

I

“I SHALL GIVE YOU A MANTRA”

We are not following the *guru*¹; the guru actually is following us. I say this because I have found it in my own life, my own personal experience, and I have seen it in the case of others, too. *Babaji* came to me himself, unsought, unknown. I had no need, no desire, no idea, but still he forced his *mantra* onto me.

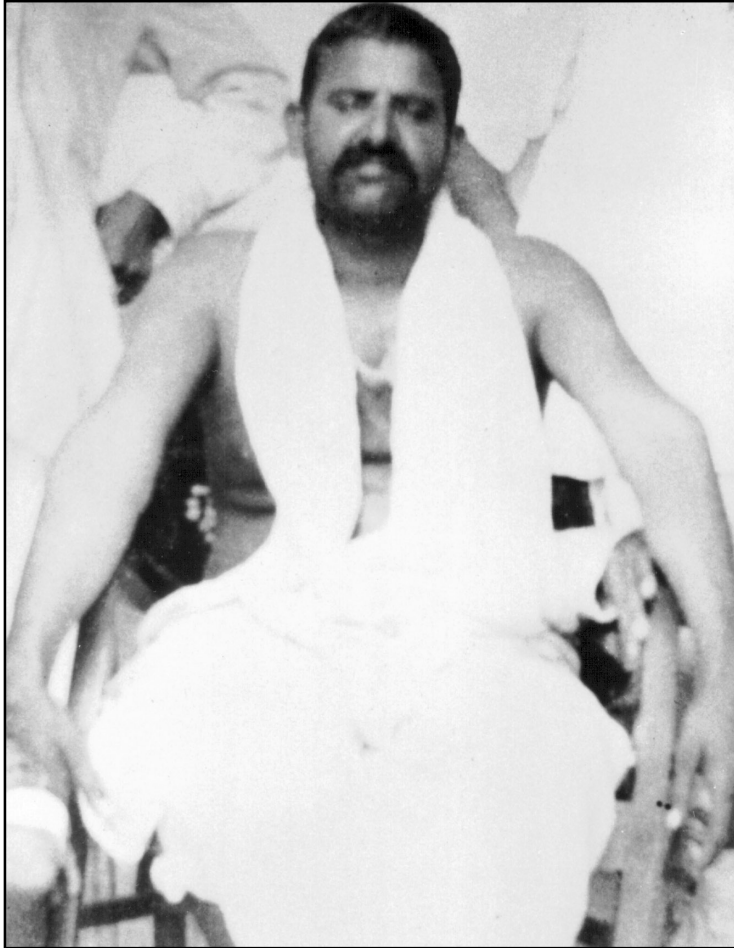
I came from a village in Bengal, which is now part of Bangladesh. We belonged to the landed property class and the income from our property was sufficient for the maintenance of the family, but there wasn't that much coming from it. We had in the India of those days the joint family system: father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt, children, all living together—a very big family. I was a small boy in that village in 1928, and I had the *sacred thread ceremony*. Just a few months after that my father died.

I had finished my village school education and the question was where I was to go for further study. Had my father been alive, we could have moved to some town or city where he could have earned money for this purpose, but now that was not possible. So I was sent to Allahabad to the home of a maternal uncle—the joint family system providing help and support. I read for exams there and after high school my uncle wanted me to get a job and earn money, rather than continue my education.

My uncle was transferred to another city and went away, but I was able to continue to stay in Allahabad at his house. No financial help was coming from anybody, I knew that very well, but somehow or other I knew that I must continue my studies. I took the only course open to a boy like that, which was to do some private tutoring. Every morning and evening I taught some children in their homes, earning just enough to manage. A number of years passed in this manner.

¹ The first appearance of each word found in the Glossary is italicized.

In 1935 I had done my undergraduate examination and had a two and a half month summer vacation. I went to my village near Calcutta, about 600 miles away from Allahabad. On the way, I visited some relations in Calcutta who asked me to stay with them for some



time. While staying there, I would purchase a tram ticket and move about the city for a whole day at a time.

One day I went to *Dakshineswar*. As I sometimes visited temples, I had been there before. Not that I had any religious interest in temples, but it was a very pleasant place on the bank of the river. It was the month of May, at about two o'clock in the

afternoon. It was so very hot that very few visitors were there—a few *sadhus* of the *ashram* were moving here and there. On the bank of the river Ganges there are rows of small *Shiva* temples, not very impressive, just *lingams*. Out of curiosity, I thought I should go and see every one of them. Not that I was interested, but I would be able to say that I had seen them all. When I came out of the fifth or sixth temple, there was a certain gentleman standing there. He was a bulky sort of fellow, with a moustache and a small beard, and a *dhoti* tucked around his waist.

He spoke to me in Hindi, “My son, you are a *brahmin*? I shall give you a mantra.”

I said I would not take it.

“No, no, I will give you a mantra.”

I said, “I have got no time for that, I do not believe in it.”

Actually, I was a nonbeliever in the sense that I was not doing any scriptures, any *puja* or prayer, and moreover, politically, I had become sympathetic to communism—reading about socialism and revolution and all those things that were of interest to my young group of friends. However, in India, religion is so much a part of life—the whole family tradition, the culture, the social life. I could call it superstition and be an atheist, but my mother, my grandmother, my nephew, my uncle, my neighbors are all part of the religion. All the celebrations, the entertainments, are in fact pujas, prayers, and dramas celebrating the lives of *Krishna* and *Rama*, so that you come to be affected by it, for good or for bad. As far as my mind or intellect was concerned, I was denying its effect. When this man said I must take a mantra, I said, “No. I have got no time for reciting your mantra.”

He said, “When you take your bath and recite the *Gayatri* mantra, you must do it then.”

I thought, “This is very strange. How did he know that?” When a brahmin gets his sacred thread, that is the mantra he is given. It is said to be the most sacred mantra for the brahmin. I did recite the *Gayatri* mantra, not because I understood the meaning or was interested in it, but simply because my father told me a brahmin boy must not forget this mantra. Had my father been living, perhaps I might not have obeyed, but since he died soon afterwards, I did it. So, how did the gentleman know this? It was certainly a very strange thing. In

order to get rid of him I said, “All right, tell me.” Then he told me the mantra; I heard it. I walked away only a few steps and when I looked back there was nobody there. I began to wonder where he had come from. I knew it was not a dream or my imagination, because I had seen him physically present and I remembered the mantra.

The next day I returned to my village. One day when I was talking to my mother and auntie and grandmother, I told them what had happened in Dakshineswar. They were very excited, “How lucky you are! You were in such a sacred place, and at such a young age you were given a mantra in Shiva’s temple. It is so very difficult to get a guru, even in old age, and here you have gotten a guru. You are very lucky!” That is, of course, what old people think. I said nothing, and the matter ended there.

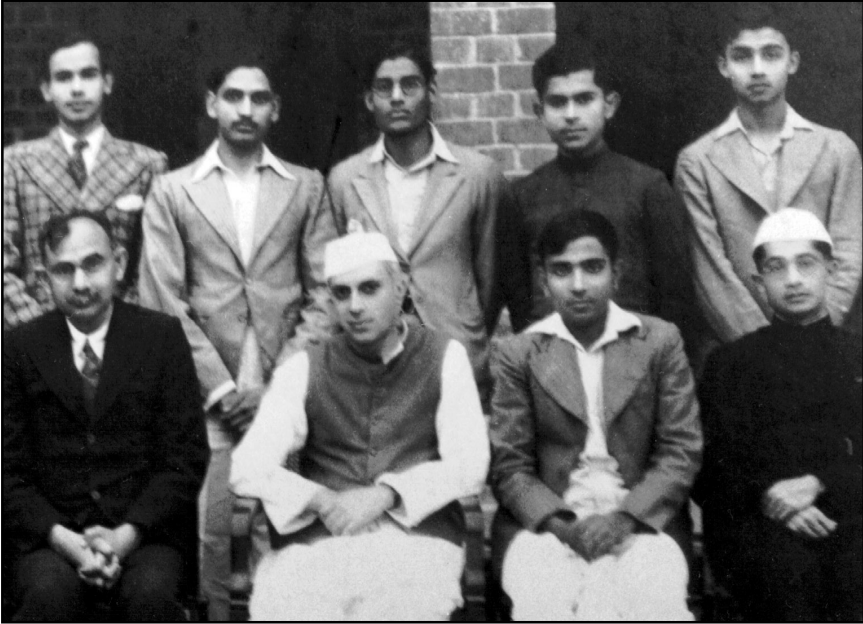
In the years that followed I completed my university education, did some research work, and was appointed a teacher in the university. After that, my younger brother Subodh, my mother and my auntie came to Allahabad and we were living in a family household. In 1950, Didi² and I were married. She was teaching in a government college there.

The month of June 1955 was one of the hottest months you could imagine. One Sunday evening I was sitting and talking with a number of friends in the open courtyard. About nine o’clock at night, Didi, Ma, and Maushi Ma were going somewhere. I asked them, “Where are you going now?” They said that some *baba* had come and was staying in a nearby house and they were going to see him.

Before anybody could reply, one of my friends said, “What kind of baba is he? Does he eat anything? I can feed him.” He said it sarcastically. This friend had become a hunter and he used to hunt deer and hare, which is what he was referring to. That shows something about our attitude towards the saints and sages at the time.

Didi and my mother said, “You must not talk like that about a sadhu or saint. You must bear reverence for them in your heart.”

² In Hindi there is a specific form of address for each familial relation, e.g., Didi for elder sister, Dada for elder brother, Maushi Ma for maternal aunt, Chachaji for paternal uncle, etc. Didi became the familiar name for Kamala Mukerjee, Dada’s wife. Once the usage has been established, many people of different and no relation may come to use it. Dada and Didi are known by those names by all of Maharajji’s Western devotees.



Sudhir Mukerjee next to schoolmate Jawaharlal Nehru, Allahabad University, India.



Sudhir and Kamala Mukerjee in the 1950s, Allahabad.

The women were gone only twenty minutes or so. The house they had gone to was right across the road. We inquired, "What's the matter? Didn't you meet him?"

"We met him." They described the very small bedroom in the mud house where the baba, covered with a bedsheet, was sitting on an ordinary cot. The only light was a flickering candle. When they reached the small porch before that room, they looked at him and he said, "Jao!" [Go!] They had come with some expectation, so they weren't ready to go.

He said it a second time, "Jao!" Even then they would not go. Then the third time he just looked at his hand and said, "Kamala, your husband's Bengali friends have come. Go and serve them tea. I shall come tomorrow morning."

Gone was the light-hearted and loose talk about the sadhus and their way of life. Everyone was wondering how he could know that we were sitting here and waiting for tea. How could he know Didi's name, and how could he know my Bengali friends were here? So it was rather a little mysterious for us. We asked Didi how this meeting had come about. The girl in that house was a student of Didi's in her college. She had mentioned that sometimes a baba came to their house, which we had not known. That day the girl had told Didi that the baba, who was called Neem Karoli Baba, had come. Therefore, the women had gone there. My friends decided to return to their rooms in a distant part of the city and come again the next day.

The next morning I went with Didi to the house. I saw the baba just lying on a cot with a bedsheet on. As soon as Didi and I came, he got up and caught hold of my hand, leaned on my shoulder, and started walking towards our house. He was walking so fast that Didi had to take off her slippers to run after us. Entering our house, he said, "Henceforth I shall be living with you." It was a small house, only two bedrooms, and we were quite a big family.

As soon as he came, he went and sat on a cot. Ma, Maushi Ma and Didi came to the room, prostrated before him and then went to prepare some milk and fruit, so I was alone with him. The first thing he asked me was, "You are a devotee of Shiva?" I said no. He said, "No, no, you go to the temple." Then he said, "You have your mantra also?" I said yes. But I could not correlate in any way that

this was the same person that had given me the mantra at the Shiva temple some twenty years earlier.

While we were talking, Ma, Maushi Ma and Didi entered with some food for him—a glass of milk, some fruit cut into pieces and some sweets. He took the milk and a few pieces of the fruit. The rest he asked them to leave there. While they were talking, some visitors began coming. He had been coming to that house across the street for a number of years. We would see many cars and persons coming and going, but we did not know why. There had been no curiosity. I had not heard his name. Now some persons started coming to our house to see him—he was actually a well-known saint in the area.

A certain gentleman came whom I knew very well. When he entered the room, he looked around and, seeing some other persons there, he tried to go out. But before he could do so, Babaji asked him, “You take bribes?” The man began trembling. Babaji said, “Tell me, you take bribes?”

He said, “Baba, in this service everybody takes something.” He was trembling in such a way that I thought he was going to fall down, so I caught hold of him and made him sit. He was an excise inspector who had taken bribes and been suspended from his job. He had come to Babaji thinking that he might do something to get his job back, and the funny thing was that the Excise Commissioner, Kehar Singh, the head of the department, was sitting there. And the man next in command to him, Sinha, was also there. I thought what a strange thing this was—here was the confession made before the biggest bosses. The man was given some *prasad* from the plate and asked to go away. After he had gone, Babaji talked with Kehar Singh. Soon afterward the man was reinstated in his job.

While talking with the people in the room, *Maharajji* suddenly got up and told Kehar Singh, “Chalo.” [Let’s go.] We did not understand anything at all—where he was going, when he would come back, whether he would come back or not. None of those who were with him could help us in this matter; all they said was that nothing could be known about him. We came out of the house. Kehar Singh’s car was at the door. While standing there we saw the “hunter” friend coming in a rickshaw. He was only a short

distance away when Babaji got into the car. Maushi Ma requested that Babaji not leave yet, but with no effect. The friend missed seeing him by a few minutes and said he would try again in the evening. A short while after this friend had gone, Babaji returned and stayed for the whole day. In the evening when our friend came again, he learned that Babaji had just gone out.

He tried all four days, at different times, but always missed Baba. He tried several times afterwards, but to no avail. His wife and children used to come and have Babaji's *darshan*, but it was not to be for him. He gave up all hope of seeing Babaji. Years later, Maushi Ma said, "Baba, I know my son³ has done something very unworthy, but he is very unhappy. Be gracious to him and give him darshan."

"All right, Maushi Ma, send for your son." He came that evening and Babaji gave him darshan. This was six years after he made the remark about feeding meat to a sadhu and was rebuked by Ma.

During that first day several persons came and Babaji talked to them. I was only a spectator with nothing in particular to do. But I was curious, how did he know things? In the afternoon three friends came—two were doctors and one was an office employee. Babaji was lying on his cot and when he saw these people coming in he sat up and welcomed the first one—a doctor—and said, "You come in, come in . . . He is a saint." The other doctor was told by Baba, "Go. Why have you come to me? Go and earn your money." The doctor went away annoyed and never came to Babaji again. Babaji took no notice of the third person.

His second visit was after three months and almost the same routine was followed. After his arrival, visitors would begin coming. Often he would go out to his devotees' houses, and sometimes I was asked to accompany him. He would sit for a short while, partake a little of prasada offered to him, and distribute the rest. His talks were mostly about the household problems of the devotees and he would give suitable advice. There was no talk of God or spiritual matters unless somebody would ask for that. People loved him, served him in their humble way, and treated him like one of their own.

His third visit to the house was in December. His devotees began coming to meet him. Seldom would he allow people to sit

³ Maushi Ma had never married, but all elderly Indian ladies call young men "son."

for long. He heard them, gave his advice, and sent them off. This rule did not apply for some of his devotees who would be allowed to stay with him as long as they wanted. Kehar Singh was one of these, an old and trusted devotee, the first one I was to meet. Babaji brought us closer and it was from him that I had my first lessons about love and devotion to Babaji. I met many more friends and teachers afterwards, but Kehar Singh is unique among those who brought me nearer to Baba.

It was during this visit that Babaji talked about our having a home of our own. The house we were living in was neither convenient nor big enough to meet our needs. It belonged to my uncle and we had been living there for more than a decade. But of late we had begun feeling its inadequacy, especially when Babaji came. He said, “You will have to shift from this house soon. Where will you go? Have you thought about that? Your uncle will need the house and will ask you soon to vacate it.”

We knew of no talk about being asked to leave. I said, “How can we build a house when we do not even have land?”

“You will get the land.”

It was difficult to believe him. It was a great surprise for all of us when the land was actually purchased in a couple of months, after we had given up all hope of getting it in an auction bid.

A couple of months after the land was purchased, Babaji came. “Have you purchased the land?”

“Yes, Baba.”

“Now you have the land, so build the house.”

I kept quiet. Not only was there no money, but even if the money had fallen from the sky, I didn’t know anything about getting mortar, or brick, or stone. After three or four months he came again. “Have you built the house?”

“No, Baba.”

He called out, “Kamala, you build the house.”

Again, after three or four months, “Have you built your house? Don’t do anything. It will be done automatically.”

I could not believe this.

While Babaji was talking all the time about building the house, we did not realize how important it was. In spite of all the hardships that we suffered in the house, we were not making any

effort or even thinking seriously about building. But soon a relation of my uncle, an old lady of eighty, came to stay with us. It was difficult to accommodate her, not only because of the shortage of space, but due to her temperament. She was always complaining and grumbling. When Babaji came she felt he was getting all the attention and care and she was being neglected.

One day when she was quarreling, Babaji surprised us by coming. It had not even been a month since he had last come and his previous visits had gaps of two or three months between them. It was a busy day full of visitors. The next morning he went out alone and sat by the roadside a few houses away. When I went to him he sent me back, asking me to stay in the house. He remained alone. Visitors were directed to the place where he was sitting. As the old lady saw all kinds of people coming to the house, she began abusing us and Babaji also. There was much unpleasantness before she stopped.

Much later in the day it started drizzling, and Didi and I were helpless spectators. Maharajji suddenly got up, caught hold of my hand and said, "Let's return to the house."

At night when we were alone with him, he asked, "What are you going to do?"

I said, "We shall send her off to my uncle."

"That will not help you. Your uncle will tell you to vacate his house. This is why I was asking you to build your house."

Didi said, "Baba, it is so very difficult for us. We do not have the money. Neither do we have any idea how to get things for making it."

He said, "It will be built and built soon." He left the next day giving us the usual cheer, "Sub thik ho jayega." [All will be well.]

Things began moving fast. Some days after Baba had gone, the old lady was sent back. She made all kinds of charges against us and as a result we got a letter from my uncle asking us to find another house. It came as an unexpected shock. Somehow Baba had a way of knowing things.

At the end of 1957, a friend of mine came one day and said, "Look here, you cannot build your house." He knew our financial condition. "I have talked to an engineer contractor here and the old man has agreed to build your house. You make an initial payment and he will build the house and you can pay him in installments over the years. So try to collect some money."

With difficulty we collected some money and took out loans. That man, Mr. Agarwal, was a retired engineer and a very sympathetic and helpful person. He realized our difficulty and was willing to assist us in every possible way. He and his son came and made plans. Work began within a month.

Ma said, “See how Babaji has been helping you. It is all due to his grace that you are going to get your house.” I was thinking more of my friend and the engineer going out of their way in helping us, rather than the unseen hand of Babaji behind the whole episode.



Just a few weeks before the construction of the house started, Baba arrived. Since the old lady had gone away, the atmosphere was peaceful. Ma and Maushi Ma had already become very close to him. For them, Babaji was a very wise and dear member of their

household. His talks with them would always be intimate and affectionate. Ma and Maushi Ma and Didi were deeply religious and became close with Baba from the first day he came. He actually began asking about each and every detail of the family and advising them. My mother and auntie would discuss even the minor things of the household with him and he would solve all their problems, family or financial or material. He could be so very affectionate, behaving just like a son to his mother. “Ma, bring me food . . . I am feeling hungry. Kamala, please scratch my back.”

Babaji at first called me by my name, Sudhir, or just “Professor.” It was in 1961 that one day he started calling me Dada [elder brother]. Others followed, but not my Ma and Maushi Ma. He asked them why they called me by name and not Dada. When they said that a son is not addressed so, he said, “When he is my Dada, he is your Dada also.”

One day I was alone with him and he asked me, “Your friends are not coming now. They must be warning you about the danger of coming under the influence of a baba and being close with him. They love you and therefore they warn you for your own good. Am I wrong?” I had no reply to give. He was right.

I was rather an outsider at the beginning, and I was not psychologically or mentally prepared for the difficulties and disturbances his coming created. I was quite interested in social and cultural life, going to the pictures, making friends, addressing various kinds of cultural gatherings, meetings, debates, and I had a very large circle of friends. They would come and gather together just like members of the family. Now when Babaji began coming, there was no place for them to come and sit. Also, many of my friends did not like the idea. “Oh, you have become the victim of some baba!” When his visits continued, they would say I was wasting my time. In spite of all their solicitations, I could not change my new way of living. I was losing my interest in my old life, but I could not think that Babaji had anything to do with it. For me it was just like dry leaves falling from the tree, without anybody’s hand behind it.

Maushi Ma had already apprised Babaji about the agreement with the contractor and said it was all done by Baba. “I do nothing. It is God who does everything. Thank God for his grace.”



Maharajji with Dada and Dada's nephew Vibuti at 4 Church Lane, Allahabad.

Ma said, “Baba, we do not know God, but we know you. So we are saying that you have done it.” Babaji changed the topic of talk.

A few days after he left, the construction of the house started. It was ready within four months and we shifted to it in the middle of July 1958. Some minor finishing work was being done when Babaji arrived four days later. He was accompanied by three old devotees. He showed them around the whole building and explained all about the house and how it was built. “Red house, red house. Very well-built.” We had never before seen him behave like an innocent little one displaying his excitement.

One day my auntie said to Babaji, “Baba, you love Dada so much. You have built such a beautiful house for him.”

Babaji replied, “Dada’s house? This is my house! Dada is my guest.”

More than two years passed and there were several visits that he made during that period, but his stay never exceeded three or four days at a time. Whenever he came, someone accompanied him. There were no bags to be carried or any work to be done for him. The only clothes he wore were the dhoti and a blanket, or a white sheet to wrap around his body. That was all he used to have with him whether he was staying with a devotee or travelling. Whenever a devotee would make him change his clothes, he would leave the clothes he had come wearing. His food was also very simple and it was easy for his devotees with modest means to feed him. He was not a burden to his devotees; this we could see from the very beginning. It was much later I realized that, although he was never any burden to his devotees, he himself was carrying so much of their burden.

After that time, Maharajji would come to Allahabad for the winter months, and many devotees would come—Siddhi Didi, her husband Tularam, Jivanti Ma, and many devotees from Nainital, Lucknow, Kanpur and other places. Sometimes Babaji would go out for a few days to Benares or Vrindaban or Jagganath Puri. I couldn’t go with him because there were so many people coming to the house and I had to look after them. Very seldom would he take me along. When he wanted to go on a long journey he would ask Didi’s brother, who was posted in Kanpur, to send his car and driver, Brijlal, who was an expert driver and also a great devotee.

Much later in 1964, he went to Jagganath Puri with Siddhi Didi and a few others for a week. One day the car came and the driver opened the gate and shouted at me, “Dada, Maharajji took us to Dakshineshwar, to the Shiva temple, and he said, ‘I gave mantra to your Dada in this temple.’” Then Siddhi Didi and others who were also there narrated the whole thing in detail to us.

Now all this shows that you do not go to him, he comes to you. This was all his grace, I had done nothing to deserve it. I did not know him. I did not seek mantra from him. He caught hold of me and gave me that. Then he came to that house and said, “Henceforth I shall be staying with you.”

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