar for about a year. This time he lived in a hut in a secluded area near Spur No. Eleven¹⁶ on the banks of the Ganges. That place belonged to the Irrigation Department and no *sādhu* was allowed to make a hut there. But the subdivisional officer of that department had studied with Swamiji in Dehradun, so he allowed him to make the hut. In 1960 Swamiji once again returned to J&K.

¹⁵ The *gayatri mantra*, often called the “mother of the *Vedas*,” is one of the oldest and most sacred of the *Vedic mantras*.

¹⁶ Spur No. Eleven is one of the many huge concrete bulwarks built along the Ganges in Haridwar to protect its banks from floods and erosion.



Swamiji in Talab Tillo, Jammu, where he lived in the vacant garden house of Sardar Hari Singhji for several months in 1958-59.

Chapter Four

Beloved of the People

Swamiji stayed in the state of Jammu & Kashmir for almost eight years between 1953 and 1961. During this period, though he followed his monastic life strictly, mostly in silence and seclusion, he continued to have a sweet and intimate relationship with his devotees, who loved and venerated him deeply. And this link with the outside world, amidst his solitude, does not seem accidental. The Lord was making him do his *sāadhanā* predominantly in seclusion, as well as letting him test his steadfastness in his *sāadhanā* in the midst of worldly situations. It also enabled him to accept the Divine in His totality as a supreme transcendental Truth that is immanent in all His manifestation. During this period, Swamiji influenced a large number of people of all walks of life. Intellectuals, professors, saints, doctors, social workers, students, children, the elderly, the rich and the poor — all loved this magnetic monk and loved to avail themselves of his company. Many devotees used to invite him for meals at their homes. Sometimes, on their request, he would stay at their houses for a couple of days or so, like one of their family members. There he would play with their children freely. But all throughout he never let his *sāadhanā*

be adversely affected by such visits to his householder devotees. He always followed his schedule of *sādhanā* strictly. Even to this day the devotees of Jammu & Kashmir have many fond and moving memories to tell of their sweet relationship with Swamiji. Many can't talk of him without tears of love filling their eyes. Repeatedly they recollect his amazing *sādhanā*, his spiritual charm, his utter humility, his playful and spiritual association with them and his selfless love for them.

As mentioned, as a mark of their deep love for Swamiji, the devotees of Jammu & Kashmir have now renovated the cave near the Tawi River where Swamiji lived for many years and built a big ashram around it, by the name Shri Chandra Gufa Sadhana Mandir. This ashram has become a meeting place for all the devotees of J&K and Swamiji himself stays there for several months each year. Because of his close connection with Jammu and the fact that this was the place where he first started his intensive *sādhanā*, some of the old devotees tell us jokingly that Jammu is the *māyakā*¹ (maternal home) of Swamiji.

During Swamiji's *sādhanā* days in Jammu and Kashmir a number of devotees insistently took *mantra* initiation from him and accepted him as their Guru. It appears that by accepting a few devotees as his intimate disciples, as willed by the Divine, there had arisen in Swamiji the Guru *bhāva* for the good of the world. But all throughout, he continued to remain humble and childlike.

Now we will briefly relive the memories of those golden days in the fifties through the memoirs given to us by sev-

¹ In *māyakā* the children fully enjoy themselves, eating and merry making with no worries, and hence this popular phrase in India.

eral of Swamiji's old devotees. We eagerly gathered these memoirs because it gives us an authentic first-hand account of Swamiji's life through the eyes of those who were actually with him in those days and are still connected with Swamiji to this day.

Cherished Memories

– by Padma Sibal (23/09/2009)

Mata Padma Sibal, daughter of late Shri R.D. Lakraji of Jammu, is the first initiated disciple of Swamiji. The whole family served Swamiji immensely during his stay in the Jammu cave from 1953 to 1961. Mrs. Sibal and her husband Lt. Col (retired) Prem Sibal now lead a retired life in Rajpur, Dehradun, though they also have a house in Delhi. The whole family is deeply devoted to Swamiji. Often the family invites Swamiji and all the devotees to their residence in Dehradun for lunch which they fondly serve to all with great devotion. On these occasions all the devotees enjoy the divine satsaṅg of Swamiji and kīrtan and bhajans at her home.

My parents belonged to Jammu (J&K) and were very spiritual. They were always on the lookout for great saints. In the year 1953 someone told them that a young saint had come to Jammu and was residing in the Veda Mandir. The very next day my parents went to meet Swamiji and I too accompanied them.

Swamiji was sitting on a jute mat wearing a faded *dhoti* with a few books lying in front of him. He was observing silence and with a hand gesture he told us to be seated.

Swamiji's face was calm, serene and glowing with very deep, impressive eyes. After meeting him once, the urge

arose to meet him frequently, and we have been doing so ever since.

After a few months Swamiji moved from Veda Mandir to a very small cave which was in a dilapidated condition on the bank of the Tawi River.

The surroundings of the Tawi River were spellbinding — full of tranquility and serenity; they would automatically make one’s heart peaceful.

Swamiji’s graciousness unto our family filled our hearts with love and peace. The way to the cave was all pebbles and huge boulders; it was impossible for my parents to reach there. Therefore he was kind enough to visit our house, which was situated on Residency Road and was three to four miles from his cave habitat, twice a week.

By walking barefoot on the rough pebbles Swamiji’s feet had become very hard with blisters all over. On my mother’s repeated request, Swamiji agreed to wear wooden sandals. My mother would sit by his side and serve him lunch like a mother to her son. On the rest of the days my mother told me to prepare lunch for Swamiji, pack it and our helper used to deliver it to his cave. This routine continued for many years until Swamiji moved to Haridwar.

I requested Swamiji to give me *Gurumantra dīkṣhā*, but Swamiji pointblank refused to do so. The reason which he wrote on a piece of paper was: “Padma is still to get married. God alone knows what sort of life partner she will get and later she may not be able to follow it up.”

However, my mother’s humble request on this issue was not rejected and finally respected Swamiji kindly agreed to initiate me. My joy knew no bounds. I am the luckiest person on earth to be initiated by such a great Guru as his first disciple.

Swamiji by nature is very peace loving. Whenever he felt that lots and lots of people and devotees had starting pouring in, he would look for another isolated place. After several years, that is in 1957, Swamiji went to Haridwar where he lived for one year in a *jhāḍī* (forest) across the Ganges which no one could easily reach; especially during the monsoon when it would be completely cut off from the rest of the world. I remember that someone used to cross the Ganges to deliver milk, but during the monsoon no one could go for months together. At that time Swamiji would live on *chanā* (grams). Such difficult *tapasya* Swamiji has done in his younger days!

In 1958 my parents, who really adored Swamiji — my father was his silent admirer and loved him within the core of his heart — went to Haridwar to invite him to my wedding which was on the 21st of April, 1958. Swamiji was extremely kind to come all the way to Jammu from the tranquility of his forest abode to attend my wedding. Such is the simplicity and love of my Gurudeva. He blessed us and presented me with Shri Guru Granth Sahib, which I still possess.

Right from the beginning Swamiji observed silence; for six months he would observe *kāshth mouna* (during which he would not speak, write or even meet anyone) and for six months he would give an informal discourse for one hour in the evening from 5 to 6 p.m. Now, for the last twenty-five years he has remained totally silent.

Our Swamiji doesn't believe in displaying miracles, but his hidden grace is always there. So many great things have happened in our lives which we cannot express in words. We will remain grateful to him forever for his graciousness.

Swamiji's magnanimity is supreme. Rich and poor are treated equally in Sadhana Kendra Ashram, situated on the bank of the Yamuna River. Swamiji is extremely humble, liberal, supportive, uncontroversial and generous. Lucky and blessed are those whose Gurudeva is Swamiji.

A Great Yogī

– by M.N. Kamotra, Jammu (2009)

Swamiji has been closely associated with the Kamotra family for many years. Once, pointing to Shri M.N. Kamotrajī, a great and humble devotee of Swamiji who is the son of Sardar Niranjan Dassji Kamotra, he wrote:

“His grandfather, Sardar Bhoop Singhji, was a retired tehsildar² and was in a very high spiritual state. I read in one book that he was a realized saint. He had a lot of land, but the government declared it as surplus under the land laws and took it. His father (Niranjan Dassji) remained a true seeker of Truth throughout. He did not do anything else in his life except seek God. He was coming to me since I stayed in Veda Mandir. Later, his whole family took initiation from me.”

Right from his childhood, my father, S. Niranjan Dassji preferred the company of *sādhus* and engaged himself in God remembrance. He started a collection of spiritual books of great realized saints during his university career. He did his graduation (B.Com) from Lahore University and thereafter mainly remained engaged in the quest for the Divine. In due course he built a huge library of his own with rare

² Land revenue officer.

books on religion and spirituality and studied them thoroughly. He often sat before a big mirror and meditated after doing *prāṇāyāma* and other *yogic kriyās*. During the night, he was often found in a sitting posture chanting “Om Hum, So Hum,” meaning “I am He and He is me.”

As he was a lover of saints, he found Chandra Swamiji in Veda Mandir and remained in contact with him for as long as Swamiji lived in Jammu. Now and then he provided rare spiritual books to Swamiji and also shared his experiences with him. Swamiji also reciprocated his visits and often came to our small modest house and looked for rare spiritual books. My father repeatedly said to my mother that even at such a young age Swamiji had advanced to a very high state and was a great *yogī*. When my father received a copy of *The Practical Approach to Divinity* he commented, “The whole spiritual philosophy has been contained in this wonderful small book.”

Later I also received initiation from Swamiji. Thus the Kamotra family came into contact with Swamiji right from 1952-53 and has been under his protective hand since then. Long live Shri Chandra Swamiji Maharaj!

Adorable Master

– by Sardar Charanjit Singh Sachdeva, Jammu (2007)

Sardar Charanjit Singhji is another of the earliest and very close devotees of Swamiji who was a frequent visitor to him during his early days of sādhanā in the Jammu cave. He is the eldest son of the late Mata Ram Pyariji, who not only revered Swamiji, but loved and cared for him as her own son. On his part, Swamiji too loved Mataji and the whole

family very much. Her other two sons, Sardar Ranjit Singhji and Sardar Pavitar Singhji, and daughter, Mata Harbans Kaur are all ardent devotees of Swamiji.

I first met His Holiness Shri Chandra Swamiji in 1954, probably in the month of April, when I was a third-year degree course student. On the very first sight of him, I was highly impressed by his personality and I could clearly perceive the splendour on his face. I received his blessings, and his deep spirituality made me realize that I had been in search of a Guru like him. I started visiting him on and off. At that time he was staying in a cave on the bank of the Tawi River. He used to treat me like a close and affectionate friend and never allowed me to leave without offering me something or the other. Generally he himself used to prepare tea, *halvā* or a meal, and would share the same with me. Later, he stayed at Hari Parbat, Srinagar, where I also visited him.

I, along with my respected mother, Mata Ram Pyaraji, and Mamiji (aunt) visited his place in the *jhāḍī* in Haridwar on the bank of the holy Ganga for the first time in 1958 and thereafter several other times before he moved to Sevak Niwas Ashram. His hospitality, affection and care for the *sevak* and guest are adorable, and comparable to that of a mother for her children. He used to accompany us all the way from the *jhāḍī* to Saptā Sarovar, Haridwar and return only after seeing us off.

I got married in October 1963. Swamiji graciously accepted our request and especially came all the way to Jammu to bless the newlyweds and stayed at our house. After marriage, I chose to visit him rather than to go somewhere else on a ‘honeymoon’ trip. So, I and my wife Hardarshan went to visit Swamiji in his hut in the *jhāḍī*, Haridwar, in May 1964 and on the way we had the opportunity to cross the streams

of the holy Ganges too. We reached his hut at 1:30 p.m. and at that time he was keeping silence. He informed us through a written note that he would end his silence by 2 p.m. and asked Hardarshan to cook lunch in the meantime. At 2, he came to the adjoining *kutīr* (hut) and all of us had our lunch. After finishing our lunch, he asked us to lie down on a mat, as we were tired from the journey. He himself sat next to us on the mat. We must have slept for about one and a half hours or so and on getting up, to my disbelief, I discovered him fanning us. I think he had been doing so the whole time we slept. In my opinion, it's hard to find such an example of modesty and humility in such a great man, especially in the present day world. He treated us like a mother, a friend and a Guru and showered his holy blessings on us. At the time of leaving, we were both very much content with the trip and his blessings.

After a few years of marriage, the Almighty blessed us with a son and I informed Swamiji about the same. He congratulated me and suggested we name him Gurmeet Singh. We went to Delhi and performed an *Akhand Pāth* of Guru Granth Sahibji at Gurudwārā Banglā Sāhibji. On the eve of its *bhog* (concluding ceremony) Swamiji came down to Delhi (or maybe he had already come to Delhi) and attended the *bhog* of the *Akhand Pāth*. Call it Swamiji's foresight that the first letter in the naming ceremony came out to be 'G' and hence the name previously thought of by Swamiji, Gurmeet Singh, was bestowed upon my first son.

In those days there was another great religious lady in Jammu, Mata Jivanji, who used to teach children. She was all alone in the world, but held very high religious values and had unshakable faith in the Almighty. She was an ardent devotee of Swamiji too. When Swamiji came to know

that she had passed away, he especially came to Jammu from Haridwar to attend her funeral procession.

About Mata Jivan, Swamiji himself once told us, “Ma Jivan was all alone in the world and loved me very much like her own son. She was in charge of a *Gurudwārā* in Jammu and gave beautiful discourses on Guru Granth Sahib there. She once told me, ‘I am all alone. Who will perform my last rites upon my death?’ I said, ‘I will do it.’ When she passed away I was in the *jhāḍī*. When I came to know of her death, I at once started for Jammu. When I arrived, thousands of people were carrying her body through the market to the cremation ground. I joined them and performed her last rites as per my promise.”

In the Hands of the Divine

– by Mohan Lal Gupta, Jammu

The following memoir is an excerpt from a booklet published by Shri Mohan Lalji Gupta of Jammu, a great devotee of the Master who has had the honour of being the chief instrument of renovating the cave where Swamiji lived near the Tawi River into the present magnificent Shri Chandra Gufa Sadhana Mandir Ashram. Mohan Lalji has practically dedicated his whole life to the service of Swamiji and his holy place of tapasyā, and has been the head of the managing body of Shri Chandra Gufa Sadhana Mandir Trust since its inception.

Swamiji had realized God at a very young age. His divine face always exuded love and bliss. By and by a large number of devotees started coming to the cave. On every *sankrānti* (first day of the Hindu calendar) there used to be



Shri Mohan Lal Gupta near the cave in 1995, before renovation.

a *bhandārā* in which the family members of all the devotees of Jammu used to participate. Of them, the more frequent visitors were Mata Ram Pyari Sachdeva, Sardar Charanjit Singhji, Sardar Ram Singhji, Sardar Hari Singhji, Shri R.K. Lakraji, Professor Chandra Mohan, Professor Inderjeet Singhji, Shri Munshi Ramji, Police Inspector Fakir Chand Gupta, Principal Lala Ishvar Dass Mengiji and his son, Dr. O.P. Mengiji, Shri Kasturi Lalji Gupta, Dr. Mela Ram Chabraji and Sardar Amar Singhji.

In those days there were a lot of scorpions around the cave. Snakes would also move around quite often. For Swamiji it was normal, but the devotees used to get scared. Mata Ram Pyariji, who served Swamiji very much, related one such incident as follows:

“Once we were five to seven ladies and we were doing *sankīrtan* in the cave in front of Swamiji. Suddenly a very thick black snake, about four or five feet long, entered the cave and sat near its entrance. All of us ladies nearly died of fear to see that huge snake, what to say of singing *kīrtan*! Swamiji opened his eyes and saw the snake, but asked us by hand gesture to continue singing *sankīrtan*. We did start *sankīrtan* again, but our voices choked in our throats. This went on for some time. Then Swamiji got up from his seat and took a broom in his hand and, pointing that broom towards the snake, told him, ‘Now you go.’ No sooner had Swamiji said so, than the snake quietly slid out of the cave and disappeared into the bushes nearby.”

After this incident, Mata Ram Pyari was very worried about Swamiji’s safety because he used to sleep on the floor of the cave. So, she immediately got a wooden cot made for Swamiji and brought it to the cave. She humbly insisted that Swamiji should sleep only on the cot and not on the

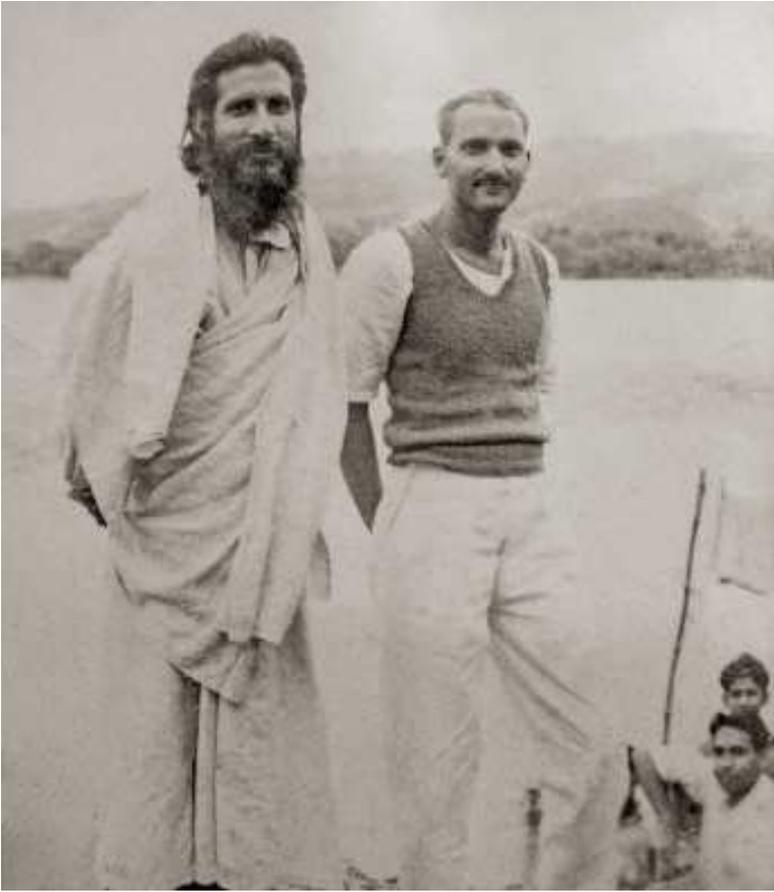
floor. Even now sometimes a big black snake is seen moving about the *āshram*, but it has not harmed anyone.

Late Sardar Ram Singhji told us of another incident; whenever he would relate this incident to anyone he would start weeping. He used to bring milk and bakery items when he visited Swamiji once a week. Once when he brought milk for Swamiji, Swamiji drank half of it and gave the remaining half to him to drink. After drinking the milk, Ram Singhji came to know that Swamiji had not eaten anything for the last three days and had only then taken milk. Ram Singhji was filled with remorse as to why he drank half the milk intended for Swamiji. Very sad, he did not go back home until 10 o'clock at night. Swamiji then consoled him and told him, "It is very late. You should go back now." Since it was dark, Swamiji himself accompanied him up to the road about half a kilometre away and then returned to the cave. It seems that for some reason Swamiji had to go without food for a few days, but as is his wont, he never asked for anything from anyone.

Early Days in Jammu

– Dr. Om Prakash Mengi, Jammu

Late Dr. Om Prakash Mengiji was another close Jammu devotee. He was the son of Lala Ishwar Dassji Mengiji, the secretary of Veda Mandir where Swamiji lived for a few months in 1953. Throughout the years Dr. Mengiji and five generations of his family have remained in close contact with Swamiji. Regrettably we were unable to obtain a memoir from him before his passing away in 2009 at the advanced age of 92. However, during his frequent visits to the āshram,



Swamiji with Dr. O.P. Mengi on the bank of the Tawi River near the cave in the early 1950's.

Swamiji would often write a few words about Doctorji's long association with him, some of which are included below:

“Doctorji is one of my first devotees from Jammu — since 1953/54. He and his family have been associated with me for more than fifty years. The first time this body came to Jammu, only Paṇḍit Agya Ram and Sardar Hari Singh knew me. They had met me in Srinagar. Paṇḍit Agya Ramji sent a man with me, who showed me many secluded places in Jammu where I could stay. I preferred the Veda Mandir. It was a temple which had no *murti* in it. Paṇḍit Agya Ramji made arrangements for my daily lunch through a *paṇḍitji* who was in charge of that temple. It was a secluded place. Doctorji's father used to come to me on every Sunday and sit for one and a half hours in Veda Mandir and read the *Gītā Rahasya*, a well-known commentary on the *Gītā* by Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

“I stayed in that temple for around two months. Then a Thakurji showed me the cave at the bank of the Tawi River. It was a very secluded place – no path coming to that cave. One had to walk on the bank of the river for about half a kilometre among the big boulders to reach that place. Now that cave has been converted by the devotees of Jammu into a temple, in which the *murtis* of Baba Shrichandraji and Baba Bhuman Shahji have been installed, and a small *āshram* has been constructed there.

“Dr. Mengiji was a pioneer in the field of dentistry, but he spent most of his time engaged in social service while his father took care of his children. Therefore his father used to tell me, “I am a *grihasthī* (householder) and Om Prakash is a *vānprasthī* (renunciate social worker).”

Sporting with the Master

– by Ram Krishna Dulloo, Jammu (2009)

Shri Ramkrishna Dullooji is amongst the earliest devotees from the Kashmiri paṇḍit community who served Swamiji during his sojourn at Hari Parbat. Though he was just a youth at that time, he used to carry milk up the hill in a flask for Swamiji to drink in the evenings, as Swamiji never used to eat dinner. His whole family up to his grandchildren are deeply devoted to Swamiji and visit him regularly.

Shri Swamiji came to Rainawari, which is 3 km away from Srinagar, in 1954. There was a temple by the name Vital Bhairava. Alongside it was a two storeyed inn. On its ground floor there were two or three rooms and on the first floor was a small hall where Swamiji lived. He used to remain absorbed in his *sādhanā*. By and by, devotees started visiting him. I was one of them. There was a big open courtyard in the inn where young boys used to play volleyball. Once, at the request of the boys, Swamiji also participated in the game. All were thrilled to have Swamiji in their midst. Swamiji took charge of the centre court of one team and never let the ball fall on the ground. The match became very thrilling because of him. All were very impressed by the powerful presence of Swamiji. His towering personality covered the full court!

Because of the devotees visiting the temple in the morning and evening, Swamiji's *sādhanā* got disturbed. So one day he expressed his wish to move to Hari Parbat. Paṇḍit Vasudeva Kaul showed him a spot on Hari Parbat which Swamiji liked very much. Swamiji started living there in a tent and the devotees of Rainawari made arrangements for his food etc.

One day Swamiji and a few of his devotees made a programme to have the *darshan* of the Amarnāth cave. Swamiji wanted to take me along as well, but my parents didn't allow me, as I was still young and was small and weak. However, they could not refuse Swamiji.

We were seven or eight persons in all, including a saint, a *sannyāsi* and Kumari Mohiniji. At the first halt, Pahelgam, the tourist officer didn't allow me to go ahead because I was too small, but again Swamiji prevailed upon him. After reaching Chandanvadi, Swamiji fed me with milk and *ghee* to give me strength and energy. That moment is one of the most precious moments of my life. May he always be gracious upon me like that.

At the third halt, Mohiniji lovingly fed us with *parānthas*, rice and vegetables. The next day we reached Panchatarni. With Swamiji's grace everything went so well. It felt as if we were floating in the air. By Swamiji's magic I used to always be first in the group. In the morning we had the *darshan* of the holy cave of Amarnāthji. Thus the *yātrā* finished with his grace.

On another day there was a programme to go to Nagin Lake, which is much deeper than Dal Lake. We took a racing boat from DAV Higher Secondary School. The lake water was fresh, sweet and pure. After taking rest there for some time, those of us who knew how to swim took the boat and went into the middle of the lake and started jumping into the lake from the boat. Then Swamiji, who was at that time just twenty-four years old, and other devotees turned the boat upside down and started swimming and sporting in the lake. Then again we turned it upright and took out all the water with the help of the oars. All along, Swamiji played

with us. Yes! We could freely behave in such an innocent and childlike manner only with Swamiji.

In those days Swamiji used to come to Hari Parbat every summer and live in a makeshift cabin. Once I was sitting with Swamiji at 8 a.m. in the morning when an American lady came there. She had been wandering around India in search of peace. She asked Swamiji if he had had the *darshan* (visions) of saints, sages, gods and incarnations. She was happily surprised to hear Swamiji say ‘yes’ to her query. That lady was disturbed because of some domestic problem and requested guidance from Swamiji. Swamiji asked her to stop wandering here and there and return to her home. He also advised her to do prayer and *sāadhanā* according to her own religion in a small room of her house, and said that it would make her peaceful. She was very much gratified to meet Swamiji.

Later, when Swamiji went to stay in the *jhāḍī* in Haridwar, with his grace I went to study in M.Sc. (Maths) at DAV College, Dehradun. At that time Professor L.N. Gupta was the head of the chemistry department. He was a very religious person. He knew Swamiji, as Swamiji had pursued his MSc in that college. Swamiji used to come to see Professor Gupta in Dehradun once a year. The professor told me that Swamiji’s physique was excellent and that there was an unusual glow on his face which attracted him to Swamiji. He also told me that once he and Swamiji were in the laboratory and he gave a heavy punch to Swamiji on his shoulder. It didn’t bother Swamiji at all. Instead he gave a beautiful smile.

Once I went from Dehradun to Haridwar with a wish to have Swamiji’s *darshan* in the *jhāḍī*. Taking his holy name

and crossing three streams of the Ganges, I reached his hut. There was another bigger stream of the Ganges in front of his hut. Across it there was a big flat space and a thick forest. I felt fulfilled to have his *darshan* there. With his permission, I took bath in the Ganges and then sat on a big stone. After some time, I noticed three or four young lion cubs playing in the flat space across the Ganges. For the fear of lions being nearby, I at once retreated to Swamiji's hut and, wonderstruck, starting musing to myself, "How is Swamiji absorbed in remembering God in such a dangerous place?" That was a teaching to me, besides being a unique experience.

My deep-felt *charan vandanā* (pranams) to revered Swamiji Mahārāj.

Childhood Memories

– by Surendar Kaul (12/04/09)

Shri Surendar Kaul is the son of late Shri T.N. Kaul, who was much devoted to Swamiji and served him, along with the others, during his stay at Hari Parbat. After a gap of many years, he came to have Swamiji's darshan at Sadhana Kendra Ashram and kindly wrote this memoir on our request.

I vividly recollect my childhood memories, when I was lucky enough to have Swamiji's esteemed *darshan* from the year 1954 onwards, and the impact he made on my mind at that time. The first instance which deeply influenced me at my tender age was the scene when he dived into Dal Lake from the boat, after doing a somersault in the air, then dashed

down the lake like an arrow, ripping apart the rippleless surface of Dal Lake. Swamiji was on a picnic trip to the Mughal Gardens arranged by my father, late Shri T.N. Kaul Ganhar, Shri Shyam Lal Peer, Shri Mohan Gash, Shri Lok Nath (harmonium player and singer). All of them were from Rainawari.

The other instance was when I saw his holiness driving a car on a boulevard in Srinagar. I was astonished to see that Swamiji Mahārāj also knows how to drive a car! The third instance was when he displayed excellent skill in playing volleyball at Vital Bhairav Mandir, Rainawari. This vivid memory I recently recounted in an article printed in *Alav* magazine: “As a young boy, I witnessed the volleyball game played at Vetal Bagh every day after office hours. One day, a graceful tall man in saintly attire named Chandra Swami joined the play. He was very alert and quick. He would dodge the ball at the net with his finger tips and with a flick of his wrist he would smash or place it at the spur of the moment, taking the opposite team by surprise. This Swami became dear to all the youth.”

The fourth instance was when my late father, Sh. T.N. Kaul Ganhar, narrated his experience while staying with Swamiji at Pahelgam in a tent for two nights. He experienced something phenomenal of the Divine, which he could not express in words.

I, on behalf of all the family members of my clan, bow before Mahārājji in great reverence and respect.

Unforgettable Night

– by D.N. Handu, Jammu (15/08/2009)

Shri Dwarka Nathji Handu is another one of the few Kashmiri paṇḍits who first came into contact with Swamiji at Hari Parbat and served him very much, personally carrying water up the steep hill for Swamiji's daily use. He is also one of the lakhs of unfortunate Kashmiri Hindus who have been uprooted from their native land within their own country due to terrorism. Presently in Jammu, in his 80's, he continues to have the same love and devotion for Swamiji and does the sevā of the book & photo shop and other miscellaneous activities at Shri Chandra Gufa Ashram, Jammu with great dedication and enthusiasm. Let us share in his sweet recollections of the Master:

In my association of fifty years with Pūjya Shri Chandra Swamiji, there are many instances, events, anecdotes and experiences that I wish to recount, but due to my old age, some have faded from my memory. Nevertheless, many I still remember vividly.

1. One such anecdote is this one. I am talking of the year 1958. The place is Srinagar. I used to go almost daily in the evening hours to Hari Parbat to listen to Swamiji's spiritual discourses which he would deliver to those who were present. These descriptions, dialogues, interactions would often run till nightfall, after which people would disperse and go back home.

Once it so happened that I stayed there for too long and eventually developed a kind of fear (psychosis) of the dark night, deserted lanes and strange howling of stray dogs in the area. I could not muster enough courage to go back home

to Rainawari, which was at a distance of about three kilometres from Hari Parbat. A strange sense of fear enveloped my mind and I decided not to venture out alone to go back home.

At this point, at 1 a.m. in the morning, pūjya Swamiji decided to do a *parikramā* of Hari Parbat and took me along. As we circumambulated the Hari Parbat hillock, Swamiji was all along chanting *shlokas* and I, as a true disciple, was trying to keep pace with him in the dead of the dark night. I was still overtaken by fear, but did not say anything and continued following Swamiji.

In the course of our *parikramā*, we went to a place called Pokhribal, where devotees would generally gather for night long devotional singing sessions. We also joined them for some time, and then resumed our *parikramā*. We now headed for Kathi Darvaza, which was a kind of a gate or exit in the boundary wall. Here my fear became palpable. I became very weak in the knees. But Swamiji just went ahead and moved past that spot and I blindly followed him. All along I could hear Swamiji reciting some hymns.

As we crossed Kathi Darvaza, lo and behold, suddenly all my fear was gone. At that very moment Swamiji turned to me and asked, “Has your fear gone now?” I was completely dumbstruck and I wondered how Swamiji could read my inner feelings, because I had not expressed my mortifying fear at all. I just bowed down with folded hands and we completed the *parikramā* at around four in the morning. I accompanied Swamiji to his meditation spot at Hari Parbat, after which I headed for my home all charged up, as it was daybreak. I enjoyed my walk back home with a beautiful sunrise lighting up the horizon, which I cannot forget to this day.

2. I often went to sit at Swamiji's feet at Hari Parbat, Srinagar. He loved me very much. Once a devotee told Swamiji about Harishur Cave, situated on a hill near village Khunmuh, some fifteen or sixteen kilometres away from Srinagar. A few of us decided to go to the cave and Swamiji was also eager to go with us. Four of us accompanied Swamiji. We started for Khunmuh Village on bicycles and it was evening by the time we reached the village. The villagers welcomed us and on the request of a householder, we spent the night at his house.

In the morning we left Khunmuh for the cave at 5 a.m. Our kind host had arranged a guide to accompany us to the cave. It was a tough, hilly terrain. The locals called it "*yam heir*" (death stairs). At first I was very scared to climb it, but Swamiji encouraged me. At last we were at the entrance of the cave and all our tiredness vanished. We became fresh and joyous.

The entrance to the cave was very narrow, but the cave itself was quite spacious. There was a natural *Shiva-lingam* formed of ice and the water drops from the roof of the cave were falling directly on it. The atmosphere of the cave was charged with spirituality. There Swamiji sat quietly in meditation with his eyes closed for half an hour. Thus spending some time in the cave, we returned to Chander Chinar Ashram by bicycle.

3. During his stay in Srinagar, sometimes devotees used to go boating with Swamiji on Dal Lake. Often they would visit the temple on Shankaracharya Hill and enjoy the beautiful breathtaking landscape of the Kashmir valley. One day we all felt very tired and sat down on the chairs kept on the lawn of the government bungalow. Puya Swamiji liked the



Rare photos of the Master in a sporting mood on the way to Harishur Cave (1957-58). Top photo from left to right: Chuni Lal, Gash Lal, Pushkar Nath, Swamiji, D.N. Handu.







Taking a rest on the lawn of the government bungalow after visiting Shankaracharya hill. From left to right: D.N. Handu, Janki Nath, Swamiji, Yogishur Hali, Chand Narain Ganju (another lifelong devotee who has written the next memoir).

hymn of mother Goddess called Gauri Stuti and would often ask me to sing it for him.

4. At Hari Parbat, Swamiji used to observe silence for the whole day, meditating inside the cabin. He would come out of the cabin in the evening hours to enlighten those present on spiritual topics for one or two hours. The young seekers would already be seated there in good numbers. They were highly impressed by his teachings and vast knowledge, and were attracted towards him day after day. Coming closer and closer, we found Swamiji to be an all-rounder, an excellent athlete, a very good swimmer, a very good singer, a very good flutist, an expert architect, designer, and what not. Among other games, Swamiji liked to play volleyball. All were amazed to see his perfection in the game.

I may recall the days when Swamiji liked to go and bathe in Nagin Lake, a beautiful lake of Kashmir which was very near to Hari Parbat. He would dive deeply in the lake and swim very fast across its waters. It was an awe inspiring sight to witness such acrobatics in water.

Swamiji also loved to go to Kashmiri saints. Being with him, I also used to accompany him to Ganderbal and also to Swami Laxmanjoo at Nishat near Dal Lake. Laxmanjoo was known to be an authority on Shaivism.

5. During his stay at Hari Parbat, Pūjya Swamiji had a desire to go to Amarnāth with some of his devotees who used to come to Hari Parbat daily to listen to his spiritual discourses. The year was 1958, when Swamiji was only 28 years old. I was one of the several devotees who accompanied Swamiji on this *yātrā*. After the decision was made, we made preparations to carry almost everything with us that would be required during the *yātrā*, including rations, kero-

sene, oil, vegetables, fruits, jams, etc. We had also made arrangements to carry our own tents.

It is on *āshād pūrṇimā*, the full moon day in July, that the *Shiva-liṅgam* formed of ice assumes its full size. It was on this day that we wanted to reach the holy cave for *darshan*. The *chadī mubārak*³ goes to the cave one month later on *sāvan pūrṇimā*, the full moon day in August. We left Srinagar on our *yātrā* many days before the full moon day of July. Pehlgam was the first halting station. We stayed at Pehlgam for a day or two in our own tents and enjoyed its natural scenery. Then we started for the next station, Chandanvadi, about 11 km from Pehlgam, where we stayed for one or two days. Then we had to leave for the third station, Sheshnag, which is normally approached through Pesu Al Gate, the ascent of which is very steep. There is another route through Hatyara Talab, but this route is very tedious and dangerous. This route has now been closed and pilgrims avoid it. Swamiji wanted to go alone to Sheshnag from this route. All of us devotees begged him not to go that way, but Swamiji remained firm in his decision and went that way all alone. The rest of us went by the safer route and met Swamiji in Sheshnag. We were very much pleased and relieved over his safe arrival.

Sheshnag is a halting station in vast fields with a beautiful lake in front of it. The water of this lake is transparent and cold. As there is no shelter there, even a slight rain disturbs the pilgrims very much. But, as good luck would

³ *Chadī mubārak* literally means ‘holy stock.’ It is carried by the head monk of a specified denomination (*darhnāmi akhārā*) ceremoniously to the Amarnāth cave so as to reach there on the full moon day of August and that heralds the beginning of the Amarnāth pilgrimage.

have it, the weather remained sunny during our one day stay in our tents. From there we proceeded to the fourth halting station, Panchatarni, by ascending Mhaguns. This is again a very beautiful place with five streams flowing through it. Here also we stayed for a day. From there the holy cave is a distance of 5 km. Early in the morning we started our journey and reached the cave on *ashād pūrṇima* and had the *darshan* of the full *Shiva-liṅgam*. We sang *bhajans*, *kirtan* and performed *pūja* to the *liṅgam*. To our great satisfaction, the rush of pilgrims was comparatively far less than that of *sāvan pūrṇimā* in August.

After having the *darshan* of Lord Shiva, we took the return journey with the same halts at every station and finally reached Pehlgam, the base camp of the Amarnāth *yātrā*. From there we came down to Anantnag and stayed at the Sunshine Hotel. From Anantnag Swamiji wished to go to Nagdandi Ashram of the Ramakrishna Mission, situated 10 km south of Anantnag. Upon reaching the *āshram*, the head of the *āshram*, Swami Ashokananda initially hesitated to give us permission to stay, so we decided to return to Anantnag. But to our surprise, as we were leaving the Swami came to us and welcomed us. Our Swamiji graciously accepted his offer and we stayed in the *āshram* for one night and were given every facility. This *āshram* is beautifully situated near Achabal, one of the famous tourist resorts of Kashmir.

From this place we came back to Anantnag and went to Van-Poh, where a Kashmiri saint lived. The *yātrā* period was over and we came back to Hari Parbat after fifteen to twenty days. This was indeed a memorable *yātrā* with *pūja* Swamiji Mahārāj.

Today, as I bow down to the presence of Swamiji, I am taken back in time to those glorious days of my association with him at Hari Parbat.

Early Days with Swamiji at Hari Parbat

– by Chand Narain Ganju (23/07/2008)

A very old, faithful and ardent disciple of the Master, Shri Chand Narain Ganju left his body on the 20th of April, 2009 in Baroda. He and his whole family were deeply devoted to Swamiji. A year before his passing away, he was able to spend two weeks in the āshram together with his wife and on our request wrote this memoir about his sweet association with Swamiji:

Praṇām to the holy land of Kashmir, where in Rainawari I was born. This beautiful land was inhabited by Mata Laleshwari, Mata Rupa Bhavani, Fakir Sheikh Nuruddin, Baba Rishi etc., who attained spiritual Fulfillment there.

In the beginning, when Swamiji first came there, he had no shelter nor any other means of protecting himself from the rain, cold and sun. He lived on Hari Parbat in the middle of two rocks which were joined together. He had managed to stretch a sheet above that place like a tent. That was his abode. Inside there was a cotton bag with some books in it and a small container for water. Swamiji used to sleep on that rock. Later, we devotees made for him a small wooden cabin and he started living in it.

The devotees of Rainawari had cleared a small pathway to the nearby spot where Swamiji did his daily *satsaṅg*. The devotees would sit in a semicircle with Swamiji facing

them in their middle. Swamiji would pick up any topic and would give it a spiritual touch and all of us used to love and enjoy it very much.

One day when the evening *satsaṅg* had concluded, all the devotees left except me. I thought I would sit up late at his holy feet and share my feelings with him. Swamiji sat on the rock and I sat on the ground in front of him. Then we conversed with each other somewhat in the following way:

Swamiji: “Why did you not go home?”

Myself: “I feel like spending the night with you and want to ask you how to do *sādhana*.”

Swamiji: “Repeat God’s name.”

Myself: “What are the important things on this path?”

Swamiji: “There are some rules, as described in Patañjali’s *aṣṭāṅga yoga* — they are eight in number. The seeker has to follow them with commitment and faith. They are *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇa*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*.⁴

Myself: “Swamiji, I can’t remember all these. Please write them all for me with detailed explanation.”

Swamiji: “It will not be possible today. I will write it for you and give it to you tomorrow.” (I have, to date, that precious handwritten material secure with me as a token of his grace.)

Talking thus it was 10 p.m.; then it was midnight, and then 1 a.m. I was thinking, “Swamiji has spared his invaluable time for me; how very kind of him!” Finally Swamiji asked me to go back home, which was about two or three km away. He then himself put on his wooden sandals (*kharāuḍ*) and led me down the hill. He came with me up to Kathi Darvaja and then asked me to return home from there.

⁴ These are defined in the glossary under *aṣṭāṅga yoga*.

I was dumbstruck to see Swamiji's love and affection. I was then only twenty years old and didn't know how to behave with a great saint like Swamiji, and that I should not waste even a single second of his precious time.

I take Swamiji as my mother who loves and blesses her child even though he is unworthy. I pray to Gurudeva to grant me love and devotion to him so that I become free forever.



Before ending this chapter, let us bow in reverence to the holy land of mother India, in whose collective psyche there is spontaneous deep love and reverence for saints, fakirs and holy men and where even today the people try to seek, at the holy feet of saints, the sustenance and means of their individual, familial, social, spiritual and overall well-being. It is a land where saints live in uncountable numbers, lovingly supported by society out of natural reverence and conviction that they are living scriptures and a benediction to the world. This is also the reason why, in spite of many upheavals throughout history and attacks on its culture, there has always been the powerful presence of inspired and enlightened saints in India, and its ancient spiritual tradition is still intact. The sweet, spontaneous and all pervasive relationship between the Indian masses and saints is a distinctive feature of the unorganized Hindu religion, which effortlessly and with great love supports hundreds of thousands of monks, *sadhus* and thousands of temples, *āshrams*, maths, *Gurudwārās*, etc. without any governmental or institutional help. And in turn, these saints show society the path of true spirituality by their own living examples and by preaching righteousness and spirituality. Sadly much un-

truth lives in the name of truth, and the many stories of degradation among the saints in India that we hear nowadays are so painful. But in spite of that, the faith of the masses in saints is not shaken, the reason being that even today such real saints do exist. The life of our Swamiji is a vivid example of this. So again, prostrations to that tradition and culture in the lap of which Suraj Prakash became Chandra Swami and attained to the highest, the most sublime goal of life.



Swamiji and devotees on a pilgrimage to *Vaishno Devi* in the Trikuta Hills not far from Swamiji's cave in Jammu (July 1957).

Chapter Five

Long Stay on the Forested Island

Throughout his *sāadhanā* and to this day Swamiji has had a mystical association with the forested island near Haridwar called the *jhāḍī*. As we have seen, in the early stages of his *sāadhanā* he had already stayed there several times, once for fifteen days with saint Gurumukh Singhji, then for about one year in 1957-58, and then again in 1959-60 near Spur Eleven¹ in the Sapta Sarovar area. Now, after spending nearly seven years of fulfilling spiritual life in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), he had a strong inner urge to live and do *sāadhanā* in the *jhāḍī* for a longer period in the loving and protective lap of Mother Ganges.

So, in October 1961 he left J&K for good and came to Haridwar. Just think! An ordinary person seldom leaves a familiar place which gives him love, respect and the security of acquaintance. But Swamiji, even after having the first-hand, profound experience of the *Ātmā*, the Self, didn't take his eyes off his cherished ultimate goal, the integral Realization of Absolute Reality. He, therefore, left behind his big family of devotees who loved and revered him deeply, and renounced the luxury of the familiar congenial environment. Under the irresistible spell of love for his divine

Beloved, he came to live in the uncertainty of a completely secluded forest island amidst the danger of wild beasts. No attachment at all with any place, person or situation, save the Divine!

After coming to the *jhāḍī*, he made his hut at a spot close to the one where he had stayed in 1957-58. In April 1962, the holy *Kumbha Melā* was held in Haridwar, a major event in which millions of devotees gather and thousands of monks stay for months at a time on the forested islands around the Ganges. As early as December 1961, the *sādhus* started coming to live temporarily on the islands of the *jhāḍī* area and the whole island where Swamiji was staying became full of huts.

For about six months some 200 *sādhus* lived in that area. The *Kumbha* ended in May, 1962, but by that time the islands had become very polluted. Therefore in June Swamiji went to spend a few months in Srinagar and came back to the *jhāḍī* in September after the monsoon rains and flood waters of the Ganges had washed the islands clean. He then made a new, bigger hut on the same island.

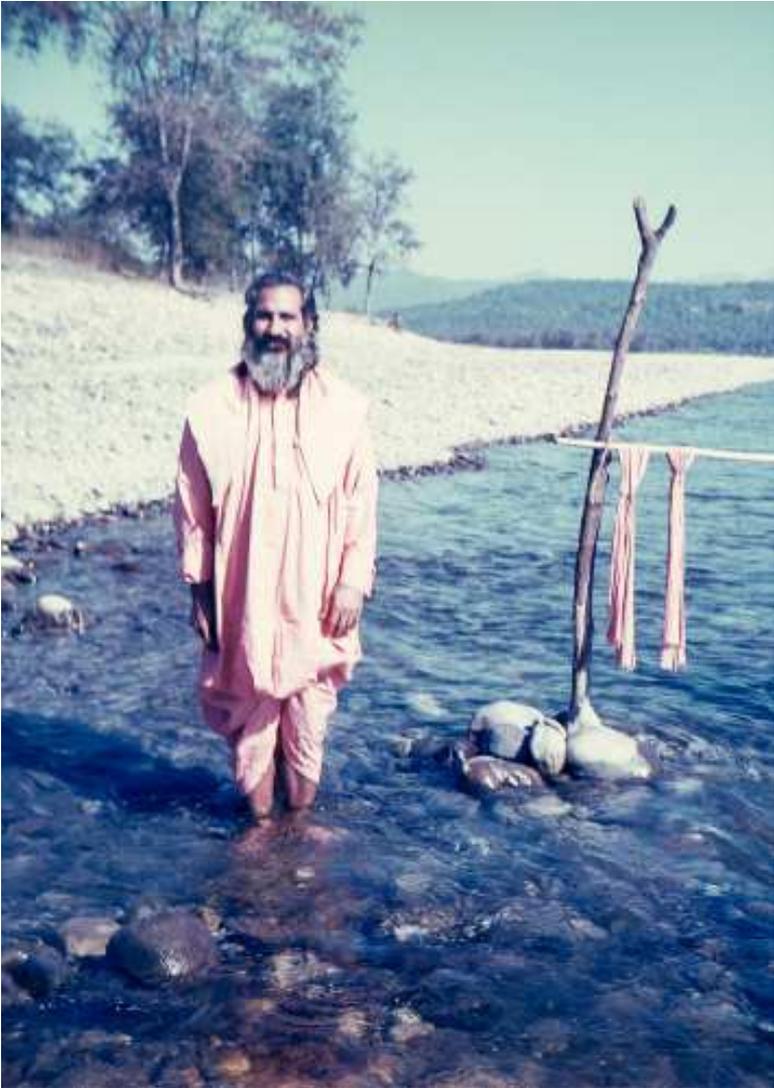
About this hut Swamiji once wrote: “When I made the new hut, the forest department was again after me. By then it had become very difficult to get a lease of forest land. This issue came to the notice of Shri Guptaji, the retired chemistry professor of DAV College, Dehradun, who had taught me in college and loved me very much. The District Forest Officer had also once been his student. So, he requested the latter to somehow get the lease granted to me. Because under the new rules a new lease could not be granted, he renewed my old lease on the grounds that I had been absent from that place and therefore could not renew it earlier. The lease was renewed for five years with the provi-



View of the *jhāḍī* area near Sapta Sarovar, Haridwar (2011).



Swamiji with devotees on the bank of the Ganges in the *jhāḍī* (1960's).



Swamiji drying his clothes on a makeshift clothesline in the Ganges near the spot where he built his hut.

sion that it could be renewed again after every five years. The cost of the lease was just one rupee per year.”

Thereafter Swamiji had to shift his hut several times because every year during the rainy season the Ganges would erode some part of the bank in front of his hut. The island was only four to five feet higher than the level of the water of the Ganges, and was therefore always susceptible to floods. It used to take many days and a lot of labour for Swamiji to shift and rebuild his hut, and he had to do it all by himself, chopping wood and collecting hay from the forest. Nevertheless he remained on this island in different huts from 1962 to 1968, when finally he moved to a second island which was higher and relatively more protected from floods. With time and experience he became an expert in making thatched huts.

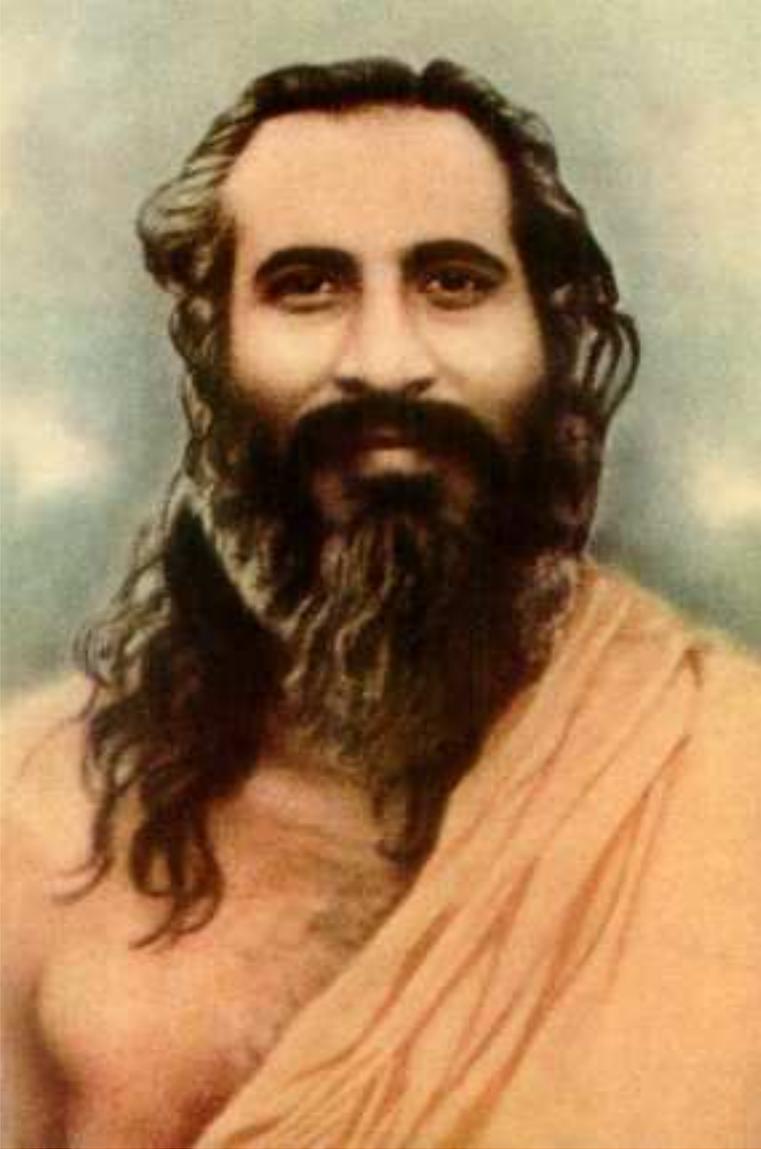
Now let us quietly and reverentially enter the forest abode where the great mystic was living absorbed in the ineffable bliss of the *Ātmā*, and try to feel its sacred ambience. The following description of his forest dwelling is more or less applicable to all his huts, which he built at different times on different islands, as mentioned above.

A short distance in front of his hut, the main stream of the holy Ganges flowed towards the south. A little further on, the river took a sharp turn towards the left and became much wider. On both banks lay scattered stones carried down from the mountains by the river. One could see the Shivalik mountain range in the northern direction towards Rishikesh. There was a dense forest all around with the exception of the wide basin of the Ganges in front of the hut. All around the hut tall trees stood as guards. On the opposite side of the river too there was a dense forest. The forest was full of large *khair* (acacia), teak and bel trees. With not a soul

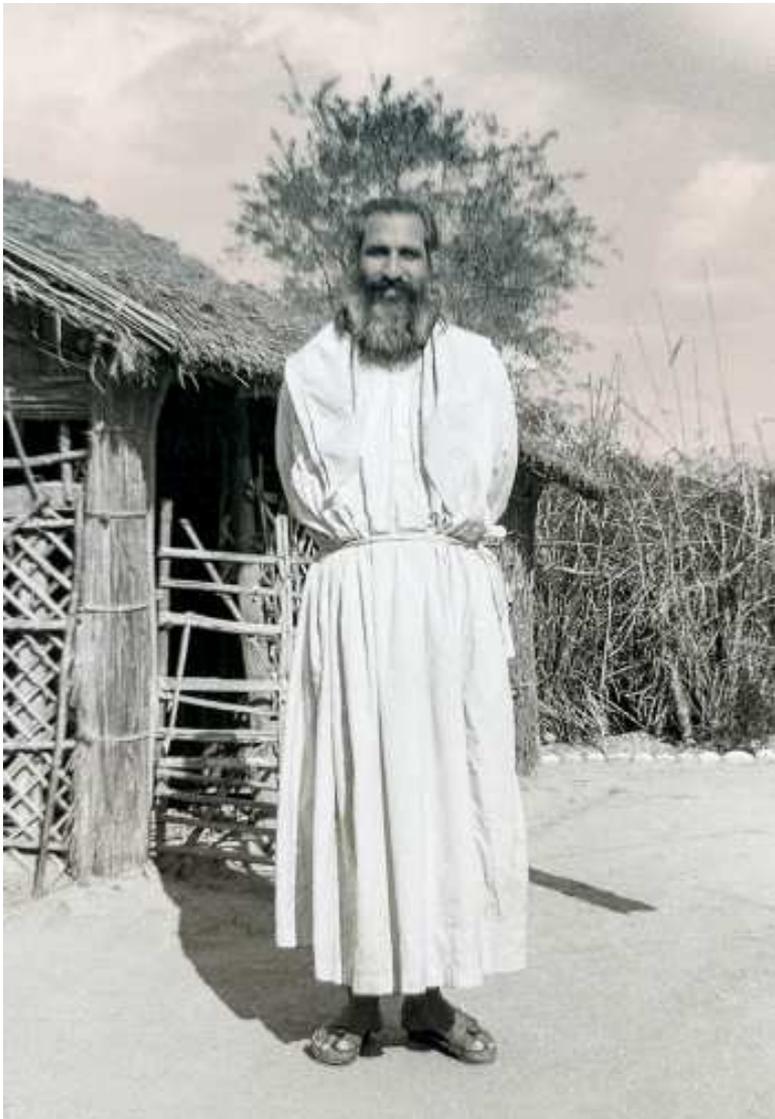
around, the whole atmosphere was permeated by deep peace and quietude, which spontaneously prompted a seeker to turn within in search of the Infinite. The silence and utter seclusion of the island was a most appropriate place for the brave hearted *yogi* who had put at stake his very life to plunge into the deepest recesses of his Being. The constant murmur of the Ganges served as a motherly lullaby. The stillness of the place was breached only by the trumpeting of wild elephants or roaring of other animals in the distance. But this did not dampen the divine *bhāva* of the sage; rather it strengthened his surrender to the Lord. In the morning and evening the faint sound of temple bells drifting through the forest from two or three kilometres away in Sapta Sarovar indicated the presence of a habitation close by.

With an ochre cloth loosely wrapped around his strong, broad shoulders and the divine glow of dispassion, austerities and divine Bliss decorating his tall handsome figure, Swamiji appeared like a prince living in his palace, embellished with all the ornaments of *sannyāsa*. He was so pure and magnetic that it was difficult to take one's eyes off him. This author had the rare privilege of having Swamiji's *darshan* in the *jhāḍī* in 1964 with his parents at the age of seven. To this day the spiritual splendour and charm which Swamiji exuded is vividly imprinted on this writer's mind. Another of Swamiji's very old and ardent disciples, Shri Anoop Singhji, who had the good fortune to stay with Swamiji in the *jhāḍī* many times, was recently asked to share his impression of Swamiji in those early days. He could only exclaim, "An unbelievable, divine radiance!"

It was indeed a rare visual feast to have Swamiji's *darshan* there. It felt as if God had painstakingly created that forest island by the side of the holy Ganges exclusively



A portrait of Swamiji during his early years in the *jhāḍī*.



In front of his thatched hut (1960's).

as a spiritual abode for this *yogī*, and that the holiness of that place and divine splendour of Swamiji were perfectly wedded to each other.

While on the forested island, Swamiji continued to follow his earlier *sāadhanā* schedule, which started at 2 a.m. and consisted of approximately twelve hours of prayer, *japa*, meditation, *prāṇāyāma*, *yoga āsanās* and scriptural study each day. The only significant change he made in his daily routine was that he would attend to bodily needs such as bathing, brushing teeth, washing, call of nature, etc. well after dawn because of the danger of wild animals roaming freely in the forest.

Having long before completed his three-year vow not to touch money, around 1961 Swamiji opened a savings account in Sapta Sarovar. Quite soon after coming to the forested island Swamiji had developed an acquaintance with the inmates of Sapta Rishi Ashram, a well-known *āshram* located about two kilometres from his island. Thereafter he never kept money with him. Whenever one of his devotees offered him money, he would send it through that same devotee to the manager of the Sapta Rishi Ashram, Paṇḍit Manoharlalji Bahuguna. Whenever Swamiji required anything, he would send a note and Paṇḍitji would personally purchase that item and send it to Swamiji. Paṇḍitji maintained an account of each and every rupee and would deposit the remaining amount in Swamiji's bank account. He had deep faith and love for Swamiji.

Swamiji always kept his forest abode exceptionally neat and tidy. Flower beds were made near the hut and a fence of thorny bushes on all sides for protection. He also made a three-foot wide and fifty-yard long pathway between his hut and the Ganges and placed smooth round stones collected

from the river along both its sides. He kept the pathway clean and meticulously maintained, not allowing any weeds or grass to grow there. Though he lived all alone in his hut, he arranged everything so tastefully as if expecting a visit from some royal guest. Well, living in a well-ordered way has always been Swamiji's second nature.

As a matter of fact, observing righteous conduct, purity, cleanliness and discipline in one's external life helps in building a strong, alert and pure mind, which is an indispensable instrument for God remembrance. The great sage Oriya Baba used to say, "The one who cannot sweep his room properly also cannot meditate properly."

Swamiji spent his time in the *jhāḍī* most joyously in God communion, thriving in the unadulterated beauty and charm of mother nature. Often in the morning or evening he would go for a long stroll in the woods. Sometimes he would sit by the Ganges and enjoy the sight of the swans gliding along the surface of the water. At other times, using the inner tube of an old truck tyre, he would enjoy floating down the stream of the Ganges, surrounded by beautiful scenery on all sides. Occasionally he would sing in the pitch dark night with only the stars as witness. Sometimes he would sit quietly beholding the trumpeting of wild elephants and other wild animals from afar. Sometimes amidst the heavy down-pour in the rainy season he would listen to the terrible song of the Beloved in the thundering of lightning. Many times the visiting devotees would lovingly press him to play his flute and he would play it to their great delight. Thus absorbed in the Bliss of the Divine, he enjoyed the Divine *līlā* outside in its varied forms. And all through, he persevered with his *sādhana*.



Swamiji
playing his
flute for
visiting
devotees.



With Yvan Amar
(Ananda), one
of Swamiji's
first foreign
disciples, who
met him in 1969
and later
became instru-
mental in
bringing many
foreign devotees
to meet him.

Perhaps sometime in the year 1962 a saint called Raja Mahatma of the well-known spiritual tradition of ‘Paramahansa Advait Mat,’ which has its headquarters in the district Guna of Madhya Pradesh, stayed for a few days with Swamiji in his hut. He told one of his devotees several years later that one day at three in the morning he saw Swamiji in the hut meditating, and a dazzling light was emitting from the point between his eyebrows. This was revealed to us directly by that saint’s devotee, Shri Moti Lalji of Kota. When we asked Swamiji about it, he explained in writing that the centre of the forehead between the eyebrows is the centre of light and that the light may appear outside as well. Several other devotees told Swamiji that they had had a similar experience, witnessing a light emanating from Swamiji’s *ajñā chakra* when he was sitting in meditation. The saint Raja Mahatma also told his devotee that Swamiji has the *siddhi* or supernatural power to shed his body at will. But our Swamiji never told us such things or encouraged us to enquire into these matters.

Though most of his time in the *jhāḍī* was spent in silence, devotees and seekers of Truth would sometimes come to meet him there. Therefore, in order to observe periods of strict silence, in 1963 he devised a schedule which was very arduous, but planned with meticulous care and consideration. According to this timetable, for a total period of six months a year — from 1st January to 28th February, and from 15th June to 14th October — he would observe *kāshth mouna*. *Mouna* literally means silence. *Kāshth mouna* is a technical phrase which implies strict avoidance of all forms of communication, including speaking, writing and even gestures. Thus during his time of *kāshth mouna* Swamiji would nei-

ther meet with anyone, nor correspond with anyone, not even through letters. He would spend his days in complete seclusion.

During the other six months of the year, from the 1st of March to 15th of June and from the 15th of October to 31st of December, Swamiji would observe silence for most of the day, but would make himself available to devotees who would come from far-off places for an hour and a half every evening for *darshan* and *satsaṅg*. This was called his “ordinary *mouna*.” During the period of ordinary *mouna* he would also correspond with his devotees through letters.

If we look closely, it is clear that Swamiji planned his periods of solitude very carefully, taking into consideration the seasonal changes and environmental circumstances. His two periods of ordinary *mouna*, when he was available to devotees, were times of moderate weather during which seekers could reach his secluded forest abode somewhat more easily. On the other hand, his four-month *kāshth mouna* from the 15th of June to 15th of October was during the monsoon season, when nature provided him with a sort of natural seclusion by cutting his island off from the rest of the world. The snow on the mountains would start melting from the month of May and this would cause the water level of the Ganges to rise. This, coupled with the rains of the monsoon season, resulted in his island being completely surrounded by rushing torrents of water well into the month of October. During this period it was practically impossible for any person to reach the island. Therefore, sheltered in the lap of the Mother Ganges, Swamiji would remain uninterruptedly absorbed in sweet communion with his Beloved.



Devotees visiting Swamiji at his hut on the forested island during his period of 'ordinary *mouna*'.





During the other two months of *kāshth mouna*, from January to February, the weather was clear but quite cold, and therefore it was not so practical for devotees to cross the icy waters of the Ganges to reach Swamiji's island. Perhaps for this reason Swamiji chose this time for his second period of spiritual hibernation. It is also possible that he had opted to divide his period of strict seclusion into two parts so that its influence would last throughout the whole year.

The following two letters, written by Swamiji during his stay in the *jhāḍī*, give us an indication of the important role silence and solitude played in his *sāadhanā*:

Sapta Sarovar Jhāḍī,
Haridwar

Beloved Sweet *Ātmā*,

You, perhaps, have had the information of my last two months *kāshth mouna*. By His power and through His Grace, it is completed well. It was all a blessed period, most of it full of ecstasy; few days very transporting blissful — A sweet thrilling presence, a most delicate Touch!

Side by side with the service of society, I hope you sit daily in prayer and contemplation too. Do you? The life of the Spirit, could we faithfully turn to it, is abundantly richer and exceedingly sweeter than that of the life of the flesh. Nevertheless, to that level of consciousness in which the peace passes understanding, we can rise only through a searchingly difficult process of spiritual discipline.

Yours in Spirit,
Chandra Swami

Sapta Sarovar Jhādī,
Haridwar

Beloved Sweet *Ātmā*,

The cardinal reason of my mind becoming perturbed, rather disquiet, was that I could not at all sit in *bhajan* (God-remembrance) in the daytime during this short *yatra*. As a result I felt there a sort of lowering of consciousness, a decrease in the intensity of God-intoxication. I don't know why it happened so, this time. However, I am now feeling quite OK by the Lord's Grace.

May the Lord ever guide us within and without! May He become the pivot of our life!

Yours in the Lord,
Chandra Swami

Taramaniji from Jammu, a very old devotee, knew Swamiji when he was living in the cave near the Tawi River. He told us of an incident that occurred when he visited Swamiji in the *jhādī* during the 1960's. There were several other *sādhus* living in the jungle at that time, though most of them stayed only for a few months of the year and would cross the Ganges daily to beg for food in Sapta Sarovar. There was one such *sādhu*, more than eighty years of age, who remained completely naked all year round and slept out in the open without any cover. This *sādhu* rarely spoke to anyone, though occasionally he would come to Swamiji at his hut and Swamiji would offer him some food or provisions. About this saint, Swamiji once wrote: "He was totally naked, even without a loin cloth. He was sleeping on the sand in the night on the bank of the Ganges with a stone under his head as a pillow."

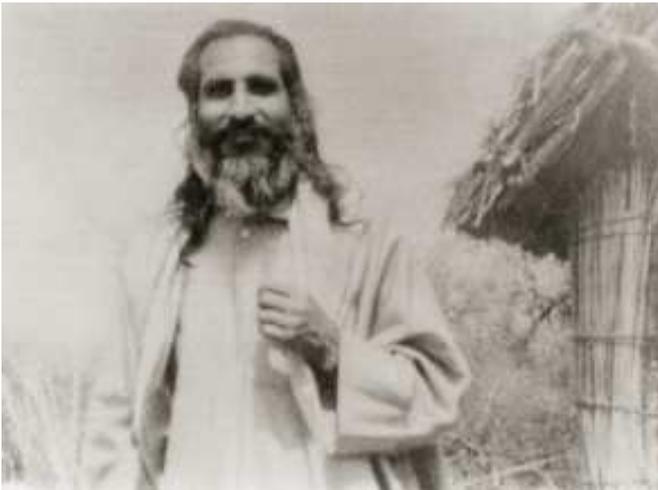
It so happened that on the very day Taramaniji came to the *jhāḍī* to visit Swamiji, this unusual *sādhu* suddenly appeared. Taramani ventured to ask the saint if the goal of his life was *moksha* (liberation). The saint shook his head and replied simply, “*Yoga*.” Only that monk knows what he meant by his mystical one word reply. After the saint departed, Swamiji told Taramaniji, “You are very fortunate. Not only did you have his *darshan* today, but he even spoke to you!”

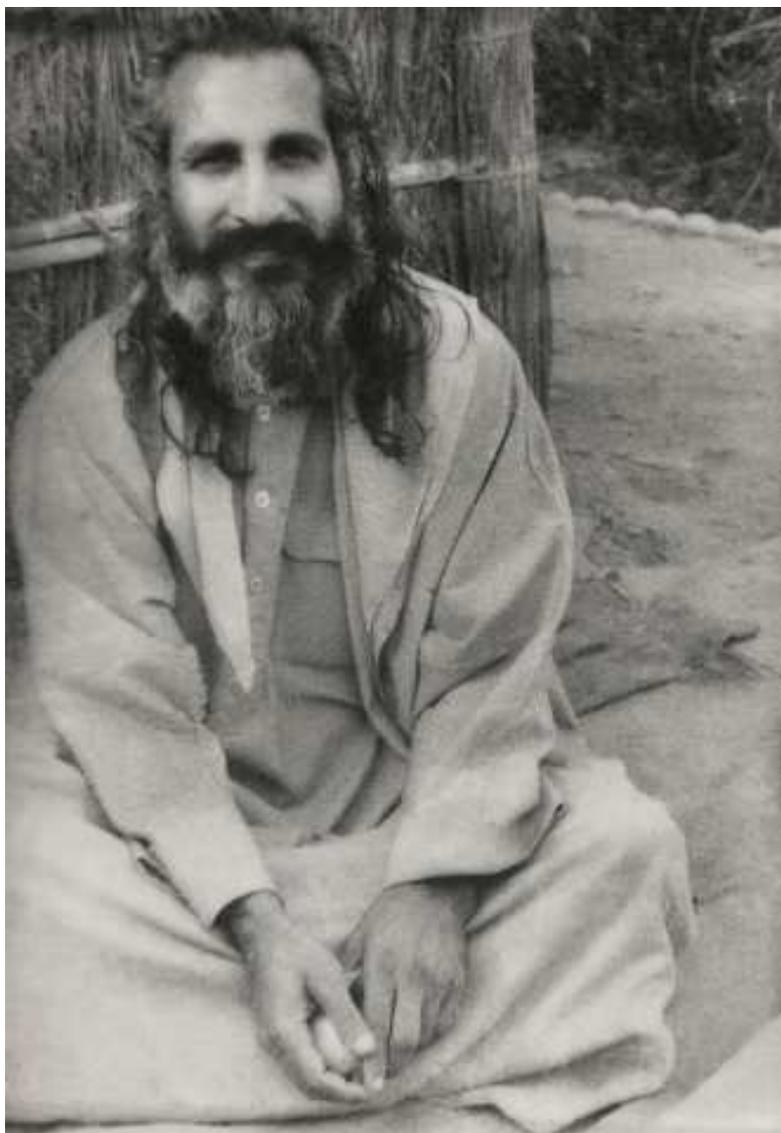
During his stay on the forested island Swamiji used to eat only one meal a day. In the morning and evening he would take just a glass of hot milk. As one can observe to this day, Swamiji has a very systematic and scientific way, even in the smallest of actions and activities. He tells us that he would prepare his daily meal, eat, clean the vessels and be free from all this in just fifty to sixty minutes. Swamiji himself describes his mealtime routine and cooking method as follows:

“In the morning I would heat two glasses of milk on the kerosene stove given to me by a devotee. After drinking one glass, I would fill the rest of the hot milk in the thermos for the evening. I would start cooking lunch at one o’clock and within less than an hour I would finish eating, cleaning and putting the washed vessels away in their places. In the pressure cooker I would either boil *dal* (pulse), or vegetables, or both (in two separate containers of the cooker). After the vegetables were cooked, it would take five to seven minutes for the steam to be released completely from the cooker. Meanwhile I would prepare *chapatis*, so I did not have to devote any extra time for this. After putting the vegetables or dal in a glazed clay vessel, I would add one spoon of *ghee*



The jhāḍī days.





to it. At the same time I would add some water in the cooker and close the lid. By the time I had finished eating, the water would become warm. Because I never added *ghee* in the pressure cooker, it would not be greasy, so I would just wash it with that warm water. Sometimes, when I felt a little lazy, I would prepare rice and vegetables together in the cooker instead of preparing *chapatis*. God always provided me with all the essential requirements through the devotees.”

Often, especially in the rainy season, dangerous and venomous snakes used to enter Swamiji’s hut. Swamiji never tried to kill them. Once in the middle of the night a big cobra fell from the roof of the hut and landed on Swamiji’s bed. He lit his torch just in time to see the snake slither across the floor and disappear into the grassy wall of the hut. Many times during heavy rains cobras and large pythons would take shelter in his hut. When he didn’t want them to enter, he would simply pat the ground to ward them off and they would quietly leave the hut. About his experience with snakes, Swamiji further writes:

“In the rainy season the mice used to go up in the roof of the thatched hut. The snakes would go there to eat them. In the beginning a python used to come in the night and would eat the birds it caught from the trees on the veranda of my hut. In the morning I would see the feathers and bloody remains of the birds. I had to clean the place daily. Then I prayed to God. After a few days it stopped coming.”

One day a wild elephant attacked Swamiji when he was going for an early morning walk in the forest. After his decision to stay in the forest, he had studied much about the behaviour of these animals. He knew that the wild elephant has the tendency of trampling its victim under its massive

feet. Seeing no possibility of escape, he shut his eyes and started praying to God. After a few moments he opened his eyes. Lo! The elephant was seen crossing the Ganges and looking back towards Swamiji as if wondering why at all it had become hostile toward this child of God. Let us hear an account of his narrow escape from Swamiji himself:

“I saw the elephant running towards me. He was about forty to fifty feet away. He had spread his trunk and was running to attack me. There was no time to run away. There was a steep slope leading down to the Ganges. I scrambled down the slope and sat on the bank of the Ganges with my back to him. I closed my eyes and was thinking that I could not escape death and it was the last moment of my life. I started thinking of God. The elephant came down the slope. I heard the crashing of the stones when he came down. When I opened my eyes he had gone into the Ganges and was standing in the middle of the Ganges looking back at me. I stood up. He went to the other side of the Ganges and stood there near the forest, looking at me again and again. I found from his footprints that he had entered the Ganges only about three feet away from where I was sitting. Either he missed his target, or his mind had changed. I don’t know.”

On another occasion, two elephants trampled one of Swamiji’s huts in the middle of the night, but they didn’t touch the hut in which Swamiji was sleeping. When recounting the incident to one of his devotees the next day, Swamiji disclosed that for the past two or three days he had been feeling that Baba Bhuman Shahji was moving around his hut. It was Swamiji’s firm conviction that Babaji had protected him from the attack of the elephants.

In 1964 Swamiji escaped yet another near brush with death by the grace of God. At that time he was living in his

fifth thatched hut, surrounded by several streams of the Ganges. It was in this hut that Swamiji had the highest and integral Realization of the Divine and it was at this divine and holy place that his spiritual pilgrimage, spanning lives and lives, came to its final consummation, as described in the next chapter. It was also in this place that Swamiji survived one of the worst floods in decades, which claimed many lives.

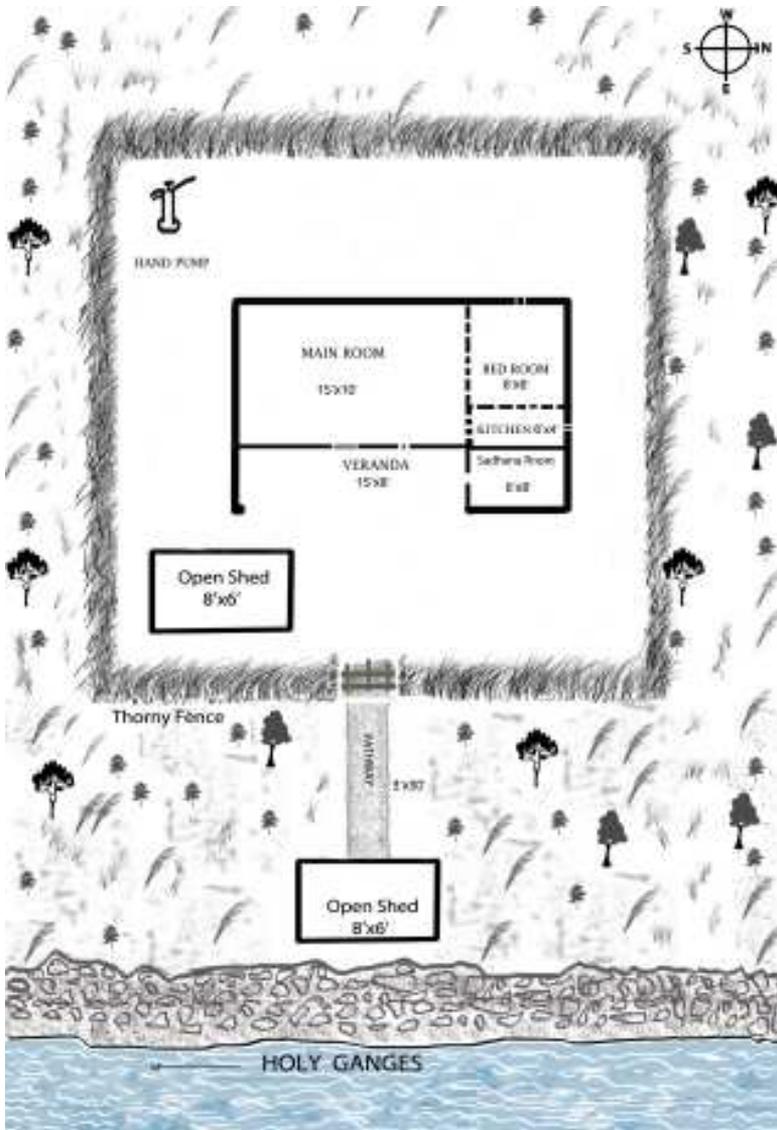
For several days the rain poured down and the water level in the Ganges continued to rise. The swift current of the swollen river made a terrific roaring sound. Broken debris from villages upstream and even cattle were seen being swept away in the rushing waters.

Swamiji himself recounts the incident as follows: “By 12 noon the river water reached my hut and started to damage the front corner of the hut. By five in the evening the front fencing was torn away. I had already come out of the hut by then.

“When I saw that the land in front of my hut was being eroded away and water had also started flowing onto the island behind my hut, I removed some of the food rations and articles from my hut and carried them to higher ground. Because the land beneath the prayer room and veranda was eroded, one portion of the roof partially collapsed.

“I watched helplessly as cows, huts and people’s belongings floated past my hut in the rushing waters of the Ganges. One entire village, by the name Pritpur, was completely washed away. I could see a number of people being carried away in the flood, floating on the boxes made for storing quilts.

“By nightfall the water was still rising and I thought perhaps my entire hut would be washed away. So I climbed



Layout sketch of Swamiji's fifth hut, where he faced the terrible flood of 1964. It was while living in this hut that Swamiji attained the integral Realization of the Divine.

up a nearby tree and spent the night on that tree. Several snakes also came up that tree to escape the flood, but they did not harm me.

“At two in the morning the water started receding and I came down from the tree. My hut was still there, but as the front portion had collapsed and the water was flowing directly in front, it was not possible to enter it. After daybreak, I cut an opening in one of the remaining thatched walls and entered the hut from behind.

“During those days people used to leave their non-milking cows on those islands for grazing. At that time there were only two cows on that island. There was a temporary abode of cowherds on another island which was also on higher ground. During the flood, only their abode and my hut were safe.

“For the next five days nobody could reach me. Even the *gujjars* on the adjacent island were unable to reach their homes in Sapta Sarovar. After five days, when the cowherds managed to cross the flooded river and return to their homes, people enquired about my welfare. Someone had spread a rumour that my hut had been swept away in the flood and that I was also washed away. Two of the *gujjars*, Shri Ram and Maiku, told them that from their island they had seen my hut collapsing in the flood, but the following day they had seen me in the distance strolling on the bank of the Ganges. They said, “He is alive, but must be very hungry!”

“The manager of Sapta Sarovar, Paṇḍit Manoharlalji Bahuguna, sent someone on a makeshift raft to enquire about my welfare. He wrote a note to me that he had heard my hut and rations had been washed away. I informed him that one section of the hut and the rations were safe.”

During this massive flood, the water level in the Ganges rose so high that it nearly reached the top of the Sapta Sarovar barrage. Had it risen by another two feet, the entire Sapta Sarovar area would have been inundated.

When we imagine that terrifying night of the flood, we cannot but shudder. Water was closing in from all sides, parts of the hut were being swept away, and in the middle of the dark night with forest all around, the rain continued pouring down in torrents. There was no hope of help from anywhere, save the Divine. And indeed, on that frightful night Babaji protected his spiritual son in every way, but not without testing his faith to the utmost.

In connection with the above incident this author once asked Swamiji, “Did you not feel fear during that ordeal? Did you not lose your faith in God even for a moment?”

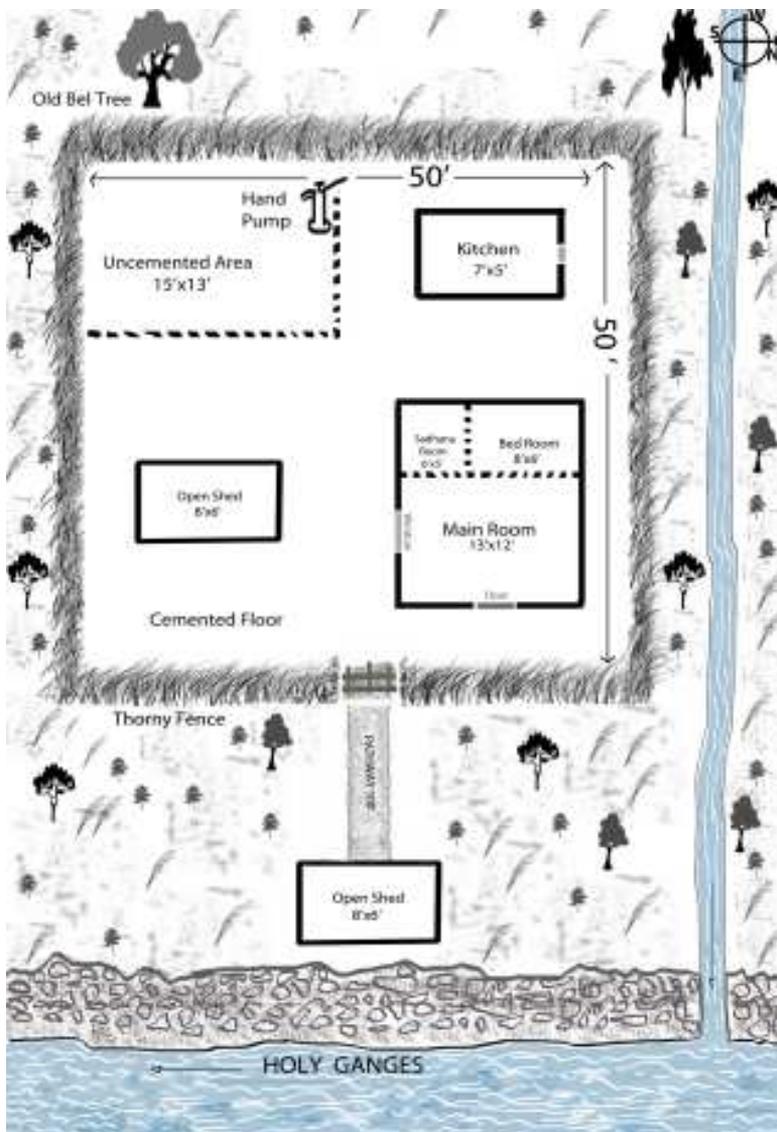
Swamiji replied humbly, “I didn’t feel fear because I was able to climb up a tree. Water was flowing all around the hut, but the trees remained above water. At that time the thought arose in my mind, ‘O Lord, so what if this body perishes? It matters little to me. But if it so happens, Your holy name will be tarnished. Again and again people warned me against living in such a dangerous place under the constant threat of floods and wild animals. I always replied, ‘God will look after me.’ If this body drowns in these flood waters, people will doubt You, saying, ‘This *sādhu* was always saying ‘God, God’, and now look what has happened to him!’ Other than this thought, I felt no fear whatsoever.”

Swamiji has always been skilled in putting seemingly useless articles to good use. So, after the flood, he tore down the front portion of the hut which was hanging in the water, cut it into two, and used the material to erect another small

hut nearby. He stayed in that hut for several months and then eventually constructed a new hut further inland where he stayed for another four years.

Gradually the Ganges eroded the land and made its way up to the foot of even this new hut. Therefore, after the *Kumbha melā* in 1968, Swamiji left this island and built a new hut on a different island on higher land, about one and a half kilometres deeper into the forest. On this new island he selected a spot which was about twelve feet higher than the ordinary water level of the Ganges and was therefore relatively safe from floods. There he made two huts on a piece of land measuring fifty feet by fifty feet. In his main hut there was a bigger room of thirteen by twelve feet, a small sleeping place of eight by six feet and a *sādhanā* corner of six by five feet. All of these were separated by curtains inside the hut. Tin sheets were erected along the walls of the hut as protection against snakes etc. Wire mesh was fixed on all the windows. Not a single housefly could enter the hut. The roof was made of hay, but both the walls and the roof were lined with plywood panels. On top of the roof, pieces of old asbestos sheets were also laid to provide protection from the rain. During the summer months the hut would become unbearably hot due to the asbestos sheets. Swamiji recalls those days as follows:

“I had a very, very long *mālā* (rosary) consisting of 1080 beads when I stayed on the forested island at the bank of the Ganges. In summer my hut would become very, very hot and it was not possible to sit in the hut after 9:30 a.m. I used to cook and eat my lunch before 9:30 a.m. and then go and sit on a stool under the shade of a tree, which was right on the riverbank, hanging my legs in the water and doing



Layout sketch of Swamiji's last hut, where he lived from 1968-70.

japa on that *mālā* of 1080 beads. When I felt tired I would stand up and do *japa* in standing position for some time, and then again sit down. Till evening I would continue telling the beads of that *mālā*.” Thus Swamiji would pass the hot hours of the day in God remembrance.

Near his main hut Swamiji built a second smaller hut which he used as a kitchen. Around his huts he built a fence made of thorny bushes and plants, four feet thick and five feet high. Within the fence his devotees fixed a hand pump so that Swamiji could get pure water even in the rainy season. Swamiji himself laid a cement floor to prevent wild rats from digging holes in the ground to enter the kitchen. To this day remnants of the broken cement floor and hand pump are still visible at this spot as a tribute to Swamiji’s years of intense *sāadhanā*, and a landmark for devotees who wish to visit the place where their Master once lived.

Within the fenced area there was a small open shed in which Swamiji used to sleep during the summer months. Around the huts Swamiji again made a bed of beautiful flowers. The four-foot wide path from the fence to the Ganges was once again levelled, perfectly cleaned and bedecked on either side with round white stones picked up from the Ganges. He also made a small open thatched shed right on the bank of the river where he used to meet the visiting devotees, as he had done on the previous island. In those days a small perennial stream flowed to the north of Swamiji’s hut. Most of the time the water was very clean and he was able to use this water. As was his nature, Swamiji kept his hut and its immediate surroundings beautifully clean and well arranged.



In front of the open shed where Swamiji used to sleep during the summer months.



On the bank of the Ganges with Jean-Luc, one of Swamiji's early foreign devotees.



With devotees in the open thatched shed on the bank of the Ganges where he used to meet visitors.



A devotee applying tilak on Swamiji's forehead (a sacred mark of respect and auspiciousness). The stone-lined pathway leading to Swamiji's main hut is visible in the background.

All these things relate to the exterior realm. But as we will see in the coming chapter, deep within the depths of his being, this period of nine long years was passed in unbroken awareness and communion with the Divine in Its numerous aspects and was itself an important part of the divine *līlā* for the good of thousands of devotees. Indeed, it was here amidst the sprawling trees, blue skies, blessings of Mother Ganges and the holy vibrations of Sapta Sarovar that he attained his ultimate Goal and became firmly established and united with the Divine in Its wholeness forever.

Chapter Six

The Final Ascent

Different Aspects of the Divine

Now we once again take a dip into the unfathomable lake of Swamiji's spiritual experiences. Earlier Swamiji's experiences were described in chronological order, as they coincided with the external events of his life. This chapter covers the remaining part of his spiritual journey, culminating in the integral realization of the Divine. Indeed this chapter is the heart of the whole biography.

From the beginning Swamiji's spiritual experiences were of a varied nature and there was an obvious pattern and evolution in the nature and sequence of these experiences and realizations, corresponding to the different aspects of the Absolute Divine Reality. Though his *sādhana* was predominantly devotional, he not only believed in the *Vedāntic* oneness of Reality, but actually verified it with his own realizations. The purpose here is not to discuss the theoretical aspect of the Divine Reality — a subject which is so deep, and abstract and which has been expressed in varied ways by philosophers and spiritual masters alike — but to understand Swamiji's own spiritual experiences of different hues and colours in the light of his own words and explanations. It should be kept in mind that in the West

there is only one word, ‘God,’ to address all the aspects of the Divine Reality, whereas in Hinduism, Buddhism and Sufism there are different words for different aspects.

Generally the terms Self-Realization, God-Realization, Realization of the Truth, Realization of the Absolute, etc. are understood to be synonymous expressions. However, Swamiji uses these terms to signify the realization of different aspects of the Divine, in accordance with his own personal experience. The fact is that the Absolute Divine Reality, which is ‘One without a second’, has many aspects in relation to the soul. That is why it is possible for an individual soul to realize first-hand different aspects of the Absolute, one after another, through *sādhana*, and it is also possible to realize the Absolute in its entirety in all its aspects. The point is that there are different dimensions of the Divine and not different divisions in the Divine. The limitation is in the soul of the aspirant, not in the Divine, and that is why the soul may realize some seemingly exclusive aspect of the Divine despite the fact that the Divine itself is essentially all inclusive, whole, integral and without division.

And here lies the uniqueness of Swamiji’s extraordinary spiritual attainments. During his spiritual journey he had the first-hand experience and realization of these different aspects, one after another, over a relatively short span of time. In this respect, his spiritual life resembles that of the great Paramahansa Ramakrishna. Like him, Swamiji directly realized the different and sometimes apparently paradoxical aspects of the Truth, assimilating them in his whole being until he’d had the all comprehensive integral experience and became firmly established in it. Before delving in, it would be helpful to have a basic understanding of

the different aspects of the Divine according to Swamiji's teachings. The following has been compiled on the basis of Swamiji's numerous answers on different occasions.

The Absolute (*Parabrahman*)

In Swamiji's words, "The Absolute Divine Reality is *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*. *Sat* means absolute Existence, *Chit* means absolute Consciousness and *Ānanda* means absolute Bliss or absolute Love. Since there cannot be many absolutes, or many infinities, this Divine Reality is One without a second. Absolute Existence, Absolute Consciousness and Absolute Bliss are not qualities of the Divine Reality. They constitute the very essence of this Reality. In fact, they are not three. They are three different names of the same one Reality."

This Divine Principle, unlimited by time, space and causality, is eternal, self-existent, self-evident, and absolutely free. It has infinite aspects and all these aspects are ever-present in it. This supreme Divine Principle is immanent in all its aspects and yet transcends them at the same time. Or to say, it is not only the sum total of all its aspects, but much more. Swamiji touches on this topic in many places in his books and *satsaṅgs*:

"The One manifests into many, and yet it remains One. This is the mystery that cannot be known by the thinking mind. It can only be illustrated by a few examples, such as the actor who plays the roles of many different people in a film."

"Everything has five ingredients within it: name, form, Existence, Awareness and Bliss. The first two vary from

one thing to another. Existence-Awareness-Bliss, i.e. *Sat-Chit-Ānanda* is One and the same in everything. It is the Substance; names and forms are like shadows. To discover the Substance, the Reality, one has to go beyond name and form.”

Since the fundamental Divine Principle is the substratum of all its aspects, the Divine Consciousness, Isness and Bliss are also immanent in all its aspects, whether manifest or unmanifest. Therefore, when a specific aspect of the Divine is realized, the same essential divine Bliss/Consciousness is experienced, but with the specific flavour corresponding to that particular aspect of the Divine. As Swamiji writes, “There are infinite, innumerable dimensions of Existence. All are, as a matter of fact, different states of Consciousness. Every dimension, whether it is outer or inner, has its own flavour, quality and taste.”

In this respect Swamiji often gives the example of sweets. There are so many types of sweets and all are made of sugar, yet the sugar tastes different in each sweet. Similarly, the divine Consciousness-Bliss is present in all Its aspects, but the realization of each aspect has its own specific flavour.

Regarding the integrality of the Divine, Swamiji writes: “These aspects have to be considered as different facets of the Divine. As one cannot see a whole mansion with the eyes by standing at one place, similarly the intellect cannot conceive of the Divine in its wholeness. As one has to move all around the building, see all its facets one by one, then go inside and see it from within, similarly the intellect can only conceive of the Divine bit by bit, understanding one aspect at a time. But there is an integral experience of the Divine that includes all its aspects at the same time and yet tran-

scends all of them. The Divine is not only the mathematical sum total of all its aspects. It is more than the sum total.”

Nirguṇa

Nirguṇa, as indicated by its name, is the aspect of the Divine without *guṇas* or attributes. It is also called *Nirguṇa Brahman* or the *Ātmā* (Self). It is pure Consciousness, pure simple Awareness — silent, without attributes, passive, the non-doer and non-experiencer. It is pure Isness, changeless and unchangeable, unmoved and unmoveable. *Nirguṇa* is timeless, spaceless and is the substratum of *Saguṇa*. There are no grades and levels in *Nirguṇa*, but there are different grades and levels in the realm of *Saguṇa*.

In Swamiji’s words, “Pure Consciousness is the non-doer; it is only the Seer, the *Puruṣha*. This is one aspect of the absolute Consciousness. God (*Īshvara*) is the dynamic aspect. On the mental level these two aspects seem to be opposite, but in the absolute Consciousness, they are not two. In fact the passive and dynamic are like two sides of the same coin.”

***Saguṇa* or *Īshvara* (God)**

Saguṇa is the aspect of the Divine with *guṇas* or attributes, also called *Saguṇa Brahman* or *Īshvara*. *Īshvara* is the *shakti* or power of Divine Reality, the cosmic divine Energy, which is why *Īshvara* is also sometimes addressed in Hinduism as the Divine Mother.¹ *Īshvara* can be said to

¹ *Shakti* is considered to be feminine.

roughly correspond with the Western concept of God — the creator, sustainer, controller and the destroyer of this universe. He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and is full of grace and compassion. He is the almighty and just ruler who has created and who enforces the inescapable cosmic law of *karma* (cause and effect) and delivers justice to all. Again He is the Divine Father and Mother of all who listens to and grants the prayers of His dear devotees and lovingly protects and takes care of them like a mother cares for her small baby.

It is through the mystical association of Consciousness (*Puruṣha*) with unconscious Nature (*Prakṛiti*) at the universal level, that *Īshvara* or the primordial Universal Being (God) manifests. Though the dispenser of the law of *karma*, He Himself is not bound by it and can act above and beyond the laws of Nature, though on rare occasions, to shower His love and grace on His devotees. While Absolute Existence/Consciousness/Bliss is the very essence of *Īshvara*, His attributes of being omnipotent, full of grace etc. are His secondary or relative qualities because they manifest only in relation to the universe. When the universe is destroyed, *Īshvara* also merges back into His substratum — Absolute Divine Reality or *Parabrahman*. This is why, according to *Vedānta*, the existence of *Īshvara* is considered phenomenal in relation to this universe, though of course His essential Being as *Sat-Chit-Ānanda* remains eternal and unchangeable.

Swamiji explains the mysterious relationship between the different aspects of the Divine as follows:

“The whole of existence has a common denominator, which is called *Brahman* or Godhead, the Divine, the One

without a second. It is the timeless and eternal Consciousness. In God/ *Īshvara*, the Power and Awareness of *Brahman* is fully manifest. In the soul, it is not so. Whereas *Īshvara* is the highest manifestation of Absolute Reality, individual souls are only partial manifestations.”

Thus we see that *Saguṇa* includes everything from inert physical matter, soul, mind, thought, desires, emotions, vital energy, relative knowing, activity, energy, right up to *Īshvara* or God, who is the Supreme Conscious Power principle, in His gross, subtle and causal states. And on the other side is the *Nirguṇa* aspect in which the non-dual, undifferentiated pure Consciousness devoid of time, space, thought or activity shines in Its pristine purity. All of Swamiji’s spiritual experiences other than the experience of the Self — the pure Spirit — can be said to belong to the realm of *Saguṇa*. This includes his earlier experiences ranging from fascinating sounds, lights, visions of saints and sages, foreknowledge of future events in childhood, experiences of other worlds, etc. right up to the experiences of the unsurpassed glory, power, knowledge and grace of God.

***Avatār* (Incarnation)**

Avatār literally means coming down. It is believed that the all-powerful Supreme Divine Reality incarnates itself as a human being on earth from time to time and voluntarily accepts the apparent limitations of body and mind out of its infinite compassion to establish righteousness and push up the process of evolution, as did Lord Ram, Krishna, Jesus, Buddha, etc.

In Swamiji's words, "In an *Avatār*, the Impersonal becomes the Personal, without losing its Impersonality so that people can communicate with Him, and be related with Him. It is the greatest sacrifice the Divine makes for people. Krishna, Ram and Jesus are not only personal, because they are always aware of their impersonal and absolute Divinity. Personal is related to what is in time. The Divine is personal and impersonal at the same time."

The *Avatārs* are fully and ever rooted in their divinity and do not come to this earth bound by the law of *karma* like ordinary mortals. Even after shedding their physical bodies, they continue to help the seekers through their infinite grace and compassion. The *Avatārs* have their own worlds representing their specific divine Consciousness. They, like *Īshvara*, also act through the supramental state.

There are also partial incarnations of the Divine, with specific powers and knowledge, who come to earth to accomplish specific tasks. Certain great spiritual masters and sages appearing at different times at different places come under this category. Fully God-Realized, they also come to push up the process of spiritual evolution.

Regarding the various aspects of the Divine described above, Swamiji writes: "It is not possible to describe the Absolute integrally. It can only be described bit by bit, describing one aspect of the Divine, then another aspect, then a third, etc. Or the Absolute can be described by using opposites, like *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa*. How can you say that God is without attributes and with attributes at the same time? It is illogical and paradoxical to say that, and yet all the scriptures say that God is both *Saguṇa* and *Nirguṇa*. In the *Gītā*, at one place Krishna says, "I am the doer. What-

ever is being done, it is being done by Me!” In another verse, he says, “I am not the doer. I do not do anything!” Now how would you reconcile these two statements? When he says, “I am the non-doeer,” he is referring to his *Nirguṇa* aspect, the impersonal aspect. When he says, “I am the doer, no one else is the doer,” he is referring to his *Saguṇa* aspect, the personal aspect.

Before concluding this discussion, it may be helpful to reflect on the following answers, given by Swamiji during one of the daily question and answer sessions, which reveal the type of *sādhana* that can lead a seeker to the experience of the Absolute in all its aspects:

Question: Can an aspirant who seeks to realize the Absolute practise the witnessing meditation?

Swamiji: There is nothing wrong in practising witnessing consciousness, even for a devotee of God. Peace is very essential if you want to concentrate your mind on God or *Īshvara*. Practising witnessing consciousness brings peace. Peace is essential for God-Realization. It can be said that peace is the foundation for the realization of the Absolute. If you are not the Seer, but are identified with what is transient, with your thoughts, emotions, and desires, you cannot have peace.

Either you have to completely surrender to God, or you must be completely established in the witnessing consciousness. There is no other way to peace. The realization of the Absolute is not opposed to the realization of the witnessing consciousness, as bliss is not opposed to peace. But the practice of witnessing alone is not enough. By the practice of witnessing consciousness, you experience only the *Nirguṇa* aspect of God, the experience of the Seer and not the Doer.

It is in this state of deep silence that the true nature of *Puruṣha* is revealed. However, it should be remembered that this is not the highest state or spiritual experience. In the highest state, the seeker is established in the fulfilling integral Realization of the Lord, the Supreme Reality, in His wholeness.

God is not only the Seer, but also the Doer at the same time; the Doer and the Non-Doer both. God is with attributes and without attributes at the same time. In one of the verses in Gurubani, Guru Nanak Devji says, “He is with attributes and without attributes too; He is the great artist who has made everyone wonderstruck” — “*Nirguṇa āp Sagaṇa bhī ohī, kalādhār jin sagalī mohī.*”

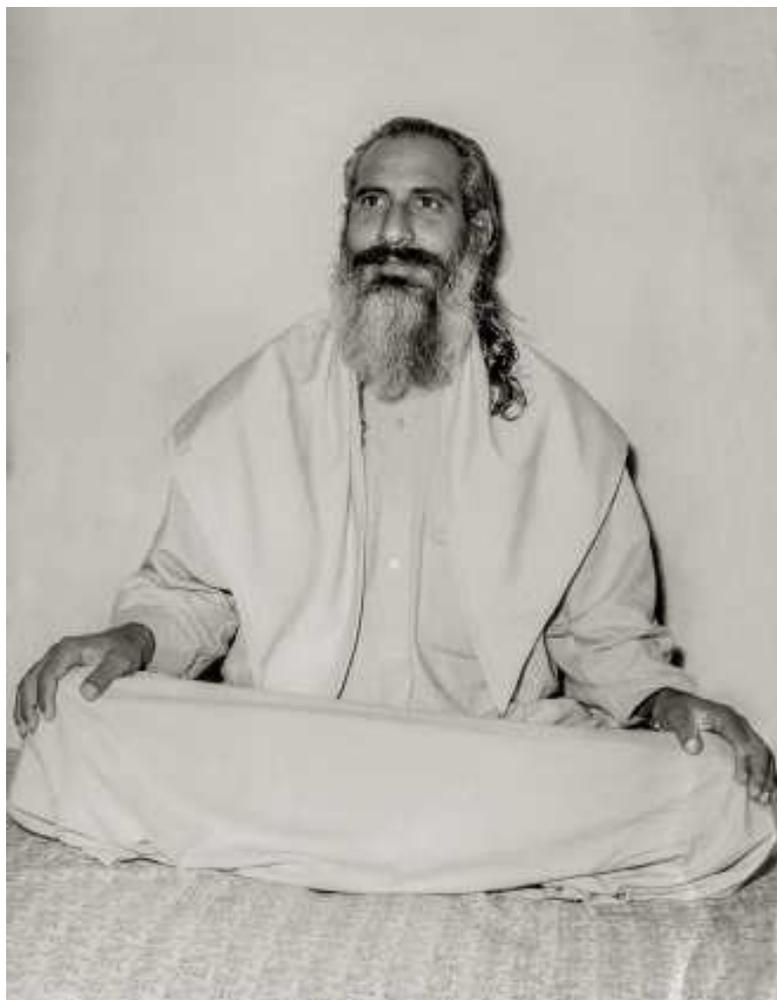
There is a *shloka* in the *Gītā* too, which says that God is the sustainer, the enjoyer, the inspirer and the witness of all:

*updraṣṭhānumantā cha bhartā bhoktā maheshvaraḥ,
paramātmēti chāpy ukto dehe ‘smin puruṣaḥ paraḥ*

The Spirit dwelling in this body is really the same as the Supreme. He has been spoken of as the Witness, the true Guide, the Sustainer of all, the Experiencer, the Overlord and the Absolute as well. (Gītā 13.22)

Question: What is the nature of that *sādhanā* in which we can realize all the aspects of God and also receive divine grace?

Swamiji: In such a *sādhanā* the seeker should remember God with the faith that the Lord is the Doer as well as the Non-Doer and is also full of grace. If you have such faith, then you will be able to receive His grace. But if you consider God to be only the Seer, then the fruit of your *sādhanā* will correspond to that.



Swamiji in the 1960's.

Those who believe that God is only *Nirguṇa* take this world as unreal. The world is obviously made up of *guṇas* or attributes. The supreme Truth/Reality is infinite and there cannot be two or many infinities. Therefore *Nirguṇa*, *Saguṇa* and all the apparently paradoxical aspects are included in the divine Reality.

In the coming pages we shall observe with wonder how Swamiji had the realization of all these aspects of the Divine Reality one after another, not only enlightening his inner being in specific ways, but also perceptibly transforming his outer life. And in the consummation of his *sāadhanā* he was blessed with the integral Realization, reflecting the all-sided freedom and sweetness of the Divine in all its glory.

Self-Realization

Stabilization of the *Nirguṇa* Experience

We have already described Swamiji's maiden experience of the *Ātmā*, which first came to him in August, 1958, when he was merely twenty-eight years old. It came to him during meditation like a flash of lightening, and with that he tasted *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the *Nirguṇa* aspect of the Divine, for the first time.

That rare experience, though like a flash, kindled in him the deep longing to have the experience again and again. From 1958 until 1961, he continued coming and going to and from Jammu, Srinagar and the forested island in Haridwar, but wherever he stayed, he was very regular and consistent with his *sādhanā*. As he persevered, the experience of the immutable *Ātmā* did start coming to him repeatedly and staying in his meditations for longer and longer durations.

Here it is important to remember that Swamiji makes a clear distinction between an experience of the Self, and realization of the Self. Experiences come and go, whereas Realization is permanent. Swamiji often likens an experience to the momentary parting of the clouds in the sky, during which one catches a glimpse of the sun for some time until the clouds again obscure it from view. In Realization,

however, the clouds are removed forever, and the vision of the sun never fades.

Therefore Swamiji continued to make all-out effort to become permanently established in the *Nirguṇa* experience, though ironically the more he progressed, the more the sense of personal effort gradually faded away. As Swamiji says, the key to having the *Nirguṇa* experience is non-identification with all types of modifications of mind, not only during meditation, but also during day-to-day activities. Therefore, during this period Swamiji was not only trying to break his identification during meditation, but he also maintained the attitude of a disinterested witness during his daily chores and activities. For great seekers like Swamiji, the identification which has to be broken is with very pure, subtle and *sattvic* objects/images, which is an extremely difficult task that requires real courage. We read in the life of Shri Ramakrishna that he was so deeply attached to the image of the Mother Goddess that he was not able to go beyond it. Finally he summoned the courage and annihilated that image with the sword of knowledge and entered into *nirvikalpa samādhi*.

Swamiji describes the process of non-identification as follows: “Non-identification means rejecting the thought that you are the physical body or the mind, or any object of perception. You have to assert that you are the knower and not the known. You see this table. Are you this table? You are the subject, the knower, and the table is the known object. The same logic can be applied to the physical body and the thinking mind. Non-identification with the thoughts, feelings and mental images during meditation stops the thinking process, which finally leads the aspirant into *nirvikalpa samādhi*.”

In *The Practical Approach to Divinity* Swamiji has described two techniques which exclusively lead to the *Nirguṇa* experience: the negative method and the witnessing method. In these techniques it is beautifully explained how to disidentify from the thought process during meditation.

In the negative method, the practitioner has to reject all emotions, thoughts and images arising from within or entering into the mind from the Universal mind. In the witnessing method, all the thoughts, desires, emotions, etc. arising on the screen of the mind have neither to be resisted, nor to be entertained. Rather, treating them as something separate from the Self, the *sādhaka* has to observe them as a detached or disinterested witness. That is, one has not to react, but to remain neutral to all that arises or crosses the mental landscape and has to disidentify oneself from it. Swamiji told us that other than the practice of *japa*, he himself mostly meditated using the witnessing method.

Swamiji also makes it clear that while these techniques finally take the seeker to the state of profound peace of the Self (*Nirguṇa Brahman*), they don't lead to the experience of *Īshvara* or *Saguṇa Brahman*, i.e. personal God. Swamiji often says that the practice of *japa* or meditation on a divine form has the capacity to lead the *sādhaka* to the experience of both *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa*, with God's grace.

As for Swamiji, right from the beginning he had unshakable faith in God, and his whole *sādhanā* was performed under God's unreserved grace. Thus he used to meditate using the witnessing method early in the morning, and would practice *japa* during the rest of the day.

When asked about how to enter the no-mind state, Swamiji writes: "There are so many ways. Even devotion

can ultimately lead to that state. Ramakrishna went into that state in a few days when he was instructed by Totapuri. Totapuri was astonished and remarked that it had taken him years and years of practice to attain the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* which Ramakrishna had attained within only a few days. It was so, because the mind of Ramakrishna had already become purified and concentrated through devotion.”

Although Swamiji’s first experience of *nirvikalpa samādhi* came to him through the practice of witnessing meditation, eventually he began entering this exalted state during the practice of *japa* as well. Thus as time went on, both the witnessing technique and the devotional practice of *japa* became gateways for Swamiji to enter the non-dual state.

Normally quite reticent when speaking of his own experiences, on one occasion Swamiji graciously acceded to our earnest requests to explain the specific stages he passed through leading up to the final non-dual experience of the *Ātmā*:

When practising the witnessing method, he would begin by witnessing disinterestedly all thoughts, emotions and perceptions that would arise on the screen of Consciousness. That is to say, in the beginning he would experience the trinity of the witness, the object of the witness, and the witnessing. In the second stage, the object of the witness would disappear, or to say, all thoughts, emotions and modifications of mind would completely subside, leaving only blankness of mind. Then he would be the witness of the blankness of mind. Finally, in the last stage of meditation, even the blankness of mind would be transcended, leading to the experience of the no-mind state, in which the Seer or Witness is established in its own Self. Swamiji told us that

in the beginning it took him a long time to pass through the second stage and transcend the blankness of mind. But later, as he became gradually established in the experience of the Self, he would go into *nirvikalpa samādhi* very quickly after sitting in meditation.

During his *satsangs*, Swamiji explains to us with great clarity the subtle distinction between the witness and pure Awareness, based on his own direct experience. Witnessing is a profound state, which Swamiji would experience before entering into the non-dual state. Through his descriptions we can gain a glimpse of his meditation experience leading up to the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*:

“Witnessing is a method, it is not the final achievement. Witnessing is a step lower than *nirvikalpa samādhi*. Pure Consciousness is contentless. Witness consciousness is pure Consciousness reflected in a pure and stable mind, that is, a *sattvic* mind. It is neither purely material nor purely Spiritual. When mind and Spirit associate, the phenomenon of relative consciousness takes place. When this relative consciousness is very, very refined due to the *sattvic* mind, it is called witnessing consciousness. Its final culmination is the establishment of the Seer in Itself, which is the highest goal of Patañjali’s system of *yoga*. It does not enable you to realize the *Saguṇa* aspect of Reality. It leads to the experience of the *Nirguṇa* aspect of absolute Reality.”

In summary, when practising the witnessing method Swamiji would experience three stages:

- i. The trinity of the witness, the object of the witness and witnessing.
- ii. The disappearance of the object of the witness, and being the witness of the blankness of mind (witnessing consciousness).



A painting of Swamiji on the forested island in the early 1960's.

iii. The no-mind state of *Nirvikalpa samādhi*.

Regarding the process of entering *nirvikalpa samādhi* through the practice of *japa*, we have a priceless answer given by Swamiji in response to a devotee during a private interview which took place in the summer of 1998 during Swamiji's visit to Europe. The devotee requested Swamiji to describe what he does during an everyday meditation and what he experiences. Swamiji replied as follows:

“For me the meditation simply stops the mental activity going on, as it were, on the surface of the ocean of Consciousness. And it takes a particular way, which I had practised for many years during the period of my *sādhana*, to that effect.

“When I sit in meditation, I just turn the direction of awareness inside and I find a *mantra* going on inside. I simply listen to it and the attention is totally drawn into it. It gives a peculiar joy to feel the vibrations of the *mantra* and this joy goes on growing. It takes only a few minutes to be absorbed in that joy. Then the *mantra* stops and a presence of something envelopes all the cells as well as the mind — as if the physical, mental and astral (parts) were dissolving into that presence. The distinction of the experience, the experiencer and the experienced fades away. After that, or as it happens, a simple, contentless Awareness remains, which itself is very transporting and blissful.”

“At the time of sitting in meditation there is an idea or *sankalpa* to keep sitting (in meditation) for a certain period. When that period is over, a jolt in the body-mind is felt, and I find myself in the state in which I had started the meditation.”

Thus over a period of three years, Swamiji continued having the experience of the Self for longer and longer durations, during both witnessing meditation and the practice of *japa*. Initially, the experience was so powerful and overwhelming that when his consciousness emerged from the non-dual state and returned to the normal plane, everything appeared to him as an illusion, an unreal dream. However, over time, as the experience came to him repeatedly and for longer periods, he gradually began to integrate it in his daily life and it progressively transformed and divinized his whole personality and perspective. Finally by the year 1961, he became firmly established in this experience forever. At that time he was staying in his thatched hut on the forested island near Haridwar.

Swamiji explains the process of experience turning to Realization as follows: “When this non-polar experience of one’s timeless and eternal Self, which is not bound by time, space and causality, comes again and again, it starts purifying all the parts of the personality and its duration becomes longer and longer. Finally, it becomes permanent and never leaves. When a soul becomes aware of its essential Nature through first-hand and direct experience and becomes permanently established in that experience, it is called Self-Realization. The experience alone does not free the soul from the vicious cycle of birth and death; only Realization frees the soul.”

“*Sākṣhatkāra* literally means face-to-face or direct experience. During *sākṣhatkāra*, the senses come to a standstill, the mind stops and the intellect does not function. The Spirit, disidentified with the mind, remains established in Itself. That is the *sākṣhatkāra* of the *Ātmā*. In Realization, the

sākṣhatkāra becomes stabilized and is never lost. I'll tell you an example. You see a rope in the darkness and mistake it for a snake, and you become scared. Then a flash of lightning comes and you see that it is not a snake but a rope, and your fear goes. As the darkness has not yet completely disappeared, you may again take the rope for a snake and again become scared. But when the sun rises, and it is day, the darkness disappears, and the delusion of the snake in the rope also disappears. The experience of *samādhi* is like the twilight, or like a flash of lightening. Realization is like the daylight.”

“Awakening, Experience, Enlightenment/Illumination, Realization and Fulfilment — this is the chronological order. Through awakening, based on deep reflection and discrimination, you come to know what is unreal and become inspired to follow the path of Truth. In rare cases, the experience may come before awakening but it does not last, it comes like a flash and goes. It comes again and again and goes again and again, transforming your personality. When you have the experience again and again, you get Enlightenment. Slowly and gradually, it starts stabilizing. When the experience is stabilized, it is Realization. There is no need to quote any other mystic or Master or scripture when you have realized the Truth. When one has thus realized all the different aspects of the Divine, it is Fulfilment.”

Impact of Self-Realization

As Swamiji tasted the pure joy of the *Ātmā* and in due course became established in the experience, it comprehensively divinized him from within and without. The devotees



Jhāḍī days (1960's).

who came in contact with him in those days perceived divinity literally emanating from him. The unmistakable charm of the *Ātmā* was written all over his persona. He was a fountain of peace, tranquillity and dispassion.

In Swamiji's words: "*Nirguṇa sthiti* (i.e. to be established in *Nirguṇa*) means that the impact of *Saguṇa* incidents on the *sādhaka* becomes less and less. The experience of *Nirguṇa* leaves an impact on the body in the same way as it influences the mind. The inner and outer movements of the body become slower and one feels as if there is no body. Realization means total purification of mind. It remains not only in meditation but also in the waking state — in all the states."

Another impact of Self-Realization was that Swamiji became free of the fear of death. The fear of death is said to be the mother of all fears. Because of the direct Realization of the timeless, changeless, deathless Divine Reality as his own true Self, he was able to completely break off his identification with his physical, subtle and causal bodies. That is why when someone takes his photo he laughingly says, "It is not *my* picture." Having broken the identification with the body, the fear of death was thus totally eradicated in him.

For years now we have observed that while using his body, senses and mind as his instruments and treating them with love and care, Swamiji is not at all identified with them, which is why he spontaneously refers to himself in the third person as "this body" instead of "I" while narrating some past incident, such as, "When this body lived in the cave in Jammu..."

About his state of mind in those days, Swamiji revealed to us that as a result of directly realizing the *Ātmā*, he felt deep detachment towards all things and situations. Nothing influenced him. While he himself felt like a centre of pure Consciousness, he saw no substance, no charm in this world or worldly things. He would therefore be drawn again and again to sit in meditation and enjoy the profound peace of the pure Spirit. That state is quite different from how he deals with this world today, as if dealing with God in every person and every thing. We will see later how in the course of his further realizations, his consciousness expanded to experience the Divine in the outer objective world as well.

Lastly, we would do well to remember that all along, while having the *Nirguṇa* experience, he was performing his *sāadhanā* with the spirit of total surrender to God. He continued with the practice of *japa* of the Lord's holy name with the same faith and devotion even after achieving the *Nirguṇa* experience and Realization. Through divine grace, utter humility and divine intuition, he discerned that he still had further to go.

Thereafter, from a station where even the great *yogīs* get stuck, Chandra Swami moved on and on, keeping himself open, receptive and docile to the tender touches and calls of the Divine. From here on his *sāadhanā* and realizations took another turn and he started getting glimpses of the infinite glory, power, sweetness and grace of the Lord, the Master of this universe, *Īshvara* – the almighty God and compassionate Father and Mother of all.

God-Realization

Supermind: The means of Divine Intuition

Before detailing Swamiji's supramental experiences, which finally culminated in God-Realization, it is necessary to briefly explain the nature of the supermind.

The term supramental has been used extensively by Shri Aurobindo, but here we will look at it as explained by Swamiji. Of course, Swamiji duly reminds us, "It is not possible for an ordinary mind to understand and comprehend the higher states of mind without experiencing these states first-hand, in the same way as it is not possible to explain the taste of sugar to one who has never eaten sugar."

What we generally call knowledge is the objective or relative knowledge obtained through the senses and/or through the thinking mind, which involves discrimination, comparison, etc. Higher than both sensory and mental knowledge is supramental knowledge, which is spontaneous knowledge based on intuition rather than logic. Supermind is the higher and more integrated, refined and evolved form of mind. Supermind manifests when the mind, having become totally pure and silent, is transcended.

Swamiji says that as the number six transcends five, but also includes five within it, so also supermind transcends and at the same time includes the ordinary mind. It means that although supramental knowledge is not comprehensible to the logical mind, it is not against it.

Another important characteristic of the supermind is that it reconciles and harmonizes that which appears paradoxical and contradictory to the ordinary mind. Again, there are many grades and levels of the supramental state, which manifest in the life of a *sādhaka* depending upon the purity, stability and evolution of mind. The higher the level, the higher is the degree of intuition and Awareness/Consciousness involved in it. In the highest supramental state, God or *Īshvara*, the omnipotent supreme conscious Power is directly realized. Though the supermind has many levels and grades, Swamiji often uses the term in its highest sense.

Swamiji beautifully illustrates the distinction between instinctive knowledge, mental knowledge and supramental knowledge in the following words:

“Intuition is of many grades. There is the intuition of the senses, as well as the intuition of the mind and the intuition of the supermind. The intuition of the senses is active or working in wild animals and, to a certain extent, in pet animals too. The intuition of the mind works only in the purified and quiet mind. For the supermind, the intuition is spontaneous. Intuition is a higher means of knowledge. Knowledge gained directly and immediately, without depending on instinct, senses and mind is called supramental intuition. It is a sort of revelation that flashes when the mind is completely silent and pure, when it is not the slave of one’s senses.”

“Supermind is a much more evolved form of the mind in which the divine attributes of God are expressed. In the supermind the mind has been completely transformed or sublimated, just as water becomes steam. One who is established in the supermind, rises up beyond the limitation of discrimination, as also beyond the partial intuition of mental consciousness, and performs all acts through supramental intuition, in the form of entirely spontaneous activity.”

As Swamiji was endowed with exceptional purity and a deeply peaceful disposition right from childhood, the supermind manifested in his early life even as a child, when he would sometimes come to know of future events or when he would become absorbed in *samādhi*, losing body consciousness. Later, in his monastic life, the supramental state started to manifest in his meditations and, as we have seen, he had different types of spiritual experiences, including visions of great saints and *avatārs*, brilliant divine light, hearing a thrilling sound at the heart centre, and deep spiritual ecstasy. These experiences in fact were gained in the state of what is called *savikalpa samādhi* in which one experiences the *Saguṇa* aspect of the Divine.

As a result of having high and transporting supramental visions and experiences during meditation, gradually the supermind started manifesting and transforming Swamiji’s outer life as well. For an ordinary person, the worldly objects and situations are not exactly what one’s senses and conditioned mind present them to be. In other words, for such a one, even the perception of objective reality is erroneous; it is tainted and distorted by attachment, aversion, fear and conditioning. As for Swamiji, he was granted a



Visiting the home of a devotee in the early 1960's.

deep, piercing insight into the true nature of objective reality based on an unbiased, accurate and fair understanding of things and situations. He started seeing the world without the glasses of likes and dislikes. This enabled him to evaluate clearly the things belonging to this relative and objective world and deal with them accordingly. Now, living at his holy feet for so many years, we, the devotees, are amazed to see what a great adept he is, remaining in a state of perfect relaxation even in his dealings with the changing world phenomena, full of the pairs of opposites.

There is another perceptible feature of Swamiji's *sādhanā* during this period. He began to feel the presence and hand of a Divine Conscious Power behind everything and all happenings. His whole vision started becoming divinised and all his actions began to be guided by the supramental touch of the Divine.

The following dialogue sheds further light on the nature of the supramental experience:

Question: When your mind is completely silent in meditation and there is no movement of thought, do you still perceive something that is moving, since life is going on?

Swamiji: When mind stops thinking, many things can happen:

1. You may fall asleep.
2. The experience of the true Self, the *Ātmā*, may come.
3. The supermind may take over.

Question: What is supermind?

Swamiji: The mind splits the existence. The mind divides. It is the instrument of making comparisons. The mind knows only through making comparisons. So it cannot grasp the Truth that is One.

The supermind unites. It unifies the apparent differences. It is the instrument of perceiving/experiencing unity in diversity. When the supermind begins to manifest, you start feeling unity in diversity. The process of reconciliation of opposites begins in feeling and seeing.

Question: Can this also happen in the normal waking state?

Swamiji: Yes.

As indicated by the above answers, when the mind becomes completely silent and when one does not fall asleep, one may either have the experience of *Nirguṇa*, or one may have some supramental experience depending upon the *sanskāras* (psychological make-up of the *sādhaka*) or as per the Divine Will.

Similarly, it also follows that in the case of some seekers, *Īshvara* or *Saguṇa Brahman* may be realized first and *Nirguṇa Brahman* later, and for others like Swamiji, *Nirguṇa* is realized first and *Saguṇa* afterwards. And, in some cases, a sage may have only the realization of either *Saguṇa* or *Nirguṇa*, but these realizations, though very high, cannot be said to be integral.

In Swamiji's words: "Both *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa* are two aspects of the Absolute. Therefore the ultimate *Saguṇa* experience is not inferior to the *Nirguṇa* experience and does not necessarily precede the latter. As Saint Kabir says:

*Nirguṇa to hai pitā hamārā, aur Saguṇa mehtārī
Kā ko nindoò kā ko bandoò, dono palle bhārī.*

Nirguṇa is my father and *Saguṇa* my mother; whom to praise and whom to belittle when both are evenly weighted?"

God-Experience & God-Realization

We now once again return to the momentous year of 1961, where we find Swamiji living in solitude on the forested island near Sapta Sarovar, Haridwar. By this time Swamiji was firmly rooted in the experience of *Nirguṇa Brahman* — also called Self-Realization. Thus while he was ceaselessly enjoying the bliss of pure Existence or relationless *Ātmā* untainted by name, form or activity, towards the end of 1961, his spiritual journey took another great leap. He had the first direct experience of *Īshvara*, the omnipotent and compassionate Master and loving Father of this universe. Though he had previously had numerous supramental experiences of a lower level, this was the first time he experienced first-hand the sweet Lord in all His majesty. Thus from *Nirguṇa*, he once again entered the realm of *Saguṇa*, the realm of Supreme Conscious Power. He was then thirty-one years old. This substantial experience, too, came to him during his early morning meditation.

In his great work *The Practical Approach to Divinity*, Swamiji has beautifully described this process of entering from *Nirguṇa* into the realm of God experience/*Saguṇa* in the following words:

“Further on, Consciousness, ever remaining established in its immovable poise, again looks, as it were, outwards and begins to assimilate the ‘All’ in itself and gradually realizes its essential oneness in and with the ‘All’.”

When asked to explain the above expression in terms of his own personal experience, Swamiji clarified that at this stage he started getting glimpses of *Īshvara*/God without losing his experience of the Self. Thus he now had the direct experience of the dynamic aspect of the Divine which

is secretly, spontaneously and perfectly controlling this universe of name and form. When asked to describe this experience in a few words, Swamiji wrote a *mahāvākya* from the Upanishads: “*Sarvam Khalvidam Brahman,*” meaning “This whole universe is verily *Brahman.*”

The following dialogue, gathered from numerous interviews with Swamiji, shed further light on the nature of this experience.

SPV: Please tell us more about your first direct experience of *Īshvara* during your early morning meditation in the year 1961.

Swamiji: In the experience of *Īshvara* one sees God in all names and forms. The literal meaning of the word *Īshvara* is the One endowed with glory and power. It is also termed as *Saguṇa Brahman*, which means the Absolute Reality with attributes. It is the dynamic aspect of the Absolute. In God experience one directly experiences the essential Being of God, which is *Sat-Chit-Ānanda* — Absolute Existence, Consciousness & Bliss — as well as His phenomenal attributes as creator, sustainer and destroyer of this universe. That is to say, one also has the first-hand experience of His omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, compassion and infinite grace.

SPV: Kindly explain the distinction between *nirvikalpa samādhi*, which came to you earlier, and the experience of God/*Īshvara*.

Swamiji: There are many types of *samādhis*. Broadly they have been divided into two categories: *nirvikalpa samādhi* and *savikalpa samādhi*. In *nirvikalpa samādhi* all the names, forms and attributes or *guṇas* are transcended. In the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* the soul is fully aware, but its mind

becomes totally and absolutely passive and merges in what is called *Nirguṇa Brahman*, the attributeless aspect of the Divine. In that state the soul does not experience any aspect or state belonging to this world composed of the three *guṇas* or qualities. There Consciousness shines in Its pristine purity. When one has had only the experience of *Nirguṇa Brahman*, the world of name and form is seen as only a dream and not real.

Savikalpa samādhi is of many kinds and has many dimensions and aspects. During *savikalpa samādhi* the soul can have the experience of any other world. There are many subtle worlds which are not experienced by a common person. One can know about the past as well as the future. One can become aware of incidents which took place a hundred years ago as if one is seeing them directly. One can know about people living in distant lands. In *savikalpa samādhi* the field of perception of the five senses becomes very much widened. A person in the state of *savikalpa samādhi* can also know the minds of others. And so many other extraordinary powers may manifest in a person in the state of *savikalpa samādhi*.

In the highest *savikalpa samādhi*, God/*Īshvara* — the Supreme Father/Mother, the omnipotent controller of this universe — is directly experienced. God is not a physical or mechanical power. He is the supreme conscious intelligent Power — *Chetan Shakti*. The higher is the experience in the realm of *Saguna*, the higher is the element of Consciousness and light of Awareness in that experience. In the experience of *Īshvara*, the infinite Consciousness reflected in and through the supermind is experienced because *Īshvara* is the highest *Saguna* principle.

As explained earlier, a long period is required before an experience stabilizes into permanent Realization. In Swamiji's case, it took three or four years for God-experience to settle and stabilize in him. Meanwhile, he also continued to experience *nirvikalpa samādhi* during his meditations. Therefore this period of three or four years was not only a period of stabilization of the God-experience, but also a period of integration and assimilation of the *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa* experiences. This is something not comprehensible logically because intellectually *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa* are two extreme opposites. But this miracle was quietly taking place in the solitude of the forested island. Finally around the year 1964, Swamiji became firmly established in the highest *Saguṇa* experience, a state he calls God-Realization.

Impact of God-Realization

The impact of God-Realization on Swamiji was that he felt intimately in his day-to-day activities that the entire world was reflecting God's unsurpassed glory. He saw divine beauty and harmony in all the apparent paradoxes and unending multiplicity. The world which had previously appeared to him as a mere illusion, a shadow and a purposeless play of the *guṇas*, as a result of the realization of the *Nirguṇa* aspect, now appeared to him as a grand stage of God's *līlā* (divine sport) with divine meaning, purpose and beauty behind everything and every being.

In his own words: "In the state of God-Realization one directly feels that the whole world is moving in *Saguṇa*, that it is God's Power alone which is controlling this uni-



At the home of a devotee in the 1960's.

verse and that everything is happening as per God's Will; the soul is merely an instrument, but a conscious instrument. Then all the pairs of opposites like justice and injustice, pain and pleasure, etc. appear to be part of the divine *līlā* (*vyāvahārik*) and not real or Absolute (*pārmārthic*).”

“The impact of God-Realization on the mind is that a man always feels inner joy in all favourable or unfavourable situations. This world is commonly felt as the pairs of opposites, composed of pleasure and pain, loss and gain, birth and death, etc. God-Realization enables the devotee to transcend these pairs of opposites and to feel oneness in one and all. But even so, the behaviour of a realized one is not equal towards everyone. How can a realized person behave with a dog and a man in the same way?”

When asked to describe the state of a realized one, Swamiji writes, “A God-Realized person, when he is looking inwards, sees God inside. When he is looking outwards, he sees God outside. When in the highest *nirvikalpa samādhi* he experiences oneness. When in the highest *savikalpa samādhi* he experiences one in many and many in one.”

Regarding the sequence of spiritual experiences, this writer requested Swamiji to kindly clarify about the commonly held belief that the *sādhaka* first has the experience of *Saguna* and then that of *Nirguna*. As we have seen, in Swamiji's case it was only after attaining Self-Realization that he had the direct experience of God and finally became God-Realized. His revealing response was as follows:

Swamiji: All seekers don't have spiritual experiences in the same order. Because there is a difference in the nature of the spiritual path, practice, inclination, and degree of aspiration, the nature of experiences of different aspirants is

also different. The Divine has infinite aspects. It can manifest itself in any form and any attribute. For example, many people visit supermarkets which have all kinds of things on display. But different people are attracted to and see different things according to their interest and liking. They don't see everything. Similarly, man's mind is conditioned and it sees what it wants to see. The rest it ignores. Therefore it is not necessary that all *sādhakas* first have the experiences of different worlds, *Īshvara* and then that of *Nirguṇa*. It is possible that one first has the experience of *Nirguṇa* and then of *Īshvara*/God, as in the case of Totapuri.

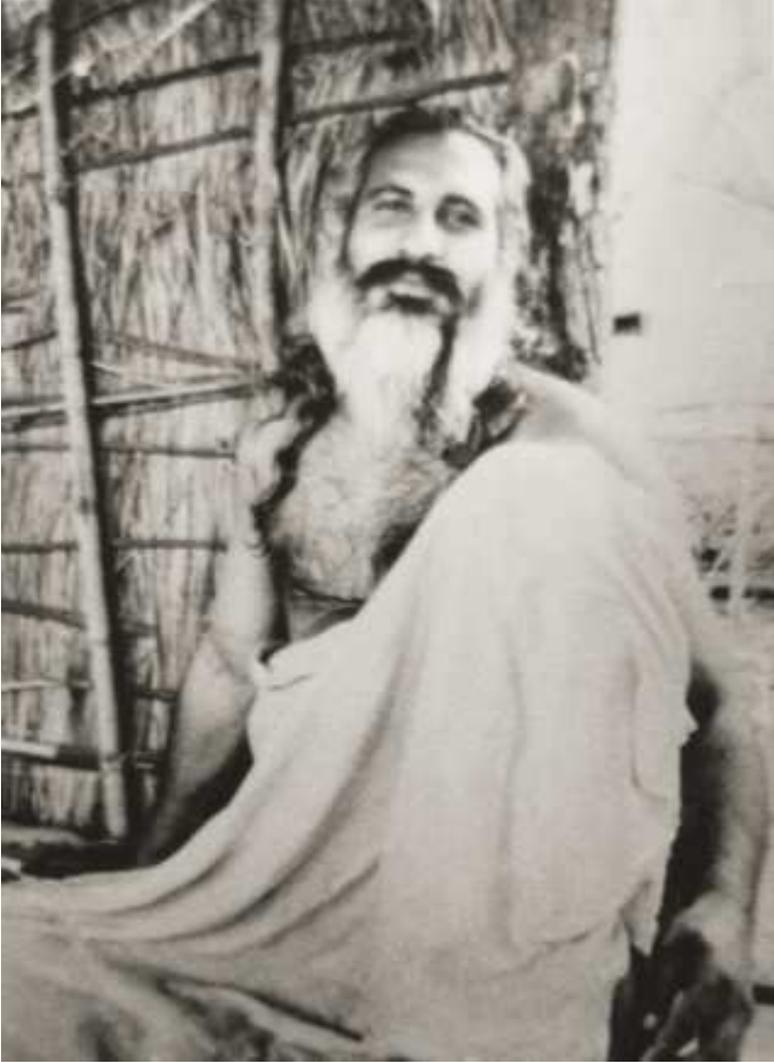
When Totapuri first came to Ramakrishna, he had had only the experience of *Nirguṇa Brahman*. He took the world of name and form as a dream, and *Nirguṇa Brahman* as the only Reality. The Divine Mother brought Totapuri to Ramakrishna so that he could have the experience of *Saguṇa Brahman* as well. Ramakrishna had the experience of *Nirguṇa Brahman* because of Totapuri and Totapuri had the experience of *Saguṇa Brahman* because of Ramakrishna.

SPV: What happens to the *Nirguṇa* experience when the *Saguṇa* experience happens and vice versa?

Swamiji: At the time of the *Nirguṇa* experience, the *guṇas* and the forms still exist, but remain unmanifest. Similarly, in the *Saguṇa* experience, the *guṇas* are manifest but *Nirguṇa* is immanent in it. In fact *Nirguṇa* is the substratum of *Saguṇa*.

SPV: The physical body and mind have their own level of consciousness and all the experiences come to the soul while it is still in the body-mind. In what way is the body-mind influenced by the *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa* experiences?

Swamiji: In a way, physical/mental consciousness is associated with all the spiritual experiences. In the experience of



God-intoxicated Swamiji sitting inside his thatched hut in the 1960's.

Nirguṇa the mind and body consciousness become as if suspended temporarily during the period of *samādhi*. In the *Sagūṇa* experience the mind is absorbed in the object of contemplation and is taken over by the supermind, but as long as the physical body is there, the physical consciousness is also associated with the spiritual experiences one has, no matter whether they are *Nirguṇa* or *Sagūṇa* in nature. Does a realized one not feel hungry? But the realized one is never deluded by this association of the physical element with his spiritual experiences.

As opposed to the *Nirguṇa* experience, in the experience of *Sagūṇa* there is the high and the low; there is the omnipotence of God and the limited power of the soul. In the experience of *Sagūṇa Brahman*, the devotee experiences the presence of God, but God's attributes like omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience are not acquired by the devotee. It is so because the physical body and the mind of the soul have their own limitations. Therefore, a devotee may have a very strong body, but he can never be omnipotent.

SPV: In other words, the physical body poses a limitation even for the realized one?

Swamiji: As long as the gross physical body remains, there is not complete union with God, but the realized one is not affected by this world of multiplicity. This state is called *jīvan mukti*. The physical body drops when the identification with all these bodies — gross, subtle and causal is also broken because, all the fruits of past karmas have been exhausted. This is called *videh mukti*. Similarly, one rooted in the *Nirguṇa* experience is also a *jīvan mukta* and later, upon shedding the body, *videh mukta*.

Liberation makes the soul free from the pairs of opposites like pain and pleasure. In Hinduism there are many kinds of liberation (*mukti*) and the liberated souls are free to be born again to help the *sādhakas* as an instrument of the Divine. However, if they are reborn, they are not bound by the law of *karma*.

We sum up this description of Swamiji's God-Realization by again quoting *The Practical Approach to Divinity* in which he so beautifully alludes to his God intoxicated state:

“Please believe that God does exist and that He is exceedingly sweet, loving and compassionate. He is ever conversing with you, but you do not hear His sweet divine song because of the disturbing noise of the doubts of your sceptical intellect and the tumult of the uncontrolled impulses of your heart. Had you the Eyes, you would see Him in the twinkling of the stars! Had you the Ears, you would hear Him in the throbbing of your heart and beating of your pulse! Had you the Heart, you would feel His presence even in a speck of dust! And then, filled to the brim with the feeling of the omnipresence of your sweet Lord, you would joyfully exclaim, ‘This whole world is verily *Brahman*’ — ‘*sarvam khalvidam brahman.*’ How engrossingly sweet and irresistibly transporting it is, O Lord, to find oneself in Thy loving arms and in Thy soothing lap!”

Fulfilment

Onward to the Spiritual Summit

It is now around 1964 and Swamiji has been living in his thatched hut for the last four years in the utter solitude of the forested island, surrounded by the holy Ganges. The blessed island is a mute witness to the young monk's amazing spiritual life flowering amidst an array of innumerable spiritual experiences and realizations.

During this period, the process of integration and harmonization of the different aspects of the supreme Godhead was taking place in Swamiji. Meanwhile, Swamiji was persevering in his *sādhanā*, moving on and on with full vigilance and valour, and in the spirit of total self-surrender. Though he had realized both the *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa* aspects of the Divine, still, due to divine grace leading his way and his own extraordinary ability to feel its tender touches, he knew he still had to go further ahead; the ultimate summit had yet to be reached. But by now he had an unmistakable and ceaseless awareness that he was marching ahead with his hand firmly held by his beloved Guru, Baba Bhuman Shahji.

Here we may recall the prophetic words of the great saint, Gurmukh Singhji, uttered in April 1953 during Swamiji's first visit to the *jhāḍī*, "I see a very bright spiritual future for you. And I somehow feel that you will come

here again one day for taking the final plunge in the ocean of supreme divine Consciousness.” Indeed his words turned out to be true, for it was amidst the towering trees of this forested island that Swamiji attained the highest spiritual summit, called Fulfilment.

While Swamiji’s spiritual boat was sailing on fast and uninterruptedly, outwardly his life was as organized, balanced and self-reliant as ever. This writer had the privilege of having his *darshan* in 1964 on the forested island, as did many other devotees. Swamiji was a beacon of peace and dynamic love, with an indescribable divine aura and magnetism. His elegant physical body was also exceptionally well-built and strong, emanating purity all around. The fact that his body, mind and subconscious could bear and assimilate the massive impact of so many spiritual experiences, especially the impact of the realization of the cosmic Divine Power or *Daivī Shakti*, is indicative of his huge physical, mental and spiritual strength.

Another important fact to remember is that while all these spiritual transformations were quietly taking place in him and his consciousness was soaring higher and higher, there were no outward signs of this except his palpable spiritual aura and charm. He had an exceptional power to contain and assimilate these sublime experiences without showing any overt sign on the physical or mental level. We hear in the lives of so many great sages that their physical bodies suffered a lot as a result of the impact of high spiritual experiences. This happens because of the big gap between the physical consciousness of the aspirant and the spiritual impact of the experience. As Shri Ramakrishna once said to Swami Vivekananda when explaining the different capacities of different devotees, “When a huge elephant enters a

small pond, a great commotion is set up, but when it plunges into the Ganges, the river shows very little agitation. These devotees [who go into ecstasy, shed tears, dance, etc] are like small ponds; a little experience makes their feelings flow over the brim. But you are a huge river.” This is an indication of how profound and pure Swamiji’s consciousness was. During his stay in the *jhāḍī*, occasionally Swamiji went to Jammu and Srinagar and visited many of his devotees without discussing or letting anyone know about his inner spiritual life.

Nothing describes Swamiji’s journey at this point of time better than a rare letter which Swamiji wrote to a devotee sometime around 1964 while living in the *jhāḍī*:

Sapta Sarovar Jhāḍī,
Haridwar (1964)

Beloved Sweet *Ātmā*,

I finished well my two months *kāṣṭha mouna* yesterday by the Lord’s grace. He is, indeed, most engrossingly sweet; so His holy name and so His communion! May He ever draw us all closer and closer to Himself!

It has now been a period of twelve years since I came out from the so called home, or rather since I again turned and started back to ‘Home’. It was inevitable; I was not, perhaps, made to be satisfied like a common man, by the physical view which the deceiving senses give us of this world. During this lapse — a period which may be considered so small in the pursuit of the Infinite — many disciplines, some of them most searchingly difficult, dangerous and painful, had to be undertaken and many ordeals to be passed through. For most of this period, it was, as it



In the late 1960's.

were, a play of hide and seek; most of the way full of ups and downs; most of the movement was like that of a pendulum oscillating between exaltations and intense *viraha*. But gratefully humbled do I feel when I write that the Lord has ever been lifting me up and supporting me always, like a most benevolent mother who, of her own accord, looks after and rears her innocent but helplessly ignorant child! He has not forsaken me in any way — a thing that I can say most confidently — and has proved true to His promises and pledges made in the scriptures for those who seek His refuge and wholeheartedly depend upon Him. He, the most compassionate Father and eternal Guide, has endowed me with an inner vision, peace and poise which no place, power or wealth of the world could snatch.

Despite all this, I know that there is yet a long journey ahead; but it is now a different matter — as different as walking straight in the light and probing in the darkness. The remaining ‘gulf’ has now to be bridged up under the constant irresistible spell of His Love, Light and *Ânanda*. Glory ever be unto the Lord.

Should I be an optimist to think that you carry on well with your *bhajan* and *sevâ kârya* (charitable activities)? During the daytime, besides sitting in prayer and meditation in the early mornings and late evenings, you can relax for a minute or two in your very chair in your clinic, lower your eyelids and whisper silently in your heart: “I am Thine, Lord; pray, take me into Thy fold.” This can be repeated every two hours or so — a very simple thing to do, but very effective. And after all, what does it cost us? A simple wish, an honest aspiration and nothing more.

Yours in divine Love,
Chandra Swami

So, as Swamiji himself described, now the journey was no longer tedious or thorny, and the approach no longer like groping in the dark. It was like the journey of a prince returning to his kingdom in broad daylight on the royal path. The journey itself was transporting and blissful.

About the indescribable joy he felt on his spiritual journey he writes the following words in *Spiritual Gems*: “They say there is bliss in God-attainment? There is no doubt about it. But there is also a celestial joy in God-search. Ask those whose hearts beat in God’s love, those whose innermost feelings remain brimming, ever and ever for Him, and whose eyes are ever a trickle for His sight, what pleasure there is in pursuing Him!”

Realization of *Nirguṇa-Sagūṇa*

Before attaining the ultimate experience, Swamiji had two more major experiences which he has chosen not to express. Perhaps they are too mystical, too sacred for our understanding. He has often told us that in spirituality not all experiences can or should be revealed. He did go so far as to say that one of those experiences was an experience of yet another aspect of the Absolute which he called *Nirguṇa-Sagūṇa*. When asked to describe the nature of *Nirguṇa-Sagūṇa*, Swamiji replied:

“It is not possible to understand or grasp it with the mind. That is why the Vedas, after describing the different aspects of God, later declared ‘*neti, neti*’ meaning ‘not this, not this.’ The Supreme Divine Principle is the One without a second. Everything has been manifested from it and ultimately everything merges back into it.”



Swamiji sitting in his thatched hut on the bank of the Ganges where he used to meet visiting devotees .

We remember that the great Ramakrishna Paramahansa also expressed his inability to describe some of his high spiritual experiences. He would say metaphorically, “Someone shuts my mouth and doesn’t let me speak about those experiences.”

Although Swamiji declined to limit this experience within the confines of words, he did confirm that the experience of *Nirguṇa-Saguna* came to him after God-Realization and that this experience was more integral than the previous experiences.

Fulfilment: Realization of the Absolute

Finally, with the direct unreserved grace of God, Swamiji had the integral experience of the Absolute Reality in all its aspects. Should we talk in terms of time about that timeless ultimate experience, it happened around 1964 during the early morning meditation. Swamiji was then only thirty-four years old. All the apparently paradoxical aspects of the Absolute (*Brahman*) were harmoniously reconciled in the light of this integral experience. His Self-Realization and God-Realization began turning into an integral Universal-Realization. The distinction between Self and non-Self or between ‘am’ and ‘is’ vanished completely. He then realized a complete harmony between the silent, passive, immutable *Ātmā* on the one hand and the universal dynamic power of the Divine on the other hand; between the formless, unqualified, transcendental Reality and the qualified, immanent, all-inclusive aspect of the Divine.

Swamiji tells us, “It may take years and years of unbroken *sādhana* to achieve the highest meditation. Purity of

heart and stability of mind are the essential prerequisites. Once you have that experience, it changes your perception and slowly and gradually, when you are established in it, you feel the oneness with the Divine in your day-to-day activities, and it is called *sahāja samādhi*. *Sahaja samadhi* implies when the *samādhi* has become effortless.”

As with his other realizations, this integral experience started happening again and again and gradually permeated all the parts of his personality, enabling him to receive and absorb it in its fullness. By and by this integral experience turned into an unbroken, continuous and comprehensive Realization and became settled and well-rooted in Swamiji forever. The journey of many, many lives came to a blissful consummation. To put it in Swamiji’s words:

“In the Fulfilment of the perfect spiritual experience, the gulf between *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa*, between the Impersonal and Personal, between Nature and God, and between the active Self and passive Self, is completely bridged. All these powers, forms and principles are different aspects of one Existence, which are conceived by the being standing at the level of mental consciousness, that is, by the individual soul of man, as different from each other or even mutually contradictory. They enter into a harmonious oneness in the spiritual Absolute.”

“There are two types of experiences: there is experience and there is Experiencing. Fulfilment is Experiencing. It is not a phenomenon. It is timeless Reality. It is Absolute Consciousness. It means being established in the experience of all the aspects of Reality. Experience implies the triangle of the experiencer, the object of experience and the relationship between them. In Fulfilment the triangle merges into one. In fact it should not be called an experience. It

should be called Absolute Experiencing or Absolute Awareness. Experiencing is never lost. Experiencing is Consciousness. Experience is relative. Experiencing is Absolute. No experience is lasting. It is the Experiencing that is lasting.”

When persistently asked by this writer, Swamiji clarified that the process of stabilization of this ultimate experience went on for four to five years until 1968-1969; and the spell of *mâyâ* was broken forever.

Divine Grace

Swamiji unequivocally attributes all his inspiration, herculean efforts and achievements to the unreserved grace of his Gurudev, Baba Bhuman Shahji, the Master of his heart and soul. When asked what had motivated such a handsome, intelligent and promising youth as himself to give up everything in search of God, Swamiji replied:

“There are many factors, but the most important and essential is the grace of saints and grace of God, which transforms the life of a person and motivates one to renounce the worldly life and be devoted to *sâdhanâ* exclusively and wholeheartedly. It was the grace of a saint, Baba Bhuman Shahji, which motivated me to devote myself exclusively to the path of God-Realization.”

As for his many, many years of intense *sâdhanâ*, Swamiji humbly writes: “Those who realize the Truth never claim that it was due to their own efforts. All efforts are in time and space and the Truth is timeless and eternal. The unreserved divine grace must intervene from above and take the seeker beyond all limitations. So what if you even sacri-

face your life for God? There is an Urdu couplet in which the devotee says:

Jân dī, dī huī thī usīkī

haq to yeh hai ki haq adā na huā.

So what if I gave up my life for Him, for it was but a gift from Him! The truth is that I could not repay the due, even by sacrificing my life.

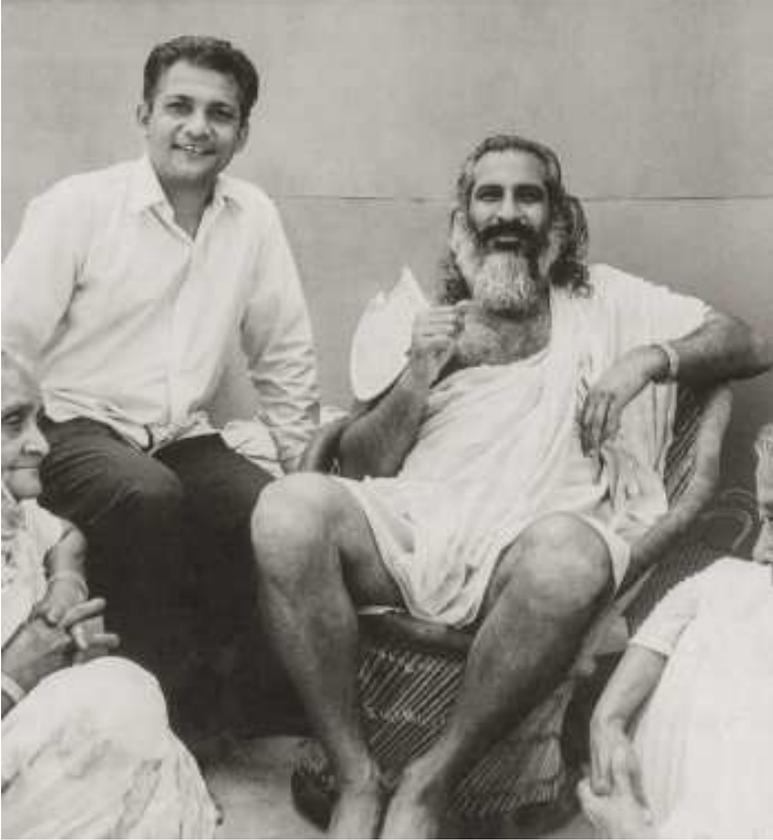
“When you see God face to face, directly, you find out that He is so great, limitless, infinite and your effort was so limited, so small. You would never say that you realized God with your own effort.”

Though Swamiji attributes all his attainments to the unreserved grace of God, we should not forget that it was the absolute humility and total self-surrender before the Lord and the all-out hardest effort on Swamiji’s part that attracted this grace. Therefore, all these elements have been dominant notes in the spiritual *rāga* (music) of Swamiji’s *sādhanā*. Below, laden with utter gratitude, Swamiji pours out his heart on the glory of self-surrender and divine grace:

“When all actions of your body, all thoughts of your mind, all love of your heart and all the queries of your intellect are oriented Godward, then only can you deserve God’s special grace which unites the devotee to the Lord and the seeker to the object of his search!”

“I tell you, for me there is not a greater truism than this, that God’s grace is a reality, and it is undoubtedly shown to individuals.”

Such was the extraordinary role of divine grace in Swamiji’s spiritual journey; it illuminated his path all along and led him to the pinnacle of spiritual felicity.



Swamiji with K.K Kapoor, a very old devotee who has kindly provided us with many of the photos shown in this book.

Impact of Integral Realization

Now we shall take a look at the impact of Swamiji's integral Realization and his divine *līlā* after attaining Fulfilment. We shall see how all his actions — big and small, important and routine — are visibly bathed in divine awareness and divinely inspired.

After Fulfillment, Swamiji's divine being was established in an ineffable blessed state in which on the one hand he constantly abided in the utter peace and tranquillity of the timeless *Ātmā*, and on the other hand he became a free instrument in the hands of the Supreme Lord who guided and inspired the smallest of his actions. Established in the highest supramental state, he became a centre of the beauty, bliss and *līlā* of the Divine.

One of the things which is obvious on the basis of direct observation of his day-to-day *līlā*, as well as his numerous answers and holy words on this topic, is that he experiences two divine states. First is his state of *samādhi* during his daily and regular meditations, and second is his state of *sahāja samādhi* in his balanced and sweet dealings with the world. Swamiji indicated to us that in his meditations, generally he enjoys contentless, non-dual divine Bliss, but sometimes he has the experience of the *Saguṇa* aspect of the Divine. In other words, to this day he experiences both *nirvikalpa* and *savikalpa samādhi* during his daily meditations.

Let us see what Swamiji says about the state of a realized one:

Devotee: When we realize God as 'the One without a second' do all relationships cease to exist?

Swamiji: How can there be a relationship in One? A relationship needs two. The realized one, when he or she opens his eyes, sees the Divine with form. When he goes within, he realizes the Divine as formless but with attributes. When in the non-polar meditation, or *nirvikalpa samādhi*, he is one with the absolute Divinity. The realized one is always with the Divine, in all the states, whether in the waking state, dream state, deep sleep state, or in *samādhi*. In the non-polar *samādhi*, the realized one is in absolute rest. In the other states, the realized one is playing with himself. You are alone only in the non-polar *samādhi*. In the non-polar *samādhi*, the relative perception stops all together.

Devotee: Swamiji, are you right now in the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*?

Swamiji (smiling): I am playing with you at this moment.

Since meditation and contemplation have been the mainstay of Swamiji's *sādhanā* right from the beginning, it is thrilling to learn about his personal daily meditation after his integral Realization. Here we have a rare collection of Swamiji's answers on this subject, which he gave during a personal interview in the summer of 1998 during his European trip. Mr. Jorg Butchner, a close devotee from Germany, was at that time writing a thesis on meditation and requested Swamiji to grant him an interview. Several key answers from this interview have been quoted earlier in the book, and thus are not repeated below.

Jorg: Most people tell me that the major problem in meditation is the wandering mind. Does it happen to you, and how do you deal with it?

Swamiji (smiling): That state is over since long, long ago.



In the home of a devotee in the late 1960's.

Jorg: So then can you tell me, since you are meditating for some decades, how did it develop? What were the major steps during the period of *sāadhanā*?

Swamiji: Well, during my *sāadhanā* I used to live a very disciplined life, practising some methods of making the mind silent: meditation, *japa* of a *mantra* and some breathing exercises. They helped me to stop the thinking process. But it was not so easy. It took many years of unceasing and regular practice.

Jorg: So the major effect or result of *sāadhanā* is the stopping of the mind?

Swamiji: Yes.

Jorg: Putting myself in a naive state I ask, “What is so particularly blissful in not thinking? How could you give a taste to an inexperienced person?”

Swamiji: By the effort you don’t find out something absolutely new. You simply come to be aware of your essential, simple, limitless Existence.

Jorg: Finding out is a mental process, which also may take place after the experience. But what do you personally live and feel when sitting?

Swamiji: It is not a feeling, it is Awareness.

Jorg: So I might ask, a little provocatively: Once you have found out, why do you do it again and again, so many times a day and all your life?

Swamiji: There is no need to repeat it at all. I sit with others so that the others should sit in meditation. If I sit alone, it is spontaneous and without any motive.

Jorg: So meditation is for you the first and major means to attain that state?

Swamiji: Yes.

Jorg: What major transitions do you experience when entering meditation?

Swamiji: Waking state, dreaming state and deep sleep state come and go in Awareness, which is always the same.

Jorg: After all, do you experience them as one and the same?

Swamiji: Yes.

Jorg: Is there even no difference between waking and sleeping and dreaming?

Swamiji: When the meditation is at its highest, it is devoid of the three states. These states cease to exist.

Jorg: What kind of Awareness is it that you are talking of?

Swamiji: As you have always been in one of these states, you cannot conceive of Awareness bereft of these states.

Jorg: You mean *turīya*?

Swamiji: Yes.

Jorg: What makes a meditation good or rather shallow?

Swamiji: The more the mind is absorbed, the more you feel good during meditation.

Jorg: Can you give us a first glimpse of that Awareness we don't know yet?

Swamiji: You can only say, "Not this, not this."

Jorg: Did you notice any change in your meditation practice before and after Enlightenment?

Swamiji: After enlightenment everything remains the same and yet everything changes. It is like a blind person getting eyesight. Meditation prepares you for enlightenment. Meditation means a sort of eye operation for the blind person.

Jorg: But did something change in your meditation practice?

Swamiji: The practice stops after Realization. It becomes effortless.

Many years ago Swamiji composed a *bhajan* on his *Iṣhta*, Lord Krishna, with the refrain based on a popular chant. It is the only time in his whole life that he composed a *bhajan* and it is sung regularly in his ashram to this day. In this *bhajan* he sings the glories of Lord Krishna, an incarnation of the Absolute in human form with all His apparently paradoxical attributes: doer-non-doer, immanent-transcendent, *Nirguṇa-Saguṇa*, as well as the one endowed with supreme grace who ever protects his dear devotees. Through this sweet hymn we also catch a glimpse of Swamiji integral divine state:

Swâgatam Kṛiṣhṇa, sharanâgatam Kṛiṣhṇa
Swâgatam, suswâgatam, suswâgatam Kṛiṣhṇa.

O Krishna! Thou art welcome in my heart, and always.
 Thou art my sole refuge. Thou art most welcome, most welcome.

Nirgunâtmâ Kṛiṣhṇa, Sagunâtmâ Kṛiṣhṇa
Sarvâtmâ Kṛiṣhṇa, Priyâtmâ Kṛiṣhṇa.

O Krishna! Thou art without attributes, and with attributes too, the beloved Self of one and all.

Dhukh bhanjanâ Kṛiṣhṇa, moh khandanâ Kṛiṣhṇa
Jag ranjanâ Kṛiṣhṇa, sukh mandanâ Kṛiṣhṇa.

O Krishna! Thou art the destroyer of sorrows and sufferings, the dispeller of delusion. Thou art so sweet and pleasing to all, the divine bestower of happiness, indeed!

Kartâ bhî tû Kṛiṣhṇa, akartâ bhî tû Kṛiṣhṇa
Drishtâ bhî tû Kṛiṣhṇa, bhartâ bhî tû Kṛiṣhṇa.

Thou art the only doer, and yet the non-doer. Thou art the eternal witness, and yet the sustainer of all, O Krishna.

Nirâkâr tû Kṛiṣhṇa, sâkâr tû Kṛiṣhṇa
Âdheya tû Kṛiṣhṇa, âdhâr tû Kṛiṣhṇa.

O Krishna! Thou art without form and with form. Thou art all manifestation as well as the ground of all manifestation.

Parmeshwarâ Kṛiṣhṇa, sarveshwarâ Kṛiṣhṇa

Sureshwarâ Kṛiṣhṇa, akhileshwarâ Kṛiṣhṇa.

O Krishna! Thou art the supreme Lord, the Master of all souls, the God of all gods.

Mad mâranam Kṛiṣhṇa, bhaya hâranam Kṛiṣhṇa

Man mohanam Kṛiṣhṇa, bandh nâshanam Kṛiṣhṇa.

The killer of arrogance, the destroyer of fear, art Thou; the charmer of the heart, the shatterer of bondage art Thou, O Krishna!

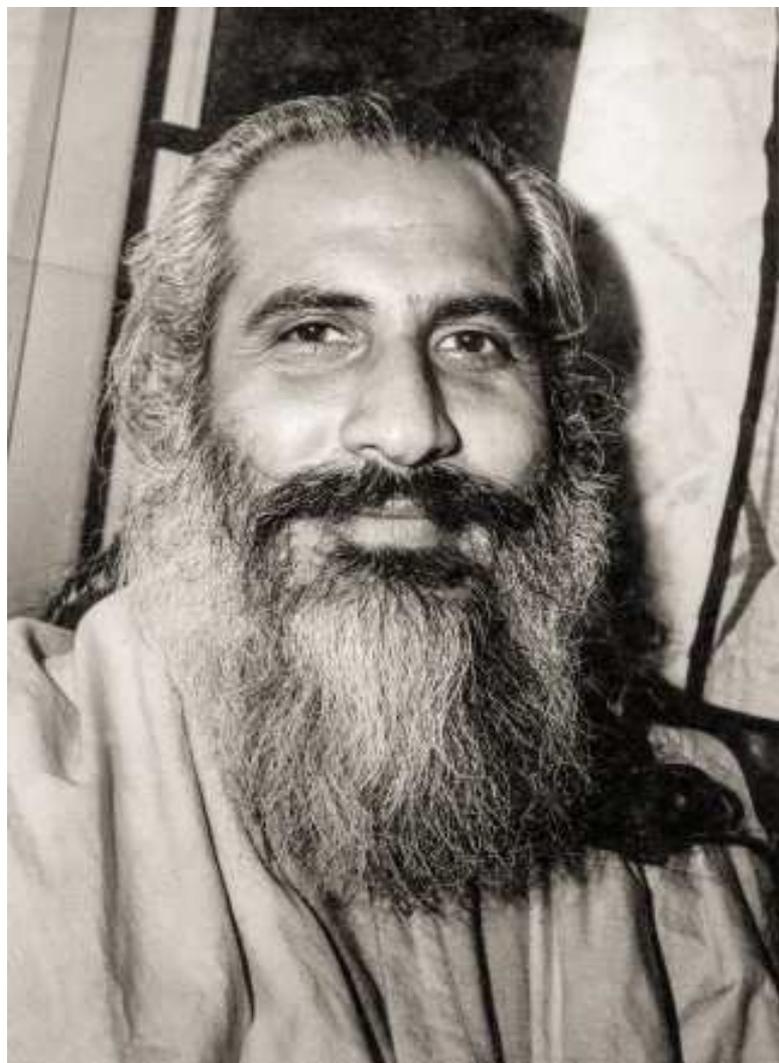
Let us sum up by turning once again to *The Practical Approach to Divinity* in which Swamiji describes the indescribable status of the blessed one rooted in the supramental state. Perhaps it would be impossible to express this rare state in such original and authentic words without tasting it first-hand:

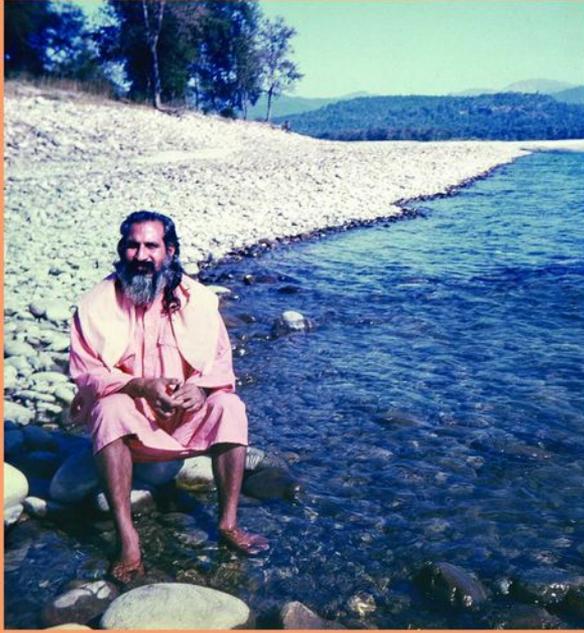
“The status of supramental Consciousness is actually beyond the grasp of the mind. It denotes the complete establishment of the whole being in the perfect *jñāna-vijñāna* (perfect Knowledge) which is at once passive and dynamic in relation to the world manifestation, at once essential and phenomenal, and at once the direct spiritual awareness of the supreme Being and a true intimate knowledge of the principles of His existence, *Prakṛiti*, *Puruṣa* and the rest. Rising up to this supramental state entirely expels and eliminates all the apparent limitations and dualities created and imposed upon us by the blundering mind — even the duality between awareness and activity is dispelled. This apart, the activities carried out through this supreme state of Consciousness are not based on mental discrimination, which always

works on the basis of the conception of the duality of the Real and the unreal. The actions performed by one possessed by, or at least in touch with, the supramental state are essentially divine, quite superior to those performed by and through perpetual strife among the modes of Nature (*guṇas*). In the highest supramental state, the transcendental divine play of the all-sided freedom of the Divine becomes manifest in such a being through *mahāmāyā*, the divine conscious Power.”

“Such a man does everything not through ego, but through divine inspiration, or say, whatever activities, spiritual or otherwise, are performed by such a *sādhaka*, they are actually performed by the divine Power. Raised to an exalted spiritual felicity, his whole life is transformed into a practical *yoga*, in which the world and God are totally reconciled and become essentially one. Consummately God-informed and God-filled, he lives in the Lord, moves in Him, breathes in Him and Him alone. All this is due to perfect surrender, which dissolves his individual existence and unites him with the Divine, both in His essential Being and in His divine universal action.”

Soon after his highest Realization, at the loving insistence of his devotees, and inspired by God’s will, Swamiji left the forested island to live in Sewak Niwas Ashram in Sapta Sarovar, Haridwar to share his divine being with all. That was in October 1970. Since then, inspired by God, his life, rather his *lilâ* has been a spontaneous and intuitive response to all situations and a ceaseless flow of divine joy and selfless love towards all.





“Every breath, every thought, every action, every emotion must be transformed into sadhana, into the remembrance of God. Only then can one realize God. This is the price of God-Realization.”

— Chandra Swami Udasin