

IV

“I AM ALWAYS HERE”

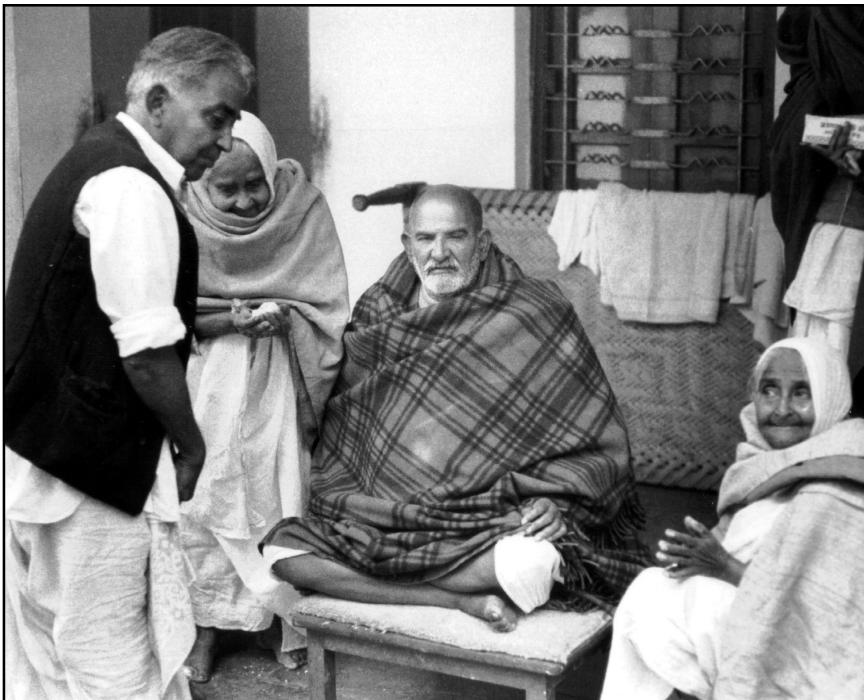
My mother and aunt were deeply religious and accepted Babaji as the head of the family. Ma would often tell us that the family and the household belonged to Baba and we were all his children. Her whole treatment of him was based on the fact that Babaji knew what was in the minds of everyone and behaved accordingly. He treated them as his Ma and Maushi Ma, giving them all the freedom and indulgence and grace. They reported to him everything going on in the house and sought his advice and guidance for running it. The most important duty assigned to them was to prepare the food and feed everyone coming to him. “Ma khana khilao” [Ma, make food] was his pet method of asking them to feed the people. Often emphasizing the importance of their work, he would say, “Maushi Ma, this is the home of the deity. Here everyone gets his food, so I also get mine.”

My mother was from a very orthodox brahmin family and formerly she could not imagine that a lower caste person would enter the kitchen. None of the servants were allowed to dust or sweep there or bring in the drinking water from outside. Ma was like that and I could not have thought of changing her attitude. But with Maharajji around all those things eventually changed. Westerners came and were entering the kitchen. Ma also became reconciled to Muslims entering the house. Maharajji was not forcing her to do this; her whole outlook had changed. She began feeling that all were her sons and daughters. If she is not keeping me away from her kitchen, how could she go on keeping others away? Now, from where had this wider outlook come? Of course, Maharajji had done that, but all he had said was, “Ma, give food to all.”

Ma and Maushi Ma had become accustomed to treating Babaji as their near and dear one, and would talk to him without any formality. Babaji enjoyed that. Whenever he left for any place, they would invariably ask him where he was going, when he would come again, and sometimes they asked him to extend his stay in the house.



Maharajji with Dada's mother and aunt, Ma and Maushi Ma.



Maharajji with Dada, Ma and Maushi Ma.

Once Babaji came and left two days later. Ma asked him to stay for a few days more. He said, "Ma, let me go now. I have some important work to attend to. I shall return soon."

Ma said, "You have no work as such—the only work that you have is to run away."

He laughed and said again that he would return soon. Three months passed and he had not come back. Ma said, "Look, so much time has passed. This is low. He goes on bluffing us." Babaji arrived a few days later. When they came to see him in his room, the first thing they said was, "Baba, you speak so many lies. You promised you would return soon. Now you have come after three months!"

Babaji replied in his inimitable way, "Ma, where do I go? I am always here. Believe me, Ma, I never speak lies to you. I am always here."

He could be so very affectionate, behaving just like a son to the Mothers. His great power, the miracles and such, no doubt were there, but the very soft, delicate, sweet and innocent impressions left by him provided a perennial source of joy—that human aspect.

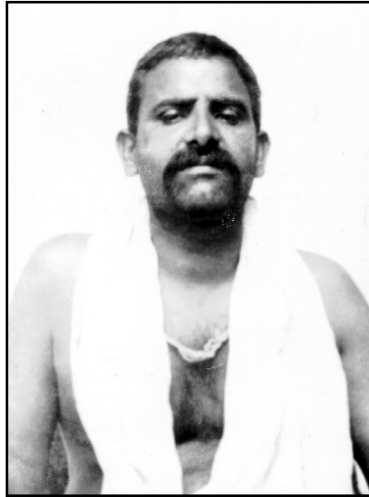
At night in Allahabad, Baba would take his food in his small room and the Mothers would sit with him. Didi would be busy preparing the chapatis and my duty was to carry them one by one to him. After he finished his food he would go on talking to those Mothers in a very relaxed mood. Sometimes he would take two spoons and begin to play on the head of one of the Mothers. Once Didi made some curd and gave quite a large tumbler of it to Babaji. He took a whole spoonful and put it on the head of one of the Mothers. Fortunately, her *sari* was over her head. Such kinds of things would go on.

One time when Babaji was at our house, he went for his toilet and gave me his blanket, "Here, you hold it." I put it on the cot and was standing near him because he was talking. He began abusing me, "What have you done with my blanket? You have left it there. Look what they are doing!"

I turned and saw that Didi, my mother, my auntie, and Siddhi Didi had picked up that blanket and were actually smelling it. When I came to them they said, "Look here. It has the odor that comes from the body of a newborn child."

Babaji shouted, "Where is my blanket!"

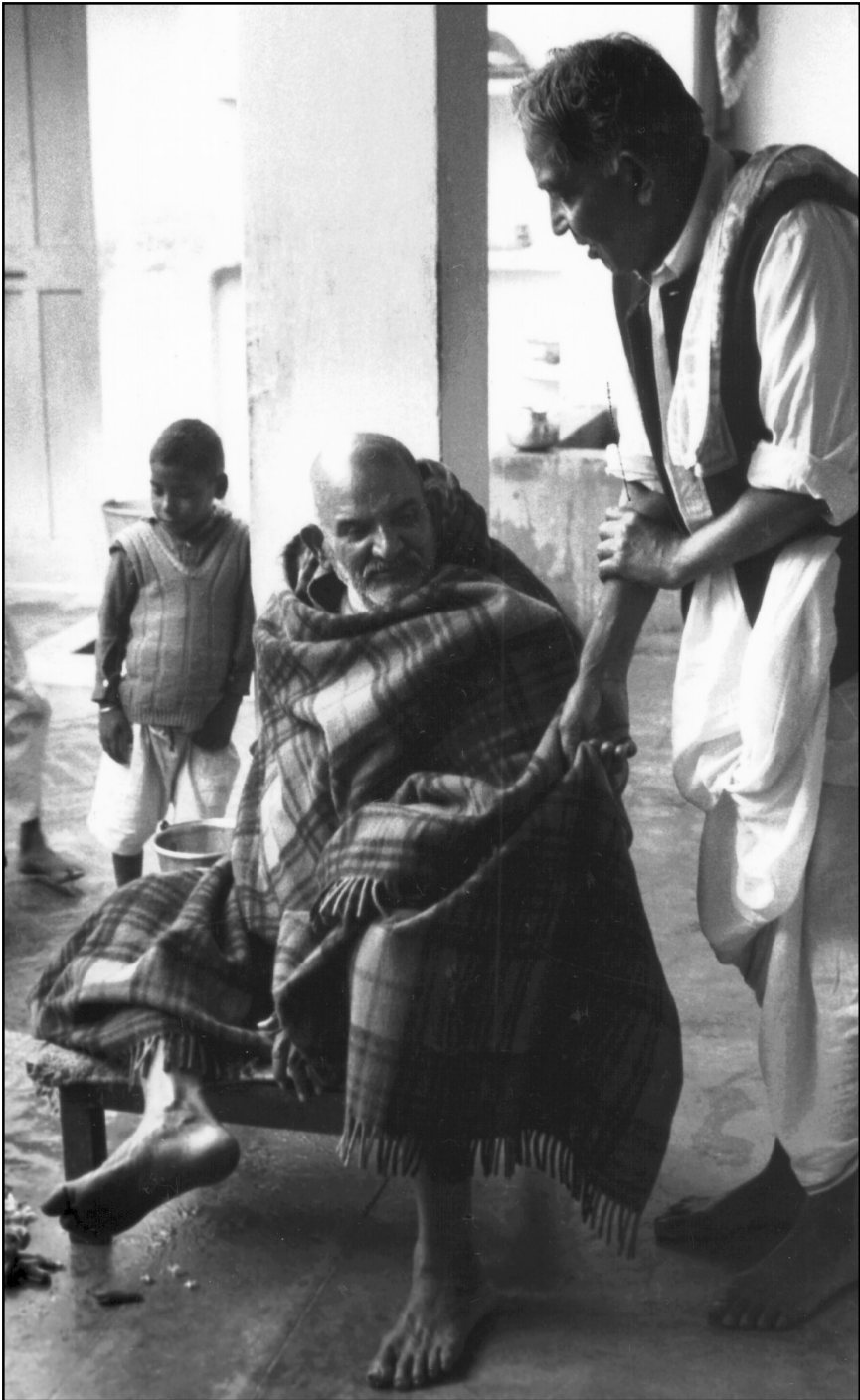
One day in the house, Baba stopped before a picture of himself as a younger man. “Whose photo is this?” he said. Since it was a photo of himself, of course, I did not reply. Then he whispered, “How did you recognize?” I suddenly realized that this photo was of Maharajji as I had first seen him so many years ago in Dakshineswar.



One day when Maharajji was not in Allahabad, my mother prepared khir, a delicacy that is often offered to the gods or goddesses. My mother put it in a big bowl and said, “If Babaji comes today, it will be very good. I will have this khir to serve him.” Of course, she was not really expecting him.

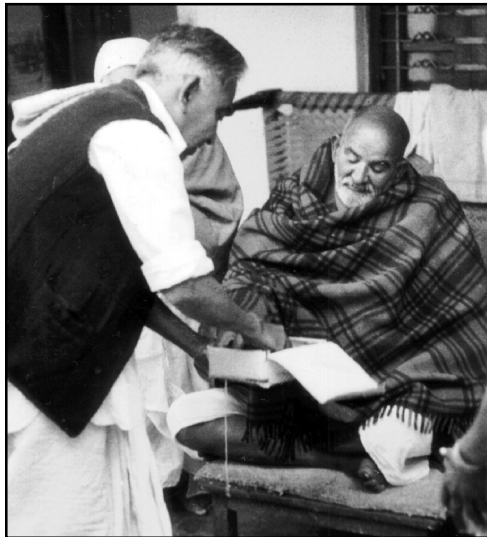
Much later in the day after we had taken our food, Babaji suddenly came. “You have prepared khir? I have come for it.” Ma was so happy to see him eating it. When he was finished, he said, as if suddenly remembering, “Oh, what a mistake I have made! Today is ekadasi [a day of fasting], and here I am eating khir!” Now this was Babaji’s way, the sweetness that we remember.

From the beginning of my being with him, he would often need to wipe his mouth. I would have a handkerchief, but if that was soiled I would just offer him my dhoti. He knew that some people thought that this was a sacrilege. One day Babaji created a drama. After drinking a glass of milk, a little remained clinging to his moustache.



He grabbed at my dhoti and rubbed it on his moustache, saying, “You are interested in something else and not paying attention to me!”

When Baba was in our house, we would purchase sweets or other devotees would bring them to be distributed as prasad. Baba would often give them to me to distribute to all the family. My mother said, “It is very strange. You make us eat, but you do not eat. Why?”



“Babaji does not give me to eat, he gives me to distribute.”

Later Ma and Maushi Ma said to Baba, “Dada says that you give him sweets to distribute, but not to eat.”

Baba said, “What necessity has he for eating sweets?”

I didn’t understand the meaning of that at the time. Much afterwards I came to understand that prasad is something that has been consecrated and its purity must be kept. If you put it into your mouth, it becomes jutha [impure]. But impurity can come not merely by touching it with your tongue, but also by touching with your mind. If your desires, your greed, are concentrated on it, it also becomes impure. Is it not that? It is said in the scriptures that when you offer something to God, He does not come with an open mouth, but takes it just by his glance. I felt that Babaji also accepted offerings just by his glance and saying “Thik hai.” [All right.] If I was distributing with the thought that

I also shall eat, it would become impure. It would become not Baba's prasad, but the refuse from Dada's plate, a great sacrilege. So in order to make me immune from that, he took away the taste from my tongue and the desire from my heart.

One day, Mr. Mathur, a devotee from Benares, and I were sitting on the porch, sipping our tea and talking. Suddenly the gate was opened and a very frightened dog ran in and went around the back of the house.

This dog: about a year earlier, we had heard a dog shrieking outside in pain. It had been beaten so mercilessly that the skin was off. I took a bottle of lotion and powder and put it on the bloody wound. After a few days the wound healed, but the dog would not leave the street, so we began feeding it. She became so attached that she stayed close by, but would not come inside the house. This was the same dog that had just run in the gate.

About a dozen young men with sticks in their hands came and said, "Where is your dog?"

I said, "My dog?"

"Yes, your dog. She just entered into your compound."

"What's the matter?"

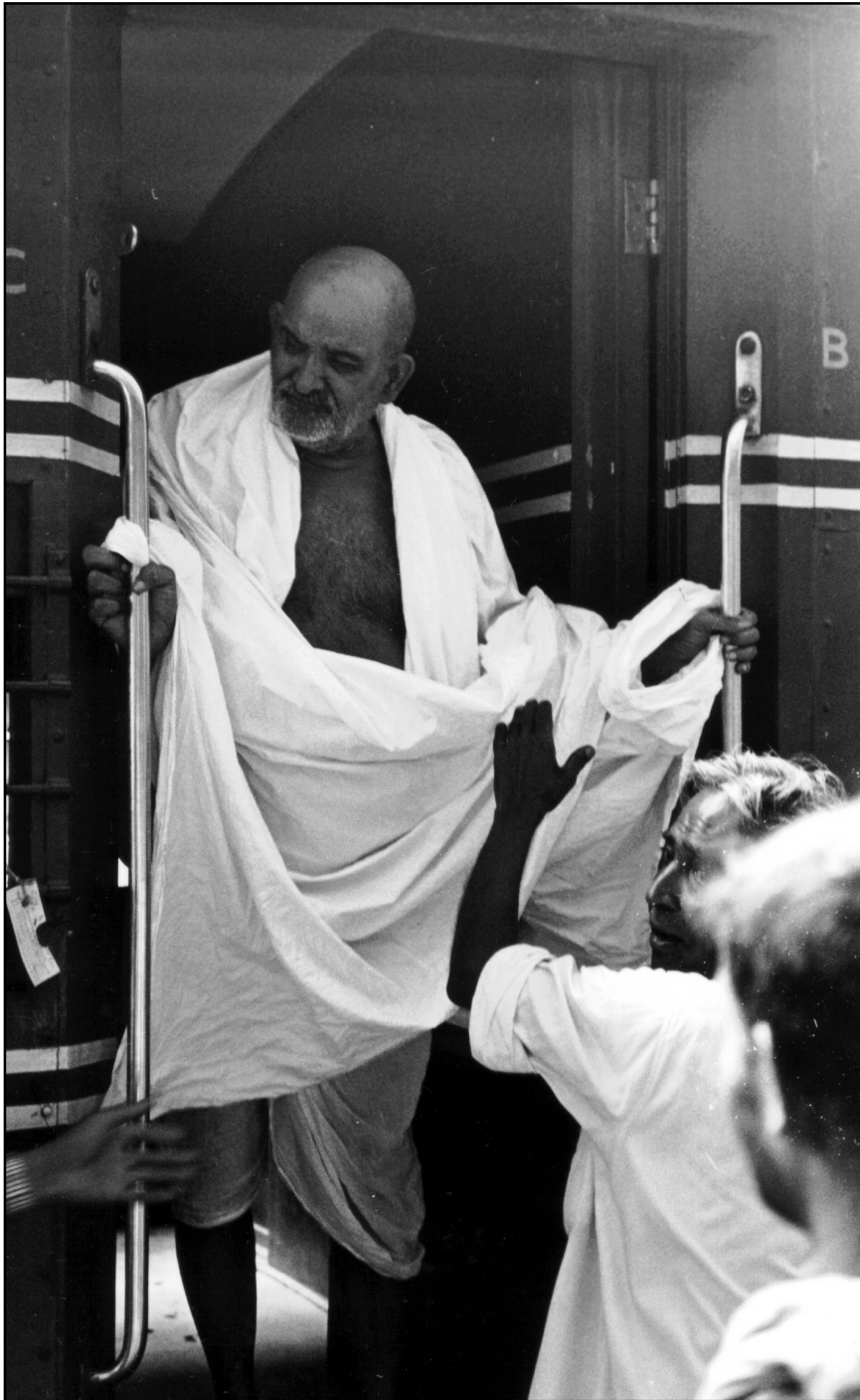
"We shall kill her. She has eaten three of our chicks."

I said, "She is not my dog, neither could she have eaten your chicks."

They insisted they would find and kill her. "You know how much it costs? It costs three rupees for a chick."

"She has eaten three?" I took out a ten rupee note from my pocket and gave it to them. They wanted to return one rupee, but I said, "Keep that to have your tea. Just go."

Later that day we received a telegram from Babaji saying that he would be travelling on a train which would be passing through Allahabad. In a short while, Kanti (Siddhi Didi's daughter-in-law) and Didi had both prepared Babaji's food to be taken to the station. They thought that Babaji was going to Delhi. Somehow the idea came and I said, "Look here, Kanti, if you and your chachiji [auntie] go with *tiffins*, Babaji will certainly think that you do not want him to stop here. Let Ramesh (Siddhi Didi's son) and myself go there. After all, we are uncle and nephew, and



we may be able to muster sufficient strength to get him down. If you two people come with his food, he is sure to think you have come to see him off."

Ramesh and I reached the station and found the train had already arrived. We found Babaji in a compartment. "You got my telegram?"

"Yes."

"So what happened?" He kept asking questions. "And what happened after that?" Ramesh told him of Kanti and Didi preparing food. "Then what happened? Then what happened?"

"Then Chachaji [uncle] said to them not to come. He said, 'If you bring food, that means that you think Babaji will continue his journey and you have come to see him off. Let Ramesh and myself go. . .'" Then Ramesh got to the part about "Uncle and nephew might have the strength between them to get him down."

Baba said, "Yes, yes, of course, uncle and nephew have got plenty of strength. I shall get down."

As we were getting off the train, Jiban, who had been travelling with Maharajji, came running. He had been searching for us along the platform. We took two rickshaws—Jiban and Ramesh in one, Babaji and I in the other. Babaji began talking, "You have done a very big thing." I didn't understand what he was saying; I kept quiet. "The dog was neither yours, nor had she eaten the chickens. But in order to save her life, you gave that money."

One day Baba and I went out toward the bazaar and Babaji sat down by the roadside. It was a poor area of the town and people and animals were crowding around. He said, "Dada, I am feeling very hungry. I would like to have a chapati and some water."

I could not leave him and return to the house, it was quite a few furlongs away. I said, "Shall we go home?"

"No, no, Dada, if we go home now they will serve me a great meal. Just get something from here. Go ask at some house."

I went to a nearby house, feeling a little shy about asking for food as they were all poor people there. To my surprise, I found at that house a young man who was a student in the university. He also was surprised to see me. "Sir, how are you here?"

I said, "Battacharya, you have got to give me a chapati and some water."

“Oh, why only one chapati? I shall get some food also.” I said no, and took just two chapatis from him and a tumbler of water.

Babaji ate the chapatis and said, “Bas. Thik hogaya. [Enough. Fine.] I was very hungry. Rukha sukha khao, thanda pani piyo.” [Eat unbuttered, dry bread and drink cold water and you are fully satisfied.] When we returned, he told Ma and Maushi Ma, “I have eaten very well.”

The whole story was narrated and then someone said, “Well, Dada, do you know what he has done with you? This is one of the highest duties of the disciple—to beg food for his guru. He has made you do it.”

One winter, while Babaji was away, Ashoka came from Delhi accompanied by a lady not known to us. This woman began behaving as if she were an old relation returning home after a long lapse of time. She addressed Didi as Mataji [mother] and called me Pitaji [father], and Ma and Auntie as Dadiji [paternal grandmother]. She was completely free and unconventional in her behavior, like taking clothes from Didi’s wardrobe and distributing them to others. She spoke of her high-placed relations, including the governor of a state. After waiting several days for Babaji, she decided to go in search of him. “Pitaji, I am not fortunate enough like you to have his darshan sitting at home. I have to go in search of him.” She took the addresses of some devotees at Lucknow, Bareilly and Nainital where he might be found.

Ashoka told us how she had met the lady, named Neela Devi, in the course of her journey. They had been travelling in the same compartment of the train. When asked where she was going, Ashoka said she was headed to her sister’s house in Allahabad to meet Neem Karoli Baba. Hearing Babaji’s name, this unknown lady blurted out that she would accompany Ashoka because she had been searching a long time to meet Baba again.

A week later Babaji came and Neela Devi was with him. After two days, Baba sent her away. She left Babaji two very valuable things; a silver statue of Shirdi Sai Baba, and a beautiful silver Shiva lingam with *Narmadeshwar* in it. He offered them to Ma and Maushi Ma, asking that they put them in the puja room and perform their puja as they did with other deities.

After Neela Devi had gone, there came many complaints from the devotees she had visited at Lucknow and Nainital. Even in Allahabad, Didi and others were not happy with the way she had thrown away so many things. When Babaji returned a few months later, he began talking about the hue and cry raised against her. She had been accommodated because she took his name. Babaji said he had no hand in it; he had not instigated her to do so. Babaji was narrating this before many devotees sitting around him, often raising his voice and abusing someone, showing he was seriously concerned with the matter.

Suddenly he declared that it was I who was responsible for it. If I had not allowed her to enter the house and given her the addresses, all this mischief would not have taken place. My reply was, "What else could I have done? You sent her and my task was to receive her."

He yelled at me, "I sent her? You say I sent her!"

With some excitement I said, "How could anybody come to this house without your knowledge? You knew her."

He said, "So many of Kamala's things are gone."

"They must have been useless things. Had they been valuable, they would not have gone."

He seemed to cool down and said in a dejected tone, "If Dada talks like that to me, what can I do?" It was a perfect act and the mystery remained.

Several months after that, when I was alone with him, he told me almost in a whisper, "Dada, Neela Devi has given 18,000 rupees for a temple."

She had said one day when she was with us, "Pitaji, you must have a temple of Hanumanji in Babaji's name. Your daughter has the money for that."

Many years later a certain lady entered the gate and shouted, "Pitaji, you do not recognize your daughter?" It was Neela Devi. She had been involved in some family strife regarding her share of ancestral property. After much litigation, she had acquired it. She told us that Babaji had forbidden her to visit or correspond with us until this work was completed.

When Maharajji had drawn anyone to him, he cared for and protected that person. He would provide whatever was needed. Whether you

took it or not, that was up to you. Occasionally, however, he did force.

One winter, a relation of Dharm Narayan Sharma came to Allahabad to see Babaji. That evening this man was to go to Calcutta for a job interview with the railway board. He was seeking Maharajji's *ashirbad* so that he would be successful. When he was to leave, Babaji said, "Don't go."

The man said, "No, Baba, I must go."

But Babaji was insistent. They argued, but ultimately the man had to give it up. He said to me, "Dada, I came to him for his *ashirbad*, so I could get that job. Now he has stopped me." He was very bitter.

The next morning the man ran into the house, shouting, "Dada, see how Babaji has saved my life!" The newspaper had come and he learned that there had been a very serious accident at the Mogul Serai railway station. Two trains had collided and about two hundred persons had died. One of the bogies that was smashed was the bogie in which he would have been travelling.

A young Englishman named Lawrie once stayed in Babaji's ashram at Hanumanghar for about a year. He had been interested in



Babaji's footprints on wall in Dada's house.

India's spiritual heritage and had come to India to learn about it. He had met Babaji, secured his grace, and was allowed to stay in the ashram, studying with Haridas Baba.

One day some devotees were talking to Babaji about Lawrie and his spiritual practice. Babaji said he would soon be going away—his "*maya*" was coming and would take him back to England. Some days later, Lawrie's lady friend, Susan, arrived in Nainital. Babaji told Didi that they would be visiting Allahabad and would stay in the house for some days and she should arrange for them.

Didi arranged a small room for their use. When she had opened the door to fix up the room, she found that one wall was full of footprints. She was astonished to see them and was convinced that they were Babaji's. Many devotees came to see the footprints and believed them to be Babaji's, but could not understand what they indicated.

A few days later, Lawrie and Susan arrived. Every attempt was made to make their stay comfortable, but there were some difficulties about their food. Lawrie was used to pure vegetarian cooking, but Susan was not. She complained to Didi directly that she was losing her health because her food was being neglected. This was hard for Didi, who had taken so much care with all the arrangements. Tears came in her eyes.

Shortly after, a devotee came with his car. He had received a phone call from Baba, asking him to take Lawrie and Susan to his house for a few days. They had been "transferred."

Babaji arrived after a few days and consoled Didi. He explained that Lawrie and Susan were old friends who were planning to marry. When Lawrie did not return from India, Susan came to bring him back. They had no money and didn't know what to do.

They were given the passage money. On the day they were to leave, Babaji left for Chitrakut with some devotees. He told me to accompany Lawrie and Susan to the station that afternoon. With tears in his eyes, Lawrie begged to be excused for all their lapses.

The devotee in whose house they had been staying also came to the station and then gave me a ride home in his car. We sat on the porch and he told me about the strange behavior of his guests. They had stayed in their room all the time, bolting it from inside. This created some suspicion in his mind. It was the time of the Indo-Chinese

conflict and he thought they were spies, transmitting radio messages from the closed room. When he made that statement, I could not listen to him any longer. He had his tea and prasad and then left.

Soon after, another car pulled up with Babaji in it. He sent the people who had come along with him into the house, and he came and sat with me. He asked about the whole episode. "You went by rickshaw to the station? Did Didi accompany you? They went in the car? What did Lawrie say?" All these things he recounted to me, rather than asking. "How did you return? You came by car? It was good of him to bring you home. You must have offered him tea and prasad." These were all preliminaries. "You were talking? What was he saying about them? Why did he go away so early? Weren't you talking to him?"

After repeated inquiries, I had to disclose that man's suspicion about Lawrie and Susan being spies. "You became angry with him because you did not believe that? Why didn't you believe him? Why?"

After that kind of hammering I said I was annoyed because I could not imagine how a person who claimed to be a devotee could think that Babaji would put him in such a dangerous situation. I said to Baba, "You knew everything about them and you could not do anything that would create trouble."

He was stroking my head while I was talking. When I stopped he laughed and said, "Do you think that everyone is a fool like you? There are wise people who look at things differently."

Once Maharajji had gone from Allahabad to Jagganath Puri with some of the devotees. I could not go because I had to run the household. At about four o'clock one afternoon I was relaxing, my mother and auntie were resting in their room, when I heard some noise from behind the house. Some children were shouting, "Baba, Baba, let us have the flute!"

A man's voice came, saying, "I am hungry, give me some food."

I looked out and saw that many children were surrounding a tall fellow with long hair, wearing a long coat. He had a brass flute in his hand. Seeing me, he said, "I am hungry."

He came and sat just before the door and I went to get some chapatis and *dal*. I brought them and said, "These are not fresh,

they were cooked at noon, but eat them and after that you can have some sweets."

He would not lift his head, just looked down and said, "Araharki dal, araharki dal. I have not eaten araharki dal for so many years."

I remembered that Maharajji had brought some sweets from Vrindaban, saying, "This is Biharaji [Krishna] prasad." I brought some to the man. When he had finished and was getting up, I said, "Wash your mouth, wash your mouth," as there was dal on his beard. But he would not, and when I insisted he only washed his flute. When he was leaving I said, "Baba, you can come whenever you like. If I am not at home, my mother and auntie will welcome you."

He said, "I have been searching long for the house where bhakti [devotion] and *Lakshmi* live."

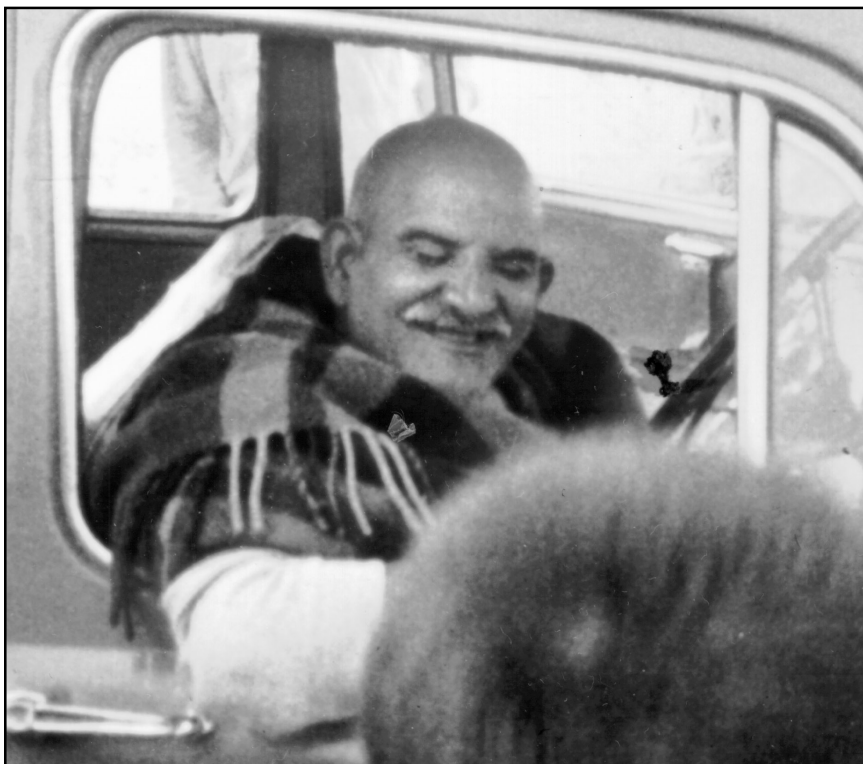
During all this, Ashoka had been standing nearby. Just like a statue. Later she related that while recently in Delhi, she and a friend had gone out in a car with Maharajji. They had stopped at the house of a very wealthy man and Maharajji had gone inside, telling them to wait at the gate. While they were waiting, a man came who looked exactly like this man, except instead of a flute he carried a big stick. He said he was very hungry and asked for food, but the gatekeeper would not let him in. He said, "I have come to the house of the richest man in the city and I must return disappointed."

Two days after that, Maharajji returned. He said to me, "Biharaji gave you darshan." When the story was narrated, Jivanti Ma asked me, "Dada, on what day did that person come who ate the araharki dal?" I said it was Thursday. Then she said, "We were in Jagganath Puri then and Maharajji had already taken his food. Suddenly at about four o'clock he said, 'I shall eat chapati and araharki dal.' He does not eat araharki dal, you know that, he always eats mung dal. So we were rather surprised. Didi said, 'This is not the time for your food, you have eaten already. Besides, you do not eat araharki dal.' But Babaji kept saying, 'I am hungry and you do not give me food.' So we had to go and get araharki dal to cook for him. That was the same time you were feeding araharki dal to that man with the flute in Allahabad."

When Babaji started spending a few months at Allahabad, the news spread among his devotees living in different parts of the

country. Many of them came to meet him there. It became a central place where his devotees could come with a high expectation of having his darshan, and they often succeeded. Previously it was Babaji who was visiting his devotees by going to their places, but henceforth many of them started visiting him. This did not mean that he gave up going to the places he was accustomed to visiting. Even when he began spending the major part of the year at Kainchi, Vrindaban and Allahabad, his roving habit continued. This was necessary, of course, to keep his promise to his devotees, “Yad karane se ham ajate hain.” [I come to you when you remember me.]

Once, while taking our morning tea, two cars stopped at the gate. The queen mother of Vizianagram had arrived with her secretary and attendants. She asked whether Babaji was here. When I told her that he wasn't, she broke down crying and exclaimed, “What shall I do now? We have been driving since 2:00 a.m. and have not slept the whole night. Where shall I find him?”



It was difficult to console her. “Mataji, you are tired. Please come rest for a while. Who knows, Babaji may come.”

She said she had to return for an appointment with the Finance Minister of India in Delhi at 4:00 p.m. She had come seeking Babaji’s advice on some tax problems and estate duties. Finally she agreed to rest and a cot was placed on the verandah for her.

She asked me to narrate some of Babaji’s lilas which had occurred in the house. The members of her party gathered around and I started talking. After an hour, Babaji suddenly arrived. She fell at Babaji’s feet, saying that she had been remembering him all the time so he had come. Babaji took her to his room and told her what to do and say in her upcoming meeting. He explained everything in detail, ending with “Sab thik ho jayega.” [All will be well.]

She was entirely a changed person, as if by some magic touch. She was given some milk and fruits. There would be no problem reaching Benares in time for her son to fly her in his plane to the meeting in Delhi.

The persons who had come with Babaji told us of his sudden decision last evening to return to Allahabad. He had arrived in Nainital that morning and the devotees there expected he would stay at least for a couple of days. They were all surprised when he suddenly asked a devotee to drive him to Allahabad, a journey of several hundred miles. He said it was very important to travel all night so he could reach Allahabad, where a devotee in distress was remembering him. When the lady heard that, she said with tears in her eyes, “That is Babaji. He knew how I was feeling and how I was crying for his help.”

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